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Abel Duarte Alonso
Edith Cowan University

Lynnaire Sheridan
Edith Cowan University

Pascal Scherrer
Edith Cowan University

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The Challenge of Preserving Rural Industries and Traditions in Ultraperipheral Europe: Evidence from the Canary Islands

Abel Duarte Alonso
Edith Cowan University
Joondalup, Western Australia, Australia
a.alonso@ecu.edu.au

Pascal Scherrer
Edith Cowan University
p.scherrer@ecu.edu.au

Lynnaire Sheridan
Edith Cowan University
l.sheridan@ecu.edu.au

Abstract

Demographic, economic, environmental, and political changes shape many rural areas and their communities across Europe. As a result, some fundamental aspects of these communities, including traditions, culture, social fabric, and their very raison d'être, are being tested and threatened by what seem to be irreversible events. Ultraperipheral European regions, including the `Canary Islands, are not an exception; in fact, because of their physical isolation from the mainland and other barriers, these regions may be more susceptible to changes. While these dimensions are very important and need to be addressed, to date very few studies have attempted to do so with regard to European ultraperipheral areas. Using face-to-face interviews among operators of Canary Island wineries, food confectioners, and handcraft artisans, this study seeks to understand how small rural businesses involved in traditional industries in this region cope with contemporary changes. The findings indicate that while generally participants vie to continue their involvement with traditional industries that have characterized the archipelago for centuries, lack of succession and marginal financial viability instill a strong sense of uncertainty about their future. These findings may have several implications for policy makers and local authorities, particularly in the design of strategies to assist small businesses located in ultraperipheral regions.

Key words: Canary Islands, rural communities, rural industries, traditions, small businesses, ultraperiphery

1.0 Introduction

The globalization phenomenon, to some "an inevitable developmental process" (Frankic & Hershner, 2003, p. 519), with its objectives to integrate world economies (Alderson, 1999) and to lay geographic bridges across extended spaces for the sake of prosperity, has shaken the foundations of many industries and nations in its irreversible process of change. Europe, with its diversity and rich heritage (Lowenthal, 2000), is in many respects changing forever. These changes include the transformation of rural landscapes in some

areas. Antrop (2000), for instance, notes the impacts that urbanization has on the countryside in some European regions: "In modern Western civilization urbanization of the countryside is a fundamental characteristic of the changes of the traditional rural landscapes" (p. 257). Buijs, Pedroli, and Luginbühl (2006) further discuss this aspect, emphasizing its severity in recent times:

> European landscapes are facing a considerable crisis. Traditional functions like agriculture are declining as a consequence of globalisation and the associated economical processes. … The landscape suffers not less from degradation, especially through fragmentation, standardisation and encroachment. (p. 375)

The region of Aragon, Spain, illustrates the struggles of some European rural areas due to lack of economic and commercial opportunities. Depopulation and alarmingly low birth rates, coupled with aging of the population and subsequent decline of generational renewal, that is, an inadequate number of newcomers to fill the gap left by those retiring from farming activities, are issues that present serious challenges to many of the region's rural areas (Pinilla, Ayuda, & Sáez, 2008). However, because "Spanish farming has experienced relative economic and demographic decline" (Hoggart & Paniagua, 2001, p. 67) these problems may become further exacerbated.

A decline of the agricultural sector may lead to the sale of rustic or arable land, with opportunities for speculators to take advantage of the unfavourable economic climate, purchase devalued land, and transform it into living quarters. This process, however, also means the end of some cultures and traditions in rural spaces. MacDonald et al. (2000) studied rural abandonment in mountainous regions (e.g., the eastern-western Alps, Oceanic-Central Pyrénées) and drew some conclusions about abandonment's resulting environmental consequences. Rural abandonment occurs when agricultural land "ceases to generate an income flow for businesses or households and the opportunities for resource adjustment through changes in farming practices and farm structure are exhausted" (MacDonald et al., 2000, p. 47). While an increasing number of studies focus on the many changes that several European regions experience in these areas, little attention has been paid to the plight of small-business operators located in ultraperipheral regions.

The challenges that ultraperipheral European regions face can also be very serious, as these regions' limitations are compounded by the complexities of physical isolation and, in the case of archipelagos or islands, by their limited potential and resources to establish manufacturing and other industries. Little has been reported on ultraperipheral regions from an academic perspective. In fact, information on these regions' traditional industries, including those in rural and semirural areas, is scant. In addition, little is known about small rural business operators in these areas, particularly regarding challenges such as generational renewal or decline of the industries they are involved in. This study investigated these dimensions from a convenience sample of Canary Island rural operators that included small wineries, food confectioners, and artisans. The study seeks to address issues from the perspective of small-business operators located in the ultraperipheral Spanish region of the Canary Islands. Furthermore, this study examines the hypothesis that small rural business operations in traditional industries face severe challenges to their viability and continuation. To provide the context and address this hypothesis, the following broad questions were examined: (1) What are the main

motivations for operators to be involved in their industry? (2) What are the main challenges they face? (3) As they are located in a popular mass-tourism destination (*mass tourism* refers to low-budget vacation packages that large numbers of individuals can afford or to destinations visited by large numbers of people), to what extent are these operations related to tourism?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Leveraging Culture and Tradition in Light of Change

According to Le Galès (1999), "In the past 20 years in Europe, while the economy seems to be becoming both disembedded and global, culture has been denationalized and deinstitutionalized and is changing scale" (p. 298). Mazzarella (2004) explains that "the world after globalization is one in which culture is everywhere" (p. 347), while Shields (1999) notes that "rather than mutually exclusive categories, culture and economy generally represent overlapping and interdependent sets of actions" (p. 306). Coinciding with the effects of globalization, in the last decades the role of agriculture in much of the advanced world as the pillar of economic and social life is being redefined (Marsden, 1995). One of the resulting implications is that the preservation of local cultures, and the potential impact of losing them, is concerning for government and nongovernment agencies.

Despite the enduring effects of globalization, some regions have found ways to counter these. Several southern European countries, for instance, have resisted what they view as an excessive influence or impact of globalization, which has its roots in standardization and mechanization processes of food production. These developments have been perceived as a threat to agricultural and culinary traditions (Mulholland, 2000; and Miele, 2001, as cited in Parrot, Wilson, & Murdoch, 2002).

Apart from rebelling against globalization, other rural communities are uniting with the objective to achieve economic prosperity. For example, the establishment of chambers of commerce in some European countries is aimed at boosting economic growth at a provincial level. For Waters (1999), however, chambers of commerce are institutions "often confined to narrow regulatory functions and remain excluded from processes of economic innovation" (p. 115). Economic prosperity is also being sought in the form of showcasing traditional local products to the outside world. An illustration of this development is the territory of Montalcino in Italy (Mattiacci & Zampi, 2004), a region that has benefited from its own wine production, promotion, and marketing as part of concerted efforts to revive its economy.

A more comprehensive, even radical, demonstration of progress that small communities have experienced is in the form of tourist developments in rural destinations, in some cases resulting in the establishment of major tourist resorts. Sherlock (2001) reports this phenomenon in a study conducted in Port Douglas, Australia. However, there is evidence of similar developments in southern European countries. Kneafsey (2000), for instance, explains that for some time now, some rural European regions have sought and implemented tourism-related activities as alternative development strategies. In contrast, in other European rural areas and despite continuous decline, farmers have not been fully receptive to change. This phenomenon is particularly true in Spanish rural areas where, according to Hoggart and Paniagua (2001), farmers have resisted adopting pluriactivity, which in turn has led to relatively low tourism development in rural areas. However, changes have been noticed in recent years with the growth of rural tourism (Maestro, Gallego, & Requejo, 2007;

Molera & Albadalejo, 2007). Supply for rural house stays is also on the rise (Albadalejo-Pina & Díaz-Delfa, 2009), suggesting both farmers' increased involvement in tapping into this resource as an extra income earner and visitors' interest and demand for this tourism concept.

The concept of *ecocultural* tourism has also been suggested as a tool that would help sustain culturally marginalized regions and landscapes (Wallace & Russell, 2004). Combining cultural aspects with tourism is also seen as a valid strategy. Herrero, Sanz, Devesa, Bedate, and del Barrio (2006) emphasize the importance of cultural economics, as well as cultural events with social, cultural, and economic impacts. Thus, while some studies contend that the development of tourism might result in negative effects in some cases, including in the form of social change and social exclusion in some rural societies (Shucksmith & Chapman, 1998), there is also evidence that tourism could act as an economic force in some European regions.

2.2 The Ultraperipheral Regions of the Canary Islands

The term *ultraperipheral* Europe is used to describe regions, particularly islands, that are geographically very distant from continental Europe but that are still part of its official borders (see, for example, Polèse, Rubiera-Morollón, & Shearmur, 2007; Quintana, Feijoó, Caro, & García, 2005; Trujillano, Font, & Jorba, 2005). Ultraperipheral regions face numerous disadvantages that, according to Hudson (2006), include extreme remoteness, different spatial environment, and limited resources. Hudson (2006) also argues that

> the ultra-peripheral regions must be situated in the context of chronic uneven development.... The reality of regional uneven development as a chronic feature of capitalist development ... has become more pronounced as processes of neo-liberal globalization have deepened.... (p. 8).

The archipelago of the Canary Islands, Spain, is considered an ultraperipheral region (see, for example, Quintana et al., 2005). Because the Canary Islands constitute a distant enclave from continental Europe and face a number of limitations of geographic dependency, isolation, and logistical issues (García Pérez, Fumero, & Rodríguez, 2006; Langreo, 2004), tourism is an important economic activity (Canary Institute of Statistics, 2007). Tourism developed in the archipelago as early as the 19th century (Medina-Muñoz, 2001), as well as mass tourism, a feature that in view of the current numbers of tourists (Canary Institute of Statistics, 2007) appears to continue today. The Canary Islands' dependency on tourism has become more evident in recent decades (Polèse et al., 2007). Some studies suggest that 12% of the population in the islands is employed in this sector, a much higher percentage than any other region in continental Europe, where percentages of the population employed in tourism range between 1% and 6% (Trujillano et al., 2005).

While the Canaries are a popular mass-tourism destination, as is the case of mainland Spain or other European regions, alternative forms of tourism have emerged in recent years, suggesting a slow shift in tourism marketing. For example, the concept of agritourism has been gaining in popularity (Parra López & Calero García, 2006). Agritourism is a "specific set of leisure activities organised by farmers to cater for visitors" (Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, 1992, as cited in Parra López & Calero García, 2006, p. 86) and "involves the whole family of farmers, whose customs and traditions are

preserved." Parra López & Calero García (2006) point out that agritourism has helped reactivate depressed areas in the islands and contributed to the preservation of local architectural and cultural heritage. Diversification and marketing alternative forms of tourism could provide an outlet for other visitor groups that may not be part of the mass-tourism environment the islands are known for. Moreover, Díaz-Pérez, Bethencourt-Cejas, and Álvarez-González (2005) explain that the heavy emphasis on tourism for the islands' economy has prompted local authorities to find other means "to maintain and improve the competitiveness of the islands' products on national and international markets" (p. 961).

The Canary Islands have long been known for their excellent soil and climate in which to grow such products as bananas, tomatoes, potatoes, and, more recently, produce, which include flowers, ornamental plants, cucumbers, green peppers, and beans (Gómez Espín, 2004; Hernández, 2000; Morales, 1995–1996). The redevelopment of the ancient local wine sector in recent years (Godenau & Suárez Sosa, 2002; Sainz, 2002) and the production of Canary cheeses (El Día, 2003), both gaining international recognition, or La Palma Island's embroideries, are additional examples of the long list of traditional Canary products with potential to market the islands to both local and outside visitors. However, the decline in rural areas, added to the difficulties posed by diminishing generational renewal, is an ever-present issue.

Ruiz (2006, 2007) argues that liberalization of markets has resulted in strong outside competition, which affects some of the archipelago's rural areas. Consequences of these developments include the growing abandonment of rural areas, the so-called rustic soil (El Día, 2006), and further discouragement among local youth to follow in their parents' footsteps and become involved in agriculture.

While much research is devoted to addressing environmental, political, economic, or cultural issues affecting European communities, to date there is limited discussion of the issues affecting the rural areas of ultraperipheral Europe, including the Canary Islands. For example, issues of loss of traditional industries, or simple abandonment of traditional activities in the islands, appear to be only marginally discussed in contemporary research. This study seeks to address these dimensions by exploring the views of small, medium, family and micro-operations in two of the Canary Islands.

3.0 Methods

This project examined an array of small enterprises pursuing traditional local crafts, including the manufacture of cigars, silk, ceramics, baked goods, woven and quilted products, and wine. Databases that included the designation of origin websites (i.e., www.tacovin.com, http://www.malvasiadelapalma.com/) for Tenerife and La Palma listed a total of 61 wineries for these two islands. The authors considered all 61 wineries as potential study participants. A review of all five existing designations of origin in the Canary Islands revealed the existence of 185 wineries; hence the 61 wineries targeted for this study represent one third (33%) of the archipelago's total number of wineries. All of these 61 businesses were contacted by mail in May 2007. Budget limitations to travel to all seven islands of the Canary archipelago were fundamental reasons for choosing these two islands only. The island of Tenerife is home to almost half of the 185 mostly small wineries in the archipelago; thus focusing on this island was believed to potentially elicit a larger number of responses. The close proximity of La Palma to Tenerife and the fact that this island has the

third-largest number of wineries (16) in the archipelago behind Tenerife and Lanzarote (21) were important reasons for choosing this island as well.

The letters sent to the winery businesses explained the purpose of the study and invited business operators to participate in an interview on their own terms. Subsequent phone calls inviting operators to participate in the study secured the involvement of 23 businesses, 15 from Tenerife and 8 from La Palma Island. One of the researchers travelled to the Canary Islands in June 2007 to conduct face-to-face interviews with winery operators. During the days in which the interviews were conducted on the island of La Palma, 8 micro and family operations in some of the towns visited were also identified and their operators invited to participate in the study.

These 8 businesses, which were selected out of convenience, were operating in the rural towns of Mazo, El Paso, Tijarafe, and Malpaises. In Mazo, they included one operation from each of the following industries: traditional Canary embroidery, cigar making, rural tourism, jams confectionery, and cheese making. Interviews were conducted in Mazo at a local market, where the business operators met with the interviewer. In El Paso, the study participant was the manager of a silk museum; in Tijarafe, the study participant was the owner of a traditional sweet confectionery; and in Malpaises, the owner of a ceramics workshop participated in the study. In all 8 cases the researcher explained the nature and purpose of the study and acquired consent from potential study participants. The interviews were semistructured.

As Tables 1 and 2 show, the majority of the participating businesses were family businesses and in general had been running for at least 10 years. A clear gender divide was noticed between the winery operations and those of the other operations, that is, the artisans and food confectioners. While women headed up just 8.7% of the wineries, they were the sole proprietors of 87.5% of the artisan and food confectionery businesses.

The semistructured interview questions sought to learn how each operation originated, operators' motivations to be in their chosen industry, their relationship, if any, with tourism, and challenges they faced in their respective industries. In all cases operations' owners and managers made themselves available for the duration of the interviews. In the case of the wineries, the researcher travelled at a convenient time so as to not disrupt labour. The month of June was selected to conduct the interviews to prevent potential major labour issues (e.g., harvesting) that might compromise the availability of the operators to be interviewed. In the case of the other small businesses, the researcher approached operators while they were working and selling their products. However, extra care was taken so as to not disrupt their relationship with their customers. The respondents' answers were then translated from Spanish into English by two of the researchers, who are bilingual. These data were transcribed verbatim; NVivo software was used to organize and manage the transcribed interviews. In the following sections respondents' comments and statements are labelled as Respondent 1 (R1), Respondent 2 (R2), and so forth.

4.0 Results

4.1 Challenges to Generational Renewal

The small rural business operators interviewed for this study highlighted that succession and economic viability were the biggest challenges they faced.

Table 1. *Basic Demographic Characteristics of Participating Wineries (N = 23)*

Ownership *n* (%)	
Family owned	15 (65.2)
Non–family owned	8 (34.8)
Gender of operator *n* (%)	
Husband and wife	3 (13.0)
Female	2 (8.7)
Male	18 (78.3)
Years under DO* *n* (%)**	
15 years	8 (34.8)
12 years	6 (26.1)
10 years	3 (13.0)
9 years	1 (4.3)
8 years	3 (13.0)
Not available	2 (8.7)

* Indicates years under designation of origin (DO), not years since dedicated to winemaking.
** Total of 99.9% was rounded to 100%.

Table 2. *Basic Demographic Characteristics of Participating Artisan and Food Confectionery Operations (N = 8)*

Ownership *n* (%)	
Family owned	7 (87.5)
Non–family owned	1 (12.5)
Gender of Operator *n* (%)	
Husband and wife	1 (12.5)
Female	7 (87.5)
Male	0 (0.0)
Years in Operation *n* (%)	
30+	3 (37.5)
22–26	2 (25.0)
3–6	3 (37.5)

Some indicated a high likelihood that their activity and business would cease once they retired. Thus the findings confirm the hypothesis that small rural business operations in traditional industries face severe challenges to their viability and continuation.

Interviewees identified a number of reasons for the difficulties with succession and generational renewal, including disappearance of traditional pastimes, preference not to be self-employed, and challenges to business viability, making it difficult even for people with personal motivation through family tradition to become successors in family businesses. An embroidery artisan (R2) illustrated the change from traditional home activities, further resulting in a loss of knowledge transfer: "The youth do not follow our steps; they have other interests. Their parents give them everything and they do not see embroidery and needlework as leisure activities, as we did in my generation and in generations before mine."

Looking at the problem more from a business perspective, the owners of a ceramic workshop in La Palma illustrate their experience regarding generational renewal. For decades, this married couple have been replicating pottery and other artefacts that the *Guanches*, the Canary Islands' former inhabitants, used to manufacture. Both the husband and wife were interviewed, and their remarks complemented and supported each other's. One of them (R3) said,

> "We have two futures; one is the succession as we are getting old. It is very uncertain at the moment, because people do not want to have a business but rather employment and a fixed salary. There is future in this industry, and this business is well known and right now we are the only ones doing this type of work on the island."

Thus in this case, it is not a lack of commercial opportunities or economic downturn posing a problem for generational renewal. In fact, asked if they had any relationship with tourism to market their products, the ceramic workshop owners said the relationship was significant. One of them (R3) continued,

> "Since we are making something important [ceramics], tour operators from around the island include us in their tours' itineraries, and this does not cost us anything. It is free advertising for us. The other day some German visitors told us they had seen our workroom in a commercial in Germany."

In the case of wineries on both Tenerife and La Palma, the lack of younger people entering the industry is also resulting in an aging population of growers (R10). "We have our grape growers (*socios* or partner growers), and among these the majority are becoming old, over 60 years old, while the younger generations are fleeing from agriculture." In some cases, the generational issue is said to be triggered by rising costs, and also by operators' age (R9):

> "Wages are very high … it is just not worth it. There are many people abandoning their vines, and I am going to do it, too. It is just not worth it with the high labour costs. I had dreamed of owning vines; I planted

> them, worked hard, but now I am letting it go. One cannot live from it. It worked as we worked as a family, but now I am getting too old."

4.2 Tradition, Passion, and the Future

Participants' motivations and reasons for being in business included maintaining tradition, having passion for the craft, being an artisan or pursuing a hobby, and being the primary source of income. In the case of the silk museum in El Paso, La Palma Island, only a handful of employees in the museum workshop maintain the tradition. The operation's host (R1) explained,

> "Today, the only place open to the public working on this type of artisan work is our museum. In the 17th and 18th centuries this industry had flourished, but today we are the only one preserving the tradition. The preservation of this industry today is done through government subsidies, whereby this museum, the space of the museum, and the preservation of the workshop in the back are part of a plan to support this ancient tradition."

The museum's host, while reflective about the possible loss of a local tradition, is aware of the challenges ahead (R1):

> "Right now the idea is to preserve this museum, but I think there will be a moment when this industry will be gone for good. Artisan work is ill paid and therefore the only people staying in this activity are those whose families were also involved in this activity. The new generations are not following in their footsteps. The local council and local authorities are subsidizing and supporting this industry because it is important to them, and they are promoting it so it does not disappear. However, if people are not continuing this, then …"

A current and future relationship with the island's tourism that is being progressively developed might, however, represent a motivation and a boost for local artisans to keep the museum's doors open (R1):

> "We do not have many tourists at the moment. Sometimes we receive 60, sometimes 20. Right now we are in the low season. Part of the government subsidies is destined to advertise this museum. We are also listed in tourism offices as an additional attraction of La Palma Island. We are advertised in hotels using brochures."

For many years, embroidery and needlework have been part of La Palma's traditions and intrinsically connected to its culture. One embroidery artisan (R2) who operates from a stand at the local weekend market stated,

> "I have been involved in this industry all my life and I have followed in the footsteps of family relatives who were involved in this industry.

> However, at their time needlework and embroideries were not marketable, and today this is happening again. We don't advertise the activity. The town hall promotes the activity sometimes."

The artisan (R2) also said, "The main reason for being here is the passion, since the money I am making here is very little. I am retired and I concentrate on this activity. However, sales have also decreased in the current economic situation." Thus, traditional embroidery has in the past shown some resilience, continuing thanks to individual passion and enjoyment despite an apparent lack of economic benefit or market for the products.

Similarly in the wine industry, one of the participating winery operators (R6) on Tenerife explains,

> "The family winery has existed since 1600. They inhabited this area and ever since had a relationship with wine. Wine in this area was first cultivated in the 15th century. The family's great-grandchildren inherited what used to be traditional vineyards in the early 1990s. Instead of selling the land or urbanizing what they had inherited, they decided to stick to family tradition and exploit their vineyards jointly."

Tradition and commercial benefits were key motivations for operators' being engaged in the wine industry, as reflected in the comments (R7) from a respondent on La Palma: "Our winery belonged to my parents; we were a family winery.… The main reason to be in this business was to maintain a family tradition and also because we had made good business of wine."

Another La Palma winery operator (R8) describes innovation and modernization as important steps in progressing beyond purely artisan winemaking toward more professional wine production, while remaining firmly a family-based operation. Nevertheless, despite the apparent strengths that suggest positive progress and potential of grape growing in the islands, there are several indications that the industry also faces threats. One challenge is that Spain's wine sector is becoming saturated (Angulo, Gil, Gracia, & Sanchez, 2000). Further, several other issues are identified in the comments some participants made. One of these issues is the view that the islands' wine industry faces development pressures and challenges in generational transfer (R8). One wine producer said,

> "This industry competes with construction and although in some regions construction is regulated because of the protection of the landscape, there is a generational renewal due to these pressures. The children of old growers may have their own professions or are not prepared to spend money on an investment that in the end may not provide profits. They may make enquiries on when regulations may change so they can sell their land to developers. The generational renewal issue is complicated."

Indeed, the comments from 10 winery operators suggested that the number of people engaged in agricultural activities in the archipelago had decreased dramatically in recent times. One of these respondents (R11) recounts the dramatic changes occurring in terms of land availability, indicating that 10 years ago there was a plethora of vineyards and it was virtually impossible to buy land in some regions, while today growers would offer their production for free in order not to abandon their land. "Today, from policy makers' points of views we [the winegrowers] are the animal on the verge of extinction.… Therefore the current situation is critical, and it is no longer so clear to me what the future holds, as opposed to what I believed 10 years ago." Thus, despite the extraordinary efforts that local winery operators and other stakeholders, including local regulatory councils, made to improve the wine industry, many among the islands' winery operators are very apprehensive about what the future holds.

4.3 Traditional Product—Creating Viability

The main distribution channels for the products of the industries surveyed were on-site, through markets and local fairs, with some wineries extending their distribution through local hospitality and retail businesses. In order to improve their viability and supplement government subsidies, the silk museum, while at a minor scale, aims at manufacturing silk products for sale and to engage in tourism by showing visitors how ancient work methods and an ancient industry are still preserved. The silk workshop's operator (R1) said,

> "We do not produce a lot of stock to enable us to find a marketing outlet for the silk. The few artisans that work here then start creating pieces [e.g., ties, scarves, handkerchiefs, etc.] that can be sold to the public here. They also work on orders, and these are extensive. We make pieces of silk for both national and international buyers."

However, despite the museum management's enthusiasm and effort to develop strategies for the museum's self-sustainability, the prospects of providing a means for the artisans are very limited. In fact, despite a certain level of demand for handmade silk garments, current aims are mainly focused on preserving a very ancient activity. The silk workshop operator (R1) stated,

> "We are a bit of a firm, with three artisans and an employee. Sometimes we grow the [silk] worms ourselves. Evidently, no artisan is in this activity because of the money. The time one invests on this is not paid. We think we have a lot of advertising support but not many people ... in this industry. Traditional artisan works are no longer feasible, and would not, cannot compete with current market structures. For example, you can find similar silk products at a much cheaper price with industrial methods. We are making work that no one else makes today, and customers know this. Sometimes people have to wait for a year to get what they ordered. A piece of what you buy now would resemble the ones being manufactured in the 18th century."

Embroidery artisans are facing similar challenges, as study participant R2 noted,

> "First, this artisan work [embroidery, needlework] is not very well paid. People [potential customers] simply do not understand the work involved in this activity. Second, the tourists do not buy. Changing to the Euro made products here very expensive as compared to when we had pesetas. Now people [tourists] buy less because they perceive the products to be expensive. Today, for example, I did not make a single Euro. A couple was about to choose two pieces of weaving, but when the wife looked at her husband, I don't know what sort of sign he made to her, but she just left the weavings and walked away. Also, some tourists think that we are selling them products made in China and for this reason they don't buy."

Thus factors of cost both in production and finished product, global competition, and lack of understanding and appreciation for genuine local products all contribute to the difficulties of making traditional industries financially viable.

Nevertheless, in demise, there is sometimes also opportunity. An artisan cigar maker (R4) identified the, at least temporary, opportunity to tap into a niche market, benefitting from a lack of competition as yet another traditional industry fades:

> "I started this activity three years ago. I learned this profession through my husband and his family. Before, I did not know about making cigars. We buy the tobacco leaves and make the cigars from them. We don't plant tobacco, and on the island people are not planting much anymore. It is a dying industry, and we combine the local tobacco with that imported from Cuba."

Be it embroidery, wine, or a local tourism experience, changing customer expectations and/or levels of appreciation contributed to the continuous struggle for some businesses to stay afloat. As a small rural tourism operator (R5) explained,

> "We started using a house from a relative and started a rural tourism business using the spare rooms in the house. We have had this business for around 6 years. We do not have any website to advertise, but we advertise through an agency and pay commission. We are facing a low number of visitors. When we began we used to have lots of visitors, but now we have tourists who prefer more comfort and now we are debating whether we should continue with this business. The positive aspect of this business is a mixture of money, passion, meeting people.

> We also want to rent the house so that we do not leave it abandoned and constantly need to maintain [and] refurbish it."

4.4 Tapping into Potential Opportunities

While the tone in most of the interviewees' responses was negative, acknowledging future difficulties in their respective sectors, some of their responses also demonstrate resilience or intention to exploit existing opportunities. A goat cheese seller (R12), for example, said,

> "I have been in this business for 30 or more years. We own 12 goats and I do all the work myself. I make the cheeses and sell them. I have a room at home with a little sign indicating the business. We have a workshop doing ceramics as well. We have visitors but not many people come. We have an internet site and advertise in hotels."

In addition, a jam confectioner (R13) said,

> "I prepare the jams house made and started here when this market opened over 22 years ago. I originally did not want to do this job, but my husband managed to convince me to work here for the last 22 years. We wanted to sell our products ourselves and avoid going through the middlemen. We prepare our conserves [jams, marmalades] in a typical local way. We have a minifactory that our daughter runs."

Being a family operation without need for external labour appears to be an important factor to the financial viability of these small traditional businesses.

In some cases the abandonment of some rural areas can be of benefit to some microbusinesses. A cake shop owner (R14) located in the north of La Palma, for example, said, "Today, almond trees are not taken care of; trees are left without being harvested, and we try to collect the fruit for our business." Also, in the case of the owners of the ceramic workshop in Mazo (R3), generational renewal occurred at the outset of their venture. The husband said,

> "We had all these lots of land and my wife's and my own relatives were getting old and had few people to take care of them. We had an empty house and now we opened a ceramic shop. Then this coincided with the growth of tourism, we expanded the entries from the main road so that busloads of people could come and visit."

5.0 Discussion and Conclusions

Succession and financial viability, the two key concerns raised in this study, are closely linked and should not be seen separately. As indicated throughout the study and by a variety of different types of operations, competition with national and international products from large-scale producers using modern technologies cannot be won on price. Unless local operations are family run, high labour costs make it extremely difficult to remain a financially viable operation. Younger generations may no longer be prepared to carry the risk of

entering the marginal family business, particularly with strong outside competition intensified by the liberalization of markets (Ruiz, 2006, 2007). Thus the push for globalization, added to other economic, environmental, and demographic pressures, negatively affects the social fabric of many rural communities in the world. The resulting problems of depopulation and difficulties with generational renewal and succession are not unique to the Canary Islands but have also been reported in rural areas on mainland Spain and elsewhere in Europe (MacDonald et al., 2000; Pinilla, Ayuda, & Sáez, 2008).

In an effort to improve commercial opportunities from local artisan activities, the autonomous Canary government aims to professionalize handcraft artisan activities (Puyol, 2006). According to Puyol (2006), currently only 10% of handcraft artisans in the Canary Islands live exclusively from their artisan activities. In the wine industry, the introduction of designations of origin to oversee quality, coupled with grape growers' efforts and focus on quality, helps the local wine industry recover. Designations of origin also help Canary wineries gain an international reputation after a long time in the shadows of anonymity due to diseases and chronic decline (Feo, 2007; García Fernández, 1999; IWSC, 2007; Sainz, 2002). The progressive and successful development of the local wine sector might ensure its future preservation.

Vineyards have been part of the Canary Island's rural landscape at least since the 16th century (García Fernández, 1999). Nevertheless, the lack of incentives for younger generations to grow vineyards, for example, and the resulting lure to sell wine cultures preserved for centuries to developers and construction companies are issues affecting the future preservation of Canary cultures and landscapes. Moreover, increasing pressures on individuals to sell inherited land to cash in on the recent development and real estate boom may also seal the fate of some local industries; unique landscapes may be lost forever in this destructive process. This scenario was reflected in the comments of respondents who illustrated that rural areas in the Canary Islands, where for centuries cultivation of local products shaped the landscape, are changing forever due to rapid overdevelopment. In addition, the progressive loss of other traditional activities, including embroidery and needlework, is identified among other operators and artisans.

Financial assistance provided by the European Union and local government agencies in recent years has aimed to slow down the process of urbanization, rural abandonment, and loss of traditional industries and activities. However, lifestyle and demographic changes also appear to contribute to the rapid decline of traditional Canary Islands industries. The dilemma for local authorities rests in supporting the preservation of these industries and that of the rustic soil, while at the same time providing commercial opportunities and incentives for operators to stay on the land, or in the workshops, helping traditions stay alive. Nevertheless, this study indicates that preserving and encouraging passion and tradition alone may not be enough. In the case of the Canary Islands, there is a distinct need to differentiate quality local products from cheaper imports. The opportunity lies not in futile competition over price, but in a focus on uniqueness, on local tradition, and on being genuine and truly handcrafted. In addition, some adaptations to address the changes in tourist expectations over time may be required. This process might involve the provision of a broader spectrum of amenities and accommodations, including facilities that meet high comfort requirements, to cater for demand.

Several limitations are acknowledged in this study. For example, the low number of respondents, while initially considered sufficient to provide initial data on an ultraperipheral European region's issues, does not allow for making

generalizations of the findings. The fact that the winery operator group accounted for most of this study's participants (23) over the number of artisans or food confectioners (8) is another limitation of this study. This last issue not only resulted in an unbalanced mix of respondents, that is, in a dominant group of respondents representing the wine industry, but also considerably limited the potential to make comparisons among the different industries that participated in this study. Finally, the short time period in which the study was conducted does not allow for making seasonal or longitudinal comparisons.

Despite these recognized limitations, the findings of this study identify the importance of continuing to gather information on ultraperipheral European regions that, as the case of the Canary Islands illustrates, are increasingly experiencing external as well as internal pressures. The preservation of traditions and ways of life in these regions is under serious threat, and the implications for the local populations can be negative in several ways. In particular, the recent collapse of the construction boom in Spain (Ross-Thomas, 2009) has hit the Canary Islands' job market hard and demonstrates the vulnerability of some ultraperipheral regions in several respects. This vulnerability, once again, is based on the limited job market and the isolated nature of the islands, which make migration in search for jobs elsewhere a complex undertaking. The construction sector's crisis was a rude awakening to both local authorities and population about the dangers of relying on short-term, ill-fated, unsustainable strategies to promote economic development. At the same time, the lure of quick, higher salaries in nontraditional industries, which, like the construction industry, have a limited lifespan, can easily entice and draw people away from local industries, where the rewards may be less in commercial terms and the work much harder.

All these developments have negative consequences for the future preservation of rural areas in an ultraperipheral region such as the Canary Islands. Moreover, the likely abandonment and loss of generational renewal in rural areas will undoubtedly affect the social fabric in rural communities, thus leading to loss of traditions and local food culture. In turn, these events may lead to more complex consequences for the local population, including already present, serious, negative social ramifications. Hence, it is important that future studies continue to explore the challenges, opportunities, and other issues related to this and other ultraperipheral European regions. In this regard, a longitudinal focus should also be considered in order to identify and/or monitor potential changes and facilitate both government and nongovernment agencies' involvement to promote development and to assist with the preservation of local traditions and ways of life.

6.0 References

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