

Older Persons in Rural Areas: An Approach to the Role They Play in a “Desagrarizada” Society of Southern Europe

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Abstract

In the context of the changes in first world country societies, the aging of population, apart from being a “burden” for budgets, it tends to be seen as a social drama in terms of productivity. However, the prolongation of activity, in a direct or indirect way, clandestine or by means of being a helping hand for the family, is an irrefutable fact. This article aims to expose, through a comparative analysis between the elderly from rural and urban areas, some elements which constitute most of the usual concerns of those whose age surpasses 65 years, a segment of the population which is to have an increasing importance in postindustrial societies. This article studies aspects such as those linked to the sense of usefulness, contribution to society in these not so productive years, as well as their perception of their quality of life. The last aim is to consider whether the dissolution of the rural-urban continuum is also a factor for the elderly. For this research, we resorted to the exploitation of the data provided by a survey done by 540 senior people from both urban and rural environments in Extremadura.

Keywords: Rural world, sociology of aging, elderly and rural world, rural sociology, development indicators.

1. Introduction

From an economic perspective, a lot has been written about the pressure carried out by the aging of the population on the pension system, health and social services and on the challenge of long-term sustainability. However, not so much has been written about the personal side which refers to the attitudes and behaviors of the elderly in the trance of life change, after leaving their work place, taking into account that such behavior directly affects public policies as an extension of psychosomatic illnesses, pharmaceutical expenses, levels of consumption, etc.

In the mid-nineties María Teresa Bazo (1996:210) argued that it was convenient to start research which highlights people’s activities in the last years. Such activities are, for the most part, not considered economically productive. The hypothesis of this author was that when the new seniors retire, they have more desires and opportunities to carry out certain activities, whether leisure or altruistic, than the previous generations. The liberation of economical need by means of a guaranteed pension, although modest in many cases, can be a factor which leads the elderly to carry out these activities. Psychological factors also have weight, like the need to continue to be active and useful, as well as to continue to have a lifestyle and the attitudes which are constitutive features of most people’s personalities.

Since the 1990’s there have been more and more academic works on the so called “third age” in Spain and its consequences from different points of view. Abad Romero and Rodríguez Míguez (2002) give us the socioeconomic characteristics and the structure of the households of the elderly in Spain. It is an exhaustive compilation of the works done throughout the decade. For instance, Ruiz-Castillo (1995) published about the welfare changes in the seventies in households where the main breadwinner is over 65 years old, Cárceles and Monreal (1995) published about the public policies referred to this matter in a European framework, etc.

Nevertheless, in our work we attempt to expand on subjective aspects, which should lead us to understand, from a sociological view, aspects related to welfare, changes in the family structure and their values. Pérez Díaz and Rodríguez (2007) alert us about the fact that “when we talk about the system of social welfare we refer not only to the estate or the businesses and non-profit organizations that provide services, but mainly about families...” and the implications for them like the challenge of aging as some aspects change such as the traditional role of women due to their incorporation into the workplace, and the repercussion of having less children as the distribution of the “burden” of taking care of the elderly changes.

However, given the challenge that aging represents, others opportunities arise with regard to what Pérez Díaz and Rodríguez (2007:8) say when they see aging as an advantage when constituting a more reflexive society, less aggressive and violent, less hasty, less stressed and with more possibilities for the cultivation of the immaterial dimension of humanity, which attracts the improvement of the material.

Our study is also done, like Pérez Díaz and Rodríguez, from the individual perspective of those who are in the moment of reaching the milestone of the seventy years and find themselves in a transition, from active labor to inactive. This is what the previously mentioned authors denominate as “the generation of transition”, as their beginnings of active life coincided with the period between the 50’s and the mid 70’s of the 20th century (1950-1976), period of great transformation in Spain, when most of the main socio-economic changes experienced in our countries take place thanks to a capitalist economy, the transition from rural world to urban, etc.

Following Dancuasa (2001:87), on the theory of “decoupling” that sees aging as an inevitable period of losses of roles and relationships, in response to the theories of “active aging”, considering that it offers a depressive image of aging as well as empirically wrong. Although this last version can be considered as too ideal, for it creates an unreal expectation about the people who age, creating in them expectations of activity assumable, depending on the cases, by people of middle age, and when facing biological limitations, and most importantly, when facing the economic, political and social structures, these factors and their inhibiting and sometimes frustrating influx are normally not taken into account.

For the case at stake, in order to analyze the perceptions of those over 65 on their contribution and their quality of life, we have the preliminary results of a survey that has its origins in the research project “Socio-demographic change and Active Ageing” (CASOENAC in Spanish). Scientific contribution for farsighted policies”, promoted by the International Cooperation in Science and Technology Foundation and the European Academy of Yuste Foundation (European Union – Mexico). The aim of this massive survey was to carry out a comparative study of the self-image, attitudes, motivations and perspectives of the population over 60 years old in Europe (Germany and Spain) and Mexico.

This article attempts to describe the attitudes and positions referred to the future and bearing in mind the past of the surveyed people, stressing the possible differences in orientations between those who come from a rural area and those who come from the cities of Extremadura, starting from the description of a series of categories such as the differences in the sense of usefulness, the different contributions to the community in this final stage of life and the daily experience in both habitats which we come to denominate, in a very generic way, quality of life parameters.

2. Approach to the socio-demographic characteristics of the Extremaduran population over 65¹.

The aging of Spain is a relatively new fact. Until the 50’s the percentage of people over 65 represented only the 7% of the population. But in the last forty or fifty years this percentage has risen continuously so that it surpasses an average of 17 %. As stated by García Sanz and Martínez Patricio (2006:22-23), if during the decade 2001-1010 the average number of people who reached the age of 65 was around 53,000, in the following decades the average number should reach 75,000 (from 2011 to 2020) and it is estimated that around 130,000 people between 2021 and 2025.

An interesting fact to be considered is that, as these authors pointed out, aging is not a phenomenon which affects the entire country equally. There is a quite or very old Spain but there is another Spain still far from reaching the national average considered as the 17%.

¹ Unless stated otherwise, in this paper we refer to them in multiple occasions as “the elderly” or “senior citizens”.

In this regard we must present the regional categorization done by García Sanz and Martínez Patricio (2006: 23-30), by which there is a really aged Spain, which is the one affected by emigration from the countryside to the city, a factor which has left the youngest groups demographically unbalanced and that has reduced notably the child birth rates. Some of the most affected regions are Castile and Leon, Asturias, Galicia, Aragon, Castilla-La Mancha and La Rioja. All of them present between 20 and 23% of population over the age of 65. Although in these areas cities have maintained a certain balance in the age structures, they could not compensate the effects of emigration. Following these regions, these authors point out that Cantabria, Extremadura, Navarra, Catalonia and Basque Country have a percentage of elderly population between 17% and 19%. They all present demographic structures which are slightly more balanced than those of the previous regions. In the case of Extremadura, they point out that “the effects of emigration from the countryside to the city are evident, like in the previous regions, an effect which has softened due to the existence of a higher child birth rate with respect to the rest of the country.”

There are two significant indicators which serve to measure the impact of the aging population on the population structure; the old age index which relates to the elderly and those who are under the age of 15, and the dependence index, which groups, on the one hand, the dependent population, that is to say the population under 15 and over 65, and on the other hand the population whose age is that of potential workers, in other words, the population between 15 and 64. Both indexes are used to assess the impact of the population both in terms of population imbalance, as well as the direct impact of aging on the labor market. If up to the year 2000 the population under 15 surpassed notably the population over 65 (in 1995 there were 100 minors for every 87 senior citizen), now the equilibrium has been disrupted and the elderly clearly surpass the population under 15. If in 2001 there were 109 people over 65 years of age for every 100 people under 15, in 2003 the proportion rose up to 116. (García Sanz and Martínez Patricio, 2006:29). In the case of the region of Extremadura, in 2010 there were 211.939 people over 65 years of age. They represent a 19.1 per cent of the total population, whereas in the country as a whole they represent a 16.9%. A total of 6.349 people from Extremadura are over 80. In the last two decades the group of elderly people has increased in a 30% approximately, as in 1991 there were 162.458 people over 65 years of age.²

The aging index of the Extremaduran population has progressively increased as seen in graph 1. It started to become obvious in the 1970's that this region would lead the country in terms of age as a consequence of the emigration process which started in the late 50's. With regard to the dependency rate, according to García Sanz and Martínez Patricio (2006:29-30) it doesn't seem to be about to suffer substantial modifications, if in 2001 the national levels were of 49 dependent seniors for every 100 independent, and the numbers decreased to 46 in the year 2003. The interpretation of this data must be positive for now the working age population will double the population that is out of the labor market, which is, without doubt, good news. Nevertheless, these authors point out that “there are three regions in which this rate will increase slightly: Extremadura, Ceuta and Melilla, whereas in the rest of the country the rates will remain similar or will be reduced.” All this will bring about certain changes which will affect not only the economic demands and the social services, but also the social relations and the cultural framework of the population.

In the case of Extremadura, the rate of dependency in municipalities with less than 5.000 habitants is, as of 2010, 38,44%, 9 points higher than the regional average. It is a population which is characterized for being formed mainly by women, as a 67% is women between 77 and 85 years of age. The main cause of such dependency is, in a 30,1% of the cases due to bones problems, followed by degenerative diseases (18%) and cardiovascular diseases (17,6%) (Muñoz González, 2001).

Another noteworthy fact pointed out by these authors is the unequal distribution of such feminization in the different regions. At first glance, you may think that the oldest regions should be the most feminized as the life expectancy of women is higher than that of men, but this is not utterly exact. In the process of feminization obviously there concur the differential mortality between men and women but also other circumstances such as the importance of the rural population, as well as the masculinization or feminization of the rural emigration to the city. Both in Extremadura and in the rest of the country a 58% of the elderly are females and a 42% are males. The higher the age, the higher the difference between the number of women and men, so among those above the age of 85 the ratio is 2,04 females per male.

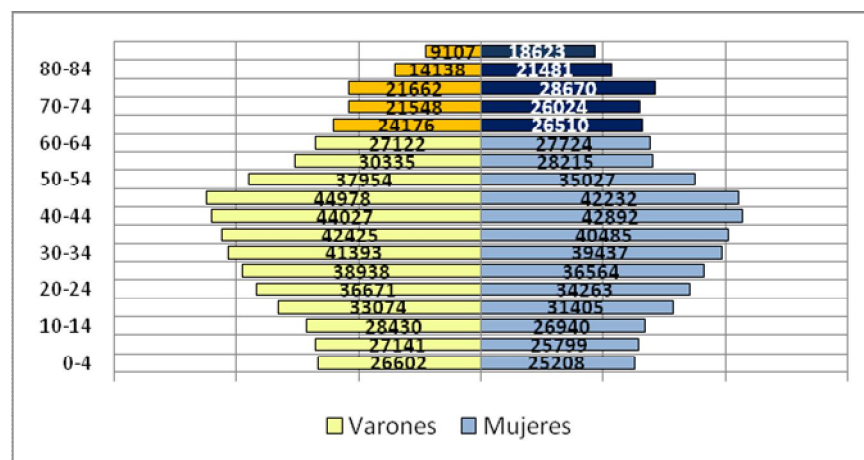
² INE.

Table 1. Distribution of the whole of the total population and the elderly according to the size of the municipality, INE.				
Size of the municipality of residence	Total population		Over 65 years	
	Number	%	Number	%
Less than 101 inhabitants	262	0,02	93	0,05
From 101 to 500 inhabitants	27,054	2,56	9.166	4,54
From 501 to 1,000 inhabitants	70,845	6,69	20.390	10,09
From 1,001 to 2,000 inhabitants	125,506	11,86	30.120	14,91
From 2,001 to 5,000 inhabitants	188,405	17,80	41.474	20,53
From 5,001 to 10,000 inhabitants	178,941	16,91	34.851	17,25
From 10,001 to 20,000 inhabitants	81,43	7,67	12.588	6,23
From 20,001 to 50,000 inhabitants	119,841	11,32	18.072	8,95
From 50,001 to 100.000 inhabitants	132,987	12,56	18.121	8,97
From 100,001 to 500.000 inhabitants	133,519	12,61	17.112	8,47
Total	1,058,503	100	201.987	100

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the INE.

The evolution of the different ages in the pyramid of ages of the region in 2010 represents a decrease in the child birth rate and a predictable increase aging or even loss of population. This is the typical shape of developed countries.

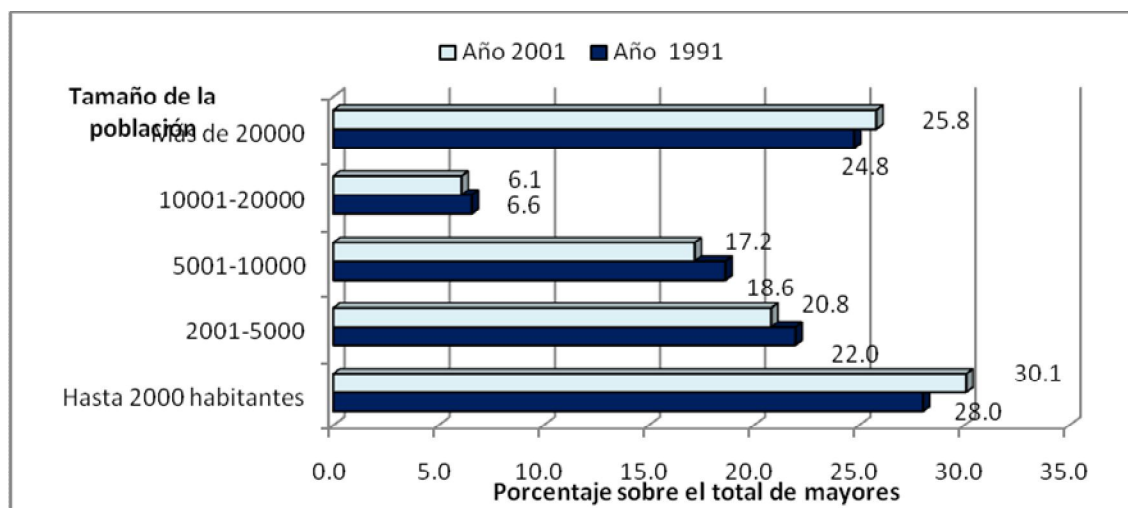
Graph 1. Pyramid of the population of extremadura. Year 2010.



Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the INE.

2.1.- The elderly in Extremadura according to the size of the municipalities in which they live.

As it can be seen in table 1 and graph 2 there is a higher proportion of senior citizens living in small municipalities. If we take a look at the whole of the population, a 21% lives in small villages with less than 2.000 people, and when it comes to the elderly a 30% of them live in the same circumstances in Extremadura and 50% of them live in municipalities with less than 5.000 habitants. The growing average age of the rural population in Extremadura is a tendency which can be seen throughout time. In relative terms the number of people above 65 years of age is growing in small towns, as it can be seen in graph 2, comparing the data from the years 1991 and 2001.

Graph 2: The elderly in Extremadura according to the size of the town in which they live. INE 1991 and 2001.

Source: own elaboration from the data provided by the INE.

2.2.- The elderly who live in single person households in Extremadura.

As stated by Bazo Royo and Maiztegui Oñate (2006:111-113) the senior people usually live with their families rather than living alone, but they prefer to live in their home rather than somewhere else. Moreover, the number of people who decide to live on their own is progressively increasing. Nevertheless, when they feel ill or need help they go back with their families, and in general, they receive this aid. They remain independent for a longer time but they have assistance from their families when needed. This circumstance is detected in societies with higher degree of economic development, where the dispersion of the family and the geographic mobility is considerable. For these authors, family in Spain hasn't lost its main traditional functions.

It continues to be involved in healthcare, education, providing the economic means and providing welfare. It is clear that as welfare structures become bigger and more overarching, the family becomes less and less involved in the material care and attention, starting to act more as intermediary between the sick elderly and the Administration. With regard to those who live in single person households the main difference between those who live in Extremadura and the rest of Spain is smaller than in 1991. Thus, the households composed by a single male over 65 years of age in Extremadura are a 1,9% whereas in Spain it is a 1.4% whereas those formed by a single female of the same age in Extremadura are a 7,4% whereas in Spain it's a 5,9%

Table 2. Households with senior citizens. INE, 2001.

	Spain		Extremadura	
	Number	% with respect to all the households	Number	% with respect to all the households
All households	14.187.169	100	366,926	100
Total of single person households	2.876.572	20,2	77.165	21,0
Households formed by one senior citizen	1.358.937	9,6	42.466	11,6
Households formed by only one female senior citizen	1.043.471	8,6	31.694	8,6
Households formed by only one male citizen	315.466	2,2	10.772	2,9
Households where there is at least one female senior citizen	3.833.847	27,0	31.694	30,0
Households where there is at least one male senior citizen	2.848.479	20,8	10.772	22,8
Households formed by 2 adults, being at least one over 65 years old	1.776.697	12,5	54.025	14,72

Source: Own elaboration from the date provided by the INE.

2.3.-Level of education of the elderly in Extremadura.

15,1% of people over 65 years of age in Extremadura are illiterate and nearly half of them (49,8%) are "uneducated". These percentages are higher in all women and also increase as the age is higher. The rate of illiterate and uneducated elderly people is higher among those who live in towns with smaller population, and therefore, on the contrary, those who finished studies of second and third degree are proportionally more in larger towns. This can be seen clearly in Table 3.

		Total of people over 65 years of age	% Illiterate	% Uneducated	% Primary education	% Secondary education	% College education
Both sexes	TOTAL	196.916	15,1	49,8	26,6	6,2	2,3
	65-69 years	61.254	11,6	47,4	30,0	8,1	2,8
	70-74	53.200	13,6	50,3	27,4	6,3	2,4
	75-79	40.974	15,0	51,8	25,9	5,5	1,9
	80-84	23.802	18,8	52,0	23,0	4,6	1,6
	85-89	11.729	24,6	49,5	20,2	3,7	2,1
	90 or older	5.957	32,6	46,9	16,2	2,8	1,5
sex	Males	84.789	9,1	52,8	27,0	7,9	3,2
	Females	112.127	19,7	47,5	26,3	5,0	1,5
According to the size of their towns	< 101 people	93	4,3	69,9	23,7	2,2	0,0
	101- 500	9.117	12,0	57,7	26,4	3,1	0,8
	501- 1000	20.210	15,4	54,3	26,6	2,7	1,0
	1.001- 2.000	29.846	17,8	52,8	25,5	3,0	0,9
	2.001- 5.000	40.990	17,7	52,3	25,6	3,3	1,1
	5.001-10.000	33.830	16,2	53,0	24,9	4,5	1,3
	10.001-20.000	11.996	13,7	51,3	26,2	6,6	2,2
	20.001-50.000	17.073	11,8	47,5	29,3	8,4	3,0
	50.001- 100.000	17.108	10,6	37,2	29,7	15,6	6,9
	100.001 500.000	16.653	12,3	35,4	29,0	16,8	6,4

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the INE.

Up to this point we have roughly presented the most significant characteristics of the population of senior citizens in Extremadura from the data that the INE provides. Secondly, we get into the aspects which are the subject of this article based on the data provided by a probabilistic survey.

3. Methodology of the survey.

For this research, the sampling values, assuming random selection and normal distribution of the samples, and considering the maximum level of variability ($p=q=1=0,5$), are the following: sampling size (n) of 540 surveys extracted from a total of 211.939 senior citizens who live in the region of Extremadura in January 2010. The sampling error is $\pm 4,2\%$ for a confidence level (cl) of 95%. The field work was carried out in May 2010. The questionnaire was done by means of personal interview, due to the high level of coverage error of telephone surveys, particularly in rural areas, which make these types of means not recommendable. Another reason why it seems more reliable to opt for the personal interview is to avoid the level of refusal derived from the typical characteristics of the senior citizens, their low levels of instruction and the length of the questionnaire. Thus, systematic errors associated with the telephone procedure have been avoided.³

The sampling base, constituted by 540 surveys carried out in the different municipalities of Extremadura, has been distributed according to criteria of rurality of the towns in the region, as shown in the following table (Table 4).

³ See WERT, J.I. (1994). "La encuesta telefónica". En García Ferrando, *Análisis de la Realidad Social*. (177 - 188).

Table 4.- Balance of the survey according to the categorization of rurality in the towns of Extremadura.

Categories of rurality in the Extremaduran towns	Sampling (%)
Rural (less than 2.000 inhabitants)	22.6
Semirural (2.001-10.000)	31
Intermediate (10.001-20.000)	4.1
Urban (more than 20.001)	42.3
Total	100

Source: Own elaboration and García García, Y. (2007:51).

Due to the low level of representation which in this case is offered by the intermediate municipalities, they will not be considered in our analysis.

3.1.-Socio-demographic characteristics of the sampling.

A.- Marital status.

With regard to the marital status, the majority of them, more than half, are married (57,7%) and almost a third part are widow/widowers (30,8%). The group of married people is bigger among the rural informants (66,7%) but the group of the widows/widowers is bigger in urban areas (34,2%).

Table 5.- Marital Status: * Rurality. N: 540. Vertical percentages.

	Rurality				Total
	Rural (less than 2.000 people)	Semirural (2.001-10.000 people)	Intermediate (10.001-20.000 people)	Urban (over 20.001)	
Married	66,7	56,0	63,6	53,8	57,7
Divorced	,9		4,5	2,7	1,5
Separated	,9	1,2		1,3	1,1
Widow / Widower	23,9	31,3	27,3	34,2	30,8
Single	7,7	11,4	4,5	8,0	8,9
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

B.- Number of components of the family unit.

The following table (Table 6) offers information about the people who constitute the household in the sampling, segmented by criteria of rurality in the municipalities where they reside.

Table 6.- Average of people per household.

Rurality	Number of people per household
Rural (less than 2.000 people)	2,05
Semirural (2.001-10.000 people)	2,24
Intermediate (10.001-20.000 people)	1,94
Urban (over 20.001 people)	2,28

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

According to this data, the number of family members per household is more reduced in rural municipalities (2,05 people per household) than in the urban equivalents (2,28).

More specifically, with respect to the composition of households, the single person households represent 27,3% of the total. This sort of household has a bigger importance on the urban areas (29,3%) and less presence in the rural zones (25,5%), as a consequence, conjugal life is bigger in rural households (56,1%) than in the urban ones (45,5%).

Table 7.- Number of people who in the household: *Rurality. Vertical percentages.

Number of people in the household		Ruralidad				Total
		Rural (less than 2.000 people)	Semirural (2.001-10.000 people)	Intermediate (10.001-20.000 people)	Urbana (over 20.001 people)	
1		25,5	26,5	17,6	29,3	27,3
2		56,1	42,8	76,5	45,5	47,6
3		11,2	17,5		13,4	13,9
4		3,1	9,0	5,9	6,5	6,6
5		3,1	1,8		1,6	1,9
6		1,0	,6		,4	,6
7			,6			,2
8			,6		,4	,2
9					1,2	,6
10					,8	,4
11			,6		,8	,6
Total		100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

D.- Income.

Table 8.- Monthly income (net) in the household: * Rurality. Vertical percentages

Total monthly income (net) in a household:		Ruralidad				Total
		Rural (less than 2.000)	Semirural (.,001-10.000)	Intermediate (10.001-20.000)	Urban (over 20.001)	
Less than 1.000 €		58,2	79,4	38,5	57,7	64,2
1.000-1.500 €		32,7	14,3	38,5	16,1	20,5
1.500-2.000 €		7,1	2,4	7,7	10,7	7,0
2.000- 2.500 €		1,0	1,6		9,4	4,4
2.500-3.000 €		1,0	1,6		2,0	1,6
Over 3.000 €			,8	15,4	3,4	2,1
no answer/don't know					,7	,3
Total		100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

Table 8 refers to the net income. It shows the households where the surveyed senior citizens who have monthly incomes that don't surpass 1.000€ live, being the proportion in rural areas of 58,2% and 57,7% in the urban ones. The differences can be seen in the households of higher income which concentrate in cities. There are hardly any households with incomes over 2.000€ a month in the rural zones, whereas in urban areas these households represent a 14,8% of the total.

Taking into account that the declaration of income, in this case of the senior citizens, may contain an elevated degree of indetermination and/or withholding of data, we have opted for carrying out an approximation. In any case the data have a certain credibility if we take into consideration that according to official estimations from 2008, the average yearly income in Extremadura is 7.551 € whereas in Spain it is 9.865 €

4. Sense of usefulness.

We deal now with aspects which have to do with welfare but that have subjective character within the context of household and family. The study of issues like the role played in their lives, the sense of usefulness, attitudes toward the future, etc., allow us to see how the elderly perceive their own aging.

There exist seven matters in this study which have to do with the concept of usefulness one way or another. Two of them could be considered as part of “self-fulfillment”, three other are part of the variable “social reference” and the three other are part of the “sense of usefulness” itself.

The variable that we come to denominate “perception of self-fulfillment” reflects whether senior citizens feel that their lives have been what they had dreamt when they were younger. It is a retrospective view which acts as an evaluation of their life.

The variable which we have called “sense of usefulness” focuses on the elderly in relation with the people and space around them. It deals with revising whether one leaves a mark or not after a long life.

The variable of social reference can be measured by the need of the neighbors and friends for the guidance of the elderly. It must be taken into account that questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 19 and 37 are done in the negative mode, so the most positive value would be the answers “nothing” or “no”.

4.1.- Self-fulfillment.

As a synthesis we can state that the sense of self-fulfillment of the elderly (Table 9) is clearly affected by the variables of “rurality”, “marital status” and “the number of household members”, to the extent of pointing out that those senior citizens who affirm to have a sense of self-fulfillment in life are those who live in the cities of Extremadura, are married and live in households constituted by more than two people.

Table 9.- “So far I have achieved the things which are important for me” (q.10).

		Percentage of valid questionnaires				Indicator
		Not at all	A bit	Quite a bit	Very much	
All		2,2	28,8	42,8	26,2	0,64
Rurality	Rural	2,5	43,4	35,2	18,9	0,57
	Semirural	1,8	24,7	48,2	25,3	0,66
	Urban	2,4	24,3	42,9	30,4	0,67
Sex	Male	4,2	24,6	45,6	25,6	0,64
	Female	0,9	31,7	41,1	26,3	0,64
Age	Under 75 years old	1,3	28,2	44,3	26,2	0,65
	Over 75 years old	3,5	29,4	40,8	26,3	0,63
Marital Status	Married	1,6	24,3	44,6	29,5	0,67
	Widow/widower	1,3	35,8	39,0	23,9	0,62
	Single	6,4	34,0	44,7	14,9	0,56
	Separated/divorced	14,3	21,4	42,9	21,4	0,57
Members of the household	1 person	3,9	38,6	37,8	19,7	0,58
	2 people	1,4	27,0	43,7	27,9	0,66
	More than 2 people	1,6	21,3	48,8	28,3	0,68

Note: From the percentage distribution of answers we have extracted the corresponding indicators. These have the advantage, with respect to the direct percentage breakdown, that they take into consideration all the answers, which are pondered in order to obtain a synthetic numeric value of all of them, generating only one quantitative value which in this case fluctuates from 0 (not at all) to 1 (very much): $\% \text{not at all} * 0 + \% \text{A bit} * 1 + \% \text{Quite a bit} * 2 + \% \text{Very much} * 3 / 300$. In the case of the questions made in negative mode ((2, 3, 5, 6, 19 y 37), the index has been done in this way: $:\% \text{not at all} * 3 + \% \text{A bit} * 3 + \% \text{Quite a bit} * 1 + \% \text{Very much} * 0 / 300$.

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

4.2.- Sense of usefulness.

One of the matters to be analyzed is the level of the sense of usefulness in this population, as well as attempting to discover the variables which can be more influential regarding this issue. With that intention, a series of questions are faced, which are relevant to problems which deal with self-fulfillment, personal and professional achievements, and the moral testament or legacy. The analytic perspective adopted in this case is that of subjective introspection, making the interviewee reflect on his/her reality and experience and attempting to achieve its communication.

González Pozuelo (1995:80) sustains that senior citizens have a changing reality ahead of them. Old age is, together with adolescence, the period of life in which more changes appear. The way in which the elderly cope with this changing reality is determined by their perception and interpretation of it. That is to say behavior is determined by the different situations (stimuli) and the way in which they are understood (aptitudes). (...). From an open attitude, reality is contemplated with interest and confidence. There is a way to overcome difficulties. This attitude is a way for personal development as it enables the put into practice of their resources and personal skills, their communication and cooperation strategies, which will contribute to achieve a creative adaptation. As opposed to this, from a closed attitude the difficulties are experienced as menaces, generating defensive strategies.

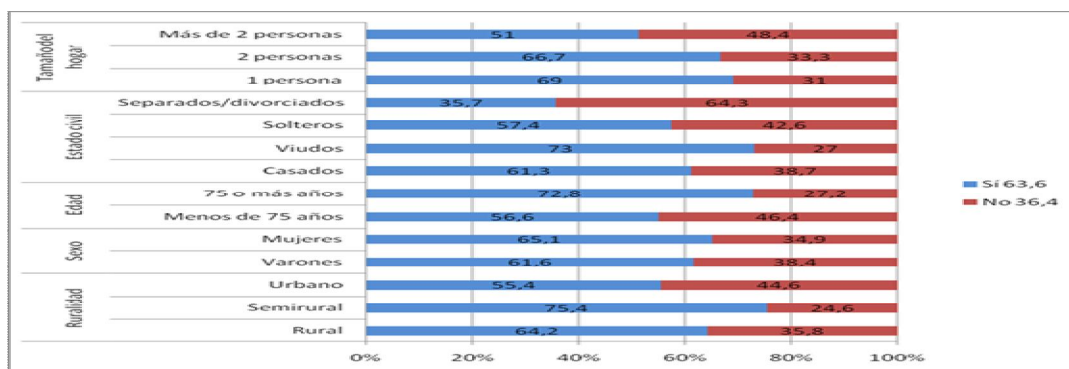
It seems that age by itself is not an adequate variable in order to determine the previously mentioned changes. These changes can be explained according to several factors which deal with personal experiences. As a summary, we could therefore characterize the sense of usefulness among the elderly in Extremadura in the following way: it's an extended sense for it adopts a 0,61 in a scale of 0 to 1. According to the different variables, we can determine that it affects people from rural and urban areas equally. It is more deeply rooted among women than men. Also, the sense of usefulness is higher among those who are married, as well as widows and widowers, above any other categories of marital status. Finally, the senior citizens who live in a household with more people feel more useful than those who live alone or with only one person.

Table 10.- “After finishing their working life, one is considered useless” (q.37)

		Valid questionnaire percentage				Indicator
		Not at all	A bit	Quite a bit	Very Much	
All		30,2	33,6	25,6	10,6	0,61
Rurality	Rural	26,2	49,2	14,8	9,8	0,64
	Semirural	25,1	30,5	34,2	10,2	0,57
	Urban	35,9	27,9	25,1	11,1	0,63
Sex	Male	27,6	31,8	30,0	10,6	0,59
	Female	32,0	34,7	22,6	10,6	0,63
Age	Under 75 years old	32,0	34,0	21,6	12,4	0,62
	Over 75 years old	28,4	33,2	30,2	8,2	0,61
Marital Status	Married	32,7	31,4	25,5	10,4	0,62
	Widow/widower	28,2	38,0	24,5	9,3	0,62
	Single	23,4	34,0	31,9	10,7	0,57
	Separated/divorced	21,4	14,3	35,7	28,6	0,43
Household members	1 person	29,2	36,9	25,4	8,5	0,62
	2 people	30,9	32,2	24,9	12,0	0,61
	More than 2 people	34,4	32,8	24,0	8,8	0,64

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

Graph 3: V1.4 “Do you feel less useful as you grow older”? (q.19)



Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

The sense of usefulness, appreciated as time passes, (Graphic 3. *Do you feel less useful as you grow older?*) seems much higher among the elderly in the rural environment, rather than in urban areas. By sex there is no apparent difference, being a male or a female is not a variable that can explain this position. Age, however, is a significant factor for among people over 75 years of age the perception of losing social usefulness increases. Nonetheless, the elderly under that age still maintain that aging does not make them feel useful in a 56,6% of the cases. Marital status is a good explanatory variable, as the sense of losing progressively such usefulness becomes more acute among married people, widows and widowers. Finally, according to the size of the household, in single person households this feeling is less significant than in households with a higher number of members.

The perception of not having done anything perdurable (Table 11) is a subjective aspect which deepens in the sense of usefulness of the elderly and also in how this varies depending on the diverse circumstances. Question number 5 has also been written in negative mode, so both the percentages and the index must be interpreted the other way around if we are pursuing to grasp the degree of satisfaction of the elderly for having achieved something enduring. The idea of *having achieved something enduring* is in general very high among the elderly, with a rate of 0,67, in a scale of 0 to 1. In the case of the elderly in rural areas it is even higher (0,68), but only 0,02 higher than those who live in urban towns (0,66) so we can determine that this sense is not determined by the environment where people live.

By sex, it is slightly higher among males. By ages, it is to some extent higher among people whose age surpasses 75 years. By marital status, it affects all categories, but it is significantly higher among people who are separated or divorced (0,76). Finally, this feeling among those who live in households of more than 2 members also seems higher than in the rest of cases.

Table 11. "I feel that I haven't done anything which endures after my death" (q.5)						
		Valid questionnaire percentages				Indicator
		Not at all	A bit	Quite	Very much	
All		34,3	39,3	18,2	8,2	0,67
Rurality	Rural	38,0	33,1	23,1	5,8	0,68
	Semirural	32,3	46,1	11,4	10,2	0,67
	Urban	3,7	37,9	20,3	8,1	0,66
Sex	Male	3,7	37,7	17,7	7,9	0,68
	Female	3,7	40,5	18,6	8,2	0,66
Age	Under 75 years old	3,5	33,2	19,4	7,9	0,68
	Over 75 years old	2,6	47,8	16,7	7,9	0,65
Marital Status	Married	3,9	40,1	17,8	7,2	0,68
	Widow/widower	3,1	41,2	14,4	1,3	0,65
	Single	3,9	34,0	27,7	6,4	0,64
	Separated/divorced	50,0	28,6	21,4	0,0	0,76
Household Members	1 person	35,4	37,0	21,3	6,3	0,67
	2 people	33,5	41,9	16,7	7,9	0,67
	Over 2 people	38,7	37,9	14,5	8,9	0,69

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey "Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging" (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies", done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

4.3.- Social referentiality.

Bazo Royo and and Maiztegui Oñate (2006:114-115) pointed out that in Europe the family works as the "source of satisfaction, reciprocal exchanges and as a «school of intergenerational relations in a society where more generations coexist with the passing of time». These authors compare the context of the European Union and estimate that the rate of family relations is in general quite high. Italy (71%), Greece (65%), Spain (61%) and Portugal (60%) are in this particular order the countries where more daily relations are established with family members, way over the European average (44%). Nevertheless, we note that in other countries, especially in northern Europe, there is a direct contact between the elderly and the young ones, unlike in the southern countries. It seems that other types of relations have been developed, relations which keep the elderly close to the members of other generations, even if they are not part of the family.

Bazo Royo and Maitegui Oñate (2006:114-115) also pointed out that the decline of the mortality rate has caused a deep change in the relations between grandparents and grandchildren, because, for the first time, most of the adults live long enough to meet their descendants, who are lucky enough to establish a relation with their grandparents. Also, a bigger camaraderie and comprehension has been noted so that a new sense of intergenerational proximity has developed, especially when the houses are next to each other and the elderly play a functional role in the family (Aranguren, 1992; Benlloch Ruiz, 1993; Cherlin and Fustemberg, 1992).

The role of the grandparent as a factor of integration in the family and the first educator-entertainer is kept, despite the fact that the image of forsaken old person, confined in a retirement home by the family is the most widely spread. Among youngster it is noted that direct contact with the senior family members modifies the perception of old age, the positive images of grandparents based on the knowledge about them or nostalgia contrast with the negative stereotypes about the elderly, even though reality does not exactly adjust to any of these two cases. For teenagers, the democratization and loss of authoritarianism in family and social relations can favor their interactions with the elderly.

In our case, the variable of “social referentiality” can be measured by the need of neighbors and family members for the elderly’s advice and for the sense of doing something valuable for them. In some way, it is about whether the elderly are still a referent in their environment.

When asked whether “*people ask them for advice*” (Table 12), in general terms, a 62,3% of the surveyed people say “not at all” or “some”. The indicator is, as a consequence, very low, 0,44. The highest indicator (0,47) was obtained by the elderly who live in rural environments, while those from urban areas reached only 0.42. The rest of independent variables are not explanatory enough.

Tabla12. V1.8 “People come to me asking for advice” (q.2)						
		Valid questionnaire percentages				Indicator
		Not at all	Some	Quite a few	Many people	
All		17,8	44,5	26,7	11,0	0,44
Rurality	Rural	14,8	41,7	32,0	11,5	0,47
	Semirural	13,8	50,3	27,5	8,4	0,44
	Urban	21,9	41,9	23,5	12,7	0,42
Sex	Male	18,4	46,1	24,4	11,1	0,43
	Female	17,4	43,4	28,3	10,9	0,44
Age	Under 75 years old	13,1	44,4	30,7	11,8	0,47
	Over 75 years old	24,1	44,5	21,1	10,3	0,39
Marital Status	Married	17,0	45,8	27,4	9,8	0,43
	Widows/widowers	16,6	45,4	26,3	11,7	0,44
	Single	23,4	36,2	27,6	12,8	0,43
	Separated/divorced	21,4	35,8	21,4	21,4	0,48
Household Members	1 person	17,7	46,2	26,9	9,2	0,43
	2 people	18,9	41,0	29,0	11,1	0,44
	More than 2 people	10,4	52,8	27,2	9,6	0,45

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

5. Contribution to community life.

In the second place, we attempt to analyze the contribution to the community by the elderly under the premise that the senior citizens who live in a rural environment continue to contribute to the social capital of the community, and as a consequence the sense of “being a burden” is lower among this subgroup than among the people who live in urban zones. The proposition of the contribution is studied through its decomposition into three components: public life, social burden and expectations (degree of fulfillment of their expectations).

5.1.- Participation in public life.

The sense of being excluded from public life divides this group of people (Table 13). Half of them consider that “quite a bit” or “very much”, whereas the other half admit that “not at all” or “to some extent”. The variable that explains this best is rurality.

It is the elderly of small towns who are against this proposition prominently and who feel excluded from public life. In terms of indicators, this sense of exclusion reached a level of 0,39 among the elderly in rural towns, whereas those of urban areas reach a 0,55, being 0,51 the average. The rest of variables contribute to this opinion with less nuances, although the marital status variable is somewhat remarkable, for people who are separated or divorced are the ones with the highest rate of exclusion (0,67).

Table 13. “The elderly are excluded from many ambits of public life” (q.36)						
		Valid Questionnaire percentages				Indicator
		Not at all	A bit	Quite a bit	Very much	
All		17,2	31,1	32,6	19,1	0,51
Rurality	Rural	26,2	42,6	18,9	12,3	0,39
	Semirural	11,4	29,9	43,1	15,6	0,54
	Urban	16,7	26,3	32,3	24,7	0,55
Sex	Male	13,4	35,9	30,4	20,3	0,53
	Female	19,6	28,0	34,2	18,2	0,50
Age	Under 75 years old	17,3	33,0	32,7	17,0	0,50
	Over 75 years old	16,4	28,8	32,8	22,0	0,53
Marital status	Married	17,0	32,3	30,1	20,6	0,51
	Widow/widower	18,4	30,6	34,4	16,6	0,50
	Single	21,3	19,1	44,7	14,9	0,51
	Separated/divorced	0,0	35,7	28,6	35,7	0,67
Household members	1 person	19,4	24,8	40,3	15,5	0,51
	2 people	15,3	34,0	29,3	21,4	0,52
	More than 2 people	20,3	33,6	30,5	15,6	0,47

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

With regard to the perception of social usefulness of the elderly, the idea of comparing themselves with the young ones is relevant. Table 14 presents the lowest values of all the series under analysis as not many senior citizens are considered *as competent as young people can be*. The indicator shows a low 0,28 of 1. It is significant that when comparing them to the young people’s competences, it is the elderly from rural zones that are in the best position (0,35). We perceive a certain persistence of the idea that the older people in rural areas are more considered for society than those from other areas.

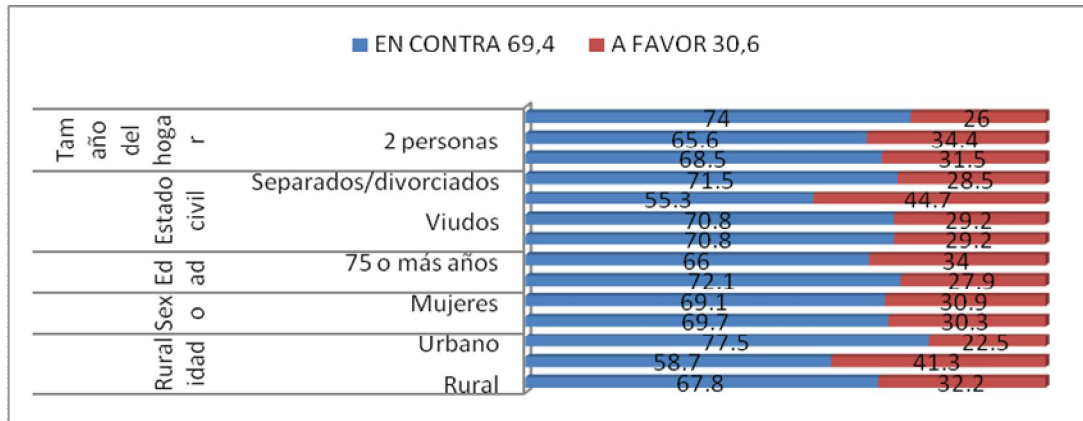
Table 14. “Most people consider that the elderly are as competent as young people” (q.50)						
		Valid questionnaire percentages				Indicator
		Not at all	Some	Quite a few	Many	
All		44,5	31,8	17,8	5,8	0,28
Rurality	Rural	30,0	38,3	27,5	4,2	0,35
	Semirural	52,1	28,7	15,6	3,6	0,24
	Urban	46,4	31,0	14,5	8,1	0,28
Sex	Male	44,2	32,6	18,1	5,1	0,28
	Female	44,8	31,7	17,2	6,3	0,28
Age	Under 75 years old	42,6	31,9	22,5	3,0	0,29
	Over 75 years old	47,4	31,6	11,4	9,6	0,28
Marital Status	Married	46,7	27,4	20,3	5,6	0,28
	Widow/widower	41,4	40,1	11,7	6,8	0,28
	Single	47,8	30,4	15,3	6,5	0,27
	Separated/Divorced	38,5	38,5	23,0	0,0	0,28
Household members	1 person	41,7	33,9	16,5	7,9	0,30
	2 people	40,7	30,4	22,4	6,5	0,32
	More than 2 people	37,5	32,0	21,9	8,6	0,34

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

5.2.- Social burden.

If, as indicated by the previous data, the elderly who live in rural environments continue to contribute to the social capital of the community, the consequence is that the sense of “being a burden” for society should be less strong among this subgroup than among the people who live in the city. Nonetheless, our data doesn’t seem to indicate significant differences attributable to the living environment. The cause seems to be the smaller differences between cities and rural towns in the sense that there is a noteworthy improvement of services, communications, etc. When we asked whether “*people over 65 years of age are too costly for the government*” (Graph 4), 7 out of 10 interviewees were against this statement. If we focus on the environment, the elderly from urban areas are the subgroup who is most against such affirmation (77,5%) whereas the elderly from the rural areas disagree in a 67,8% of the cases, a difference of ten percentage points.

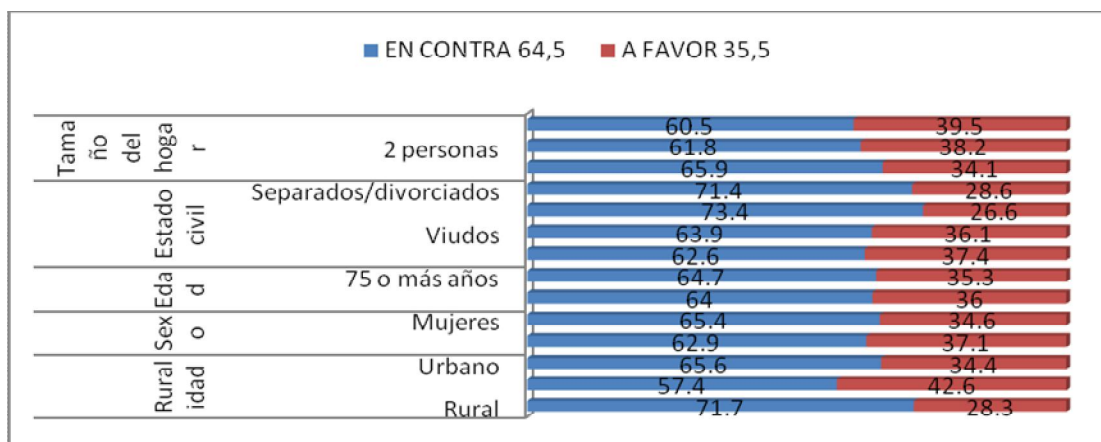
Graph 4: “The elderly people are too costly for the government.” (percentages).



Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

Approximately 6 out of 10 interviewees affirmed being against the statement that “the growing proportion of elderly people is lowering our economic competitiveness” (Graph 5). The group of people who are most against this idea that senior citizens lower our productivity are actually the senior citizens from rural zones (71,7%), as well as the separated, divorced and single.

Graph 5: “The growing proportion of older people lowers our economic competitiveness.”



Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

5.3.- Expectations.

The world of expectations generated with respect to the rest among the elderly is analyzed by means of two statements formulated to the interviewees: “In general, people respect the elderly”, Table 15, and the utterance:

“Most of the elderly expect too much from their families”, Table 16. Regarding the first question referred to the elderly, we can say that the whole sample adopted an average position which can be said to be intermediate, a 0,5. However, the analysis of the indicators which derive from the percentage distribution inform us that, as usual in these studies, the location variable (rurality) is the one which provides the biggest differentiation; so the respect for the elderly seems to be higher in the rural environments (0,61) than in urban zones (0,44).

		Valid questionnaire percentages				Indicator
		Not at all	A bit	Quite a bit	Very much	
All		14,5	39,4	27,1	19,0	0,50
Rurality	Rural	6,6	33,6	29,5	30,3	0,61
	Semirural	13,2	39,5	27,5	19,8	0,51
	Urban	19,3	42,1	25,7	12,9	0,44
Sex	Male	17,1	42,1	21,8	19,0	0,48
	Female	12,8	37,7	30,5	19,0	0,52
Age	Under 75 years old	16,0	36,7	31,0	16,3	0,49
	Over 75 years old	12,6	43,0	22,2	22,2	0,51
Marital Status	Married	12,5	39,3	29,5	18,7	0,51
	Widow/widower	17,2	37,4	24,5	20,9	0,50
	Single	17,0	48,9	21,3	12,8	0,43
	Separated/divorced	23,1	46,1	15,4	15,4	0,41
Household members	1 person	14,7	46,5	19,4	19,4	0,48
	2 people	15,4	36,0	27,1	21,5	0,52
	More than 2 people	10,9	38,3	39,1	11,7	0,51

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

A little more than half the people who took part in the survey sustain that “Most senior citizens expect too much from their families” (Table 16). In the case of the older people from rural towns this percentage is more elevated (62,8%), whereas the percentage of the people from cities is way more reduced, 49,6%. A possible interpretation is that the elderly from rural towns have more expectations on their families, than those from the city.

		Valid questionnaire percentages		
		AGAINST	IN FAVOR	Indicator ^(*)
All		44,7	55,3	0,54
Rurality	Rural	37,2	62,8	0,56
	Semirural	41,5	58,4	0,59
	Urban	50,4	49,6	0,49
Sex	Male	46,8	53,3	0,52
	Female	43,3	56,7	0,55
Age	Under 75 years old	45,4	54,6	0,53
	Over 75 years old	43,7	56,3	0,55
Marital Status	Married	46,3	53,8	0,53
	Widow/widower	42,8	57,3	0,55
	Single	41,3	58,7	0,57
	Separated/divorced	42,9	57,2	0,57
Household members	1 person	43,2	56,8	0,54
	2 people	35,3	53,8	0,50
	More than 2 people	41,3	58,7	0,56

Note: Indicator obtained from the percentage distribution of the categories: “not at all, a bit, quite a bit and very much” which are not included in this table.

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by the survey “Socio-demographic Change and Active Aging” (CASOENAC). Scientific contribution for far sighted policies”, done for Extremadura by DELSOS, a research group of the University of Extremadura.

6.- Conclusions: “rurality” as an explanatory factor.

Throughout this piece of work, we have pointed out how the environment in which elderly people live can constitute a significant explanatory factor. Some of the aspects which are influenced by this variable are those we attempt to explicit as conclusion or summary.

6.1.-The sense of usefulness.

A first question is the sense of self-fulfillment of the elderly people. We observed how this sense is affected mainly by the variables “rurality”, “marital status”, and “household members”. This explained that the elderly people with the highest rate of self-fulfillment are those who live in the urban cities of Extremadura, are married and live in family units constituted by two or more people.

Another question is whether after their working life “*they consider themselves useless*”. The average indicator (0,61) shows that this sense of uselessness is very high. When crossed with the rurality variable, the elderly people from urban and rural environments have a similar sense of uselessness, 0,64, 0,63, and therefore this variable hardly affects this sense. The sense of usefulness assessed as the years pass, (“*Do you feel less useful as you grow old?*”) is considerably higher among the people from rural areas than in the urban environment. The perception of not having accomplished anything enduring is a subjective aspect which has a big impact on the sense of usefulness. The idea of not having achieved anything perdurable is in general very high among the elderly, with a rate of 0,67 in a scale of 0 to 1.

“Social referentiality”, measured in terms of the need of neighbors, friends and family members for the elderly’s advice and also in terms of the sense of “doing something valuable” for them, attempts to establish whether the elderly are still a referent in their environments. When asked whether “people ask them for advice”, in general, a 62,3% of the interviewed senior citizens said “not at all” or “a bit”. As a consequence, the indicator is quite low, 0,44. The highest rate was obtained by the people from rural areas (0,47), whereas the people from the city obtained a 0,42 rate.

Also, regarding the perception of social usefulness by the elderly, we approached the question of comparing themselves with the younger ones, or whether people consider them as competent as younger people. This question presents the lowest rate as only a few senior citizens state that society considers them as competent as younger people. The indicator reached 0,28. We find a certain persistence of the idea that the elderly from the rural towns are more considered for society than in other areas.

6.2.- Taking part in public life.

The sense of being excluded from public life divides this group. The variable which explains this sense best is rurality. In terms of indicators, this sense of exclusion reaches a level of 0,39 among the people from rural towns, whereas the urban senior citizens display a rate of 0,55, being the average of all the groups a 0,51.

6.3.- The sense of being a burden to society.

When we asked whether they think that “*The elderly are too costly for the State*”, 7 out of 10 interviewed elderly citizens were against this statement. Regarding the rurality variable, the seniors from the city are the ones who most strongly disagree with this (77,5%), while only a 67,8% of the ones from rural zones are against this affirmation, a ten point difference. As, we can see, the older people from rural environments consider themselves more costly to the state than those from urban areas.

6.4.- Expectations for old age

The first question in this regard shows an intermediate position (0,50). The rurality variable offers a bigger differentiation so “*respect for the elderly*” has a much higher rate among the rural older people (0,61), than among the urban (0,44). We can conclude that the elderly from rural towns feel the respect for them by other people more deeply than the elderly from urban areas.

Although a little more than half the interviewees sustain that “*Most elderly people expect too much from their families*”, the elderly from rural towns expect more from their families (62,8%) than those who live in the city (49,6%). In general, and as a conclusion, we can sustain that in many of the analyzed variables, being/living in a rural environment, provides the elderly with higher levels of satisfaction, social recognition and sense of wellbeing, as opposed to those who live in other environments.

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