

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Is cooperativism helping to keep the population in Andalusia?

Rationale and current interest in topic

Rural areas in Andalusia present clear disadvantages as compared to urban areas, such as lack of infrastructure, scarcity of basic services or lack of economic dynamics, causing a rural exodus and thus giving rise to territorial imbalances in the region. This rural exodus, in turn, has a limiting influence on the generation of economic dynamics, resulting in an increasingly ageing population and reducing opportunities for territorial development.

In the face of this problem, cooperatives –societies of the social economy– may play a significant role in terms of their capacity for attaching a population to its territory, due to the existence of a relationship with the surroundings in which they operate, as demonstrated by the available literature on this topic (García-Gutiérrez, 1999; Buendía and García, 2003; Coque, 2005; Mozas and Bernal, 2006; Cuñat and Coll, 2007; Puentes and Velasco, 2009; Calvo and González, 2011; Demoustier, 2011; Draperi, 2014; Guzmán, Santos and Barroso, 2016; Pérez and Valiente, 2017).

Moreover, there is significant cooperativism in this region (with 19% of cooperatives and 18% of the employment these generate nationwide located in Andalusia) as well as consolidated institutional recognition of these organisations (as evinced by the laws which regulate them, as well as by the *Pactos Andaluces por la Economía Social* [Andalusia Agreements for the Social Economy] or by the various support programs for cooperative organisations). This represents an opportunity for the creation of economic dynamics and for attaching the population to its territory through the promotion of social economy societies.

Objectives

The main objective of this work consists in determining whether cooperative societies in Andalusia may be contributing to the maintenance of the region's population, especially in rural areas, to a greater extent than mercantile businesses.

In addition to confirming whether this occurs throughout the entire population, we have separated out the populations of women and young people, due to the difficulties currently faced by these groups in joining the labour market (the main reason for emigration, especially in rural areas) and to their strategic interest in terms of consolidating the region's population, passing the inter-generational torch in local economic activities.

A comparison of cooperative societies with mercantile businesses is carried out in order to lay the foundations for the establishment of strategies and policies for the specific promotion of cooperativism, in the event that the behaviour seen in these social economy organisations differs from that of mercantile businesses.

Methodology

In working towards the stated objective, and after an exploratory analysis of the variables used, spatial econometrics techniques were applied which take into account the location of the data in a given geographic space for the variables under study: spatial distribution and autocorrelation analysis graph-sand the application of spatial regression. Calculation of the models was carried out with GeoDa software.

With respect to the variables used, these were the following: percentage of total emigration, percentage of emigration of young people and percentage of emigration of women were considered as dependent, proxy variables for the attachment of population to territory; the number of cooperatives out of the total number of businesses was established, as well as the number of mercantile businesses (public limited companies and limited liability companies) out of the total number of businesses, expressed as percentages, served as explanatory variables. These variables were obtained for the various Andalusian municipalities (a total of 770) for 2015. In addition, for the purpose of determining whether differences exist in emigration between rural and non-rural municipalities, a dummy variable was added, termed *rural municipality or territory*.

Results, practical conclusions and research limitations

The results obtained provide indications that cooperativism may be contributing to an attachment of the population to its territory (as compared to mercantile businesses, where a significant relationship was not seen), since the regression analyses demonstrated that the variable for percentage of cooperative societies is significant in explaining the variability seen in emigration. Moreover, both show an inverse relationship. The same was obtained when the said dependent variables used were percentage of emigration of women and young people. In other words, the proportion of cooperatives inversely influence these emigration rates, which is not the case for mercantile businesses.

Based on the aforementioned and given that, on the one hand, difficulties in attaching a population to its territory are further complicated in rural Andalusian municipalities, especially for women and young people and, on the other hand, cooperativism inversely influences emigration from rural municipalities, the creation of quality, sustainable employment through cooperatives societies of social economy– may represent an opportunity for reducing problems of depopulation in these areas.

Another result obtained is that the cooperative business culture may be spread to neighbouring regions to a lesser extent than that of the conventional business sector. If cooperativism can contribute to an attachment of population to territory, the application of specific policies and strategies for reducing emigration from rural areas –promoting the development of cooperative societies for the creation of quality, sustainable employment and thus spreading cooperative culture to a greater extent– becomes at once a challenge and an opportunity for Andalusia. From another perspective, business synergies between cooperativism and conventional businesses may be encouraged, making the most of the opportunity offered by the latter for spreading their culture to neighbouring regions to a greater degree than cooperativism. In this way, spreading the principles and values of cooperativism in the Andalusian region can be achieved at the same time as contributing to an attachment of population to territory, through a potential business inter-cooperation.

Among the conclusions drawn, one also finds the need to carry out specific strategies and policies for promoting cooperativism in Andalusia, derived from results showing more heterogeneous behaviour in the region than seen in the conventional business sector.

With regard to the limitations of this work, it should be noted that, in the first place, the analysis carried out is static in nature, based on specific moment in time (the year 2015), which represents a limitation for analysing the evolutionary dynamic followed by both cooperatives societies and emigration in Andalusia. In the second place, percentage of emigration was taken as a proxy or indicative variable, with respect to the difficulty in attaching a population to its territory. However, the presence of other factors must be taken into account: it may be that the percentage of emigration is low or null as a result of considerable ageing in the population, such that depopulation or difficulty in attaching population to territory would be caused, rather, by a lack of demographic growth.

This work has established a number of future lines of research stemming in part from the very limitations indicated above, among which are the analysis of the evolutionary dynamic between cooperativism and emigration for the purpose of identifying the relationship these have followed over time; as well as consideration of other factors indicating capacity for attaching population to territory, such as the previously mentioned rate of demographic growth.

KEYWORDS: Andalusia, cooperative societies, territory, emigration, spatial regression.