

Review

Community resilience in Spanish depopulated rural areas: A systematic review

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Abstract: Research on community resilience has been ongoing for decades. Several studies have been carried out on resilience in different groups and contexts. However, few address the relationship between community resilience and depopulated rural areas. This study aims to dig deeper into this, considering the concrete impact of population decline in Spain. We carried out a systematic review of the most relevant contributions. A search protocol was developed and used to consult ten databases. Different combinations of terms such as ‘community resilience’, ‘rural’, and ‘depopulation’, or related terms, were used. 22 scientific texts were analysed. We obtained a set of publications that demonstrate the heterogeneity of research methods, approaches and analytical processes applied to the study of this relationship. A mostly qualitative approach was observed, either as the main technique or complementary to documentary reviews. The results underscore the complex nature of rural depopulation and related constructs. It emphasizes the specific importance of community resilience in these territories in terms of social capital, endogenous resources, sustainability, economic dynamism, local responsibility and effective governance. The findings identify a scarce mention to social intervention professions, which should have a more important role due to their core values. In the studies reviewed, it appears as an emerging and scientifically relevant area to explore, both for investigation and intervention purposes. The strength of a multidisciplinary approach to addressing the phenomena appears in the discussion as a main potential line of research.

Keywords: community resilience; rural; depopulation; systematic review; social intervention

1. Introduction

Depopulation processes challenges the vitality of communities, the quality of life of their inhabitants and the provision of basic services in the territories (Fischer and McKee, 2017). For this reason, addressing depopulation requires comprehensive strategies that should be focused not only on population growth. To strengthen collective capacities and enhance the resilience of communities, it becomes crucial. Building up competences to adapt appropriately, efficiently and innovatively to demographic patterns and socioeconomic conditions is essential to them in order to promote their long-term sustainability, social cohesion, economic and infrastructure stability, preservation of the local culture, heritage and identity, their well-being and their disaster preparedness. In this sense, a resilient community appeals more attractively to both current and potential residents, helping to curb depopulation processes or at least reduce their impact (NIST, 2018).

While research on community resilience has been ongoing for decades, few studies address the relationship between community resilience and depopulated rural areas. To do it, we could provide a more nuanced understanding of the circumstances

and opportunities of these communities. This is needed to design and implement more effective strategies in these territories. Furthermore, there are even less studies that provide a localized contextual understanding of the realities of these geographical areas. There is a need for research that considers the specific local contexts, avoiding the generalization of the challenges and possible solutions. Accordingly, we approach the issue through a qualitative systematic review of national studies. In this sense, this paper serves to synthesize and analyze the panorama of community resilience in Spanish depopulated rural areas, while it contributes to lay the foundations for future research work on the topic. The paper highlights the need for social intervention accompanying depopulation processes.

1.1. Depopulation

Rural areas have seen a decline in their populations for years now. The widespread low birth rates, in these territories are accompanied by higher rates of aging population. Besides, in rural territories is more difficult to access educational, health, cultural, financial and recreational services. Even public services can be no longer efficient in these zones, limiting universal access to state benefits to its population (Collantes and Pinilla, 2020). These expulsion factors among others, lead the population to move. According to this, rural-to-urban migratory movements have been happening for decades, especially those of an intra-national, permanent and voluntary nature (IOM, n.d.).

Depopulation processes relate to situations and forms of socio-demographic vulnerability, especially poverty, masculinization and the ageing population. However, they are also linked to environmental vulnerabilities, such as to desertification and a greater frequency and/or severity of forest fires. In any case, depopulation is understood as a vulnerability or 'stressor' that undermines community resources and generates a loss of security for those affected (Cáceres et al., 2021; Del Valle, 2021; Rodríguez, 2016; etc.).

The Spanish case:

These depopulation processes have become an international and, above all, European concern (Bandrés and Azón, 2021). Spain is an emerging and main example. Between 2000 and 2020 the national population has grown 17.2%, but 63% of Spanish municipalities have seen their population decline. There is a generalized context of population stagnation or regression in these territories (FEMP, 2017a, 2017b), especially if they are located at high altitudes or far from large or medium-sized urban centres. According to European Union standards, 48.4% of all Spanish municipalities are at demographic risk as their population density is below 12.5 inhabitants/km² (Government of Spain, 2021). The projections from the United Nations forecast a worsening and expansion of the problem that even extends to small and medium-sized cities in the country (González et al., 2023).

Depopulation, as a slow or 'slow-motion' disaster, is a symptom of both structural and procedural problems. It is especially difficult to identify because of its gradual build-up, which may be even paused at times (Knowles, 2020). It has devastating effects, increasing the duration, intensity and impact of environmental, social and economic challenges (Sato et al., 2023). At its most extreme, it can even

lead to the disappearance of communities with a wealth of ancestral knowledge, losing a valuable resource to be put into practice (Sáez Pérez, 2019).

In response, measures have been introduced at different levels in Spain. Mainly, strategies designed as global, transversal, cooperative and collaborative, which aim to bring about social, economic and demographic transformation, while promoting resilience.

1.2. Community resilience

Community resilience lies in the transformation of adversity into personal growth, collective strengthening of social commitment and actions. Adger (2000) defines it as a collective ability to cope with disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change, while other authors include the ability to detect, respond and also prevent those adversities and recover from damage and advance through learning and adaptation (Folke, 2006; Twigg, 2007; Cutter et al., 2008). Progress has been made in the construction of a conceptual framework around this concept, although reaching a consensus about resilience has been difficult for the social sciences (Becoña, 2006) and many experts have expressed criticism of its development and evolution. These critiques mainly focus in the lack of an integrated approach to the concept, in its tendency to be conservative applied to social relations, by external agents, without considering the structural components that have a great impact in the opportunities of the communities (Berkes and Ross, 2013; Mac Kinnon and Derrickson, 2013). In this line, Wilson (2012) addresses the fact of inequalities that could arise from the globalized pathways of decision-making, causing an imbalance between communities. More recently, the authors continue to focus in the lack of attention paid to social structures that condition agency of social agents and include the fact that the effectiveness of communities to solve and cope with disturbances depends greatly on the previous existing capacities and resources (Vaneekhaute et al., 2017).

Despite the difficulties mentioned above, a certain level of unanimity has been achieved regarding its characteristics: is a dynamic process (Suarez, 2004); different factors are combined (Infante, 1997); it allows the development of a non-exceptional universal human capacity to deal with adversities (Suarez, 2004; Vanistendael, 2002).

When the term is applied within the framework of the social sciences, a certain tendency can be perceived that links the concept of resilience with others such as poverty, vulnerability, risk, education, sustainability, flexibility, connectedness and community development (Brown, 2016; Fazey et al., 2021). Its increasingly frequent and influential use in social science's empirical and theoretical studies also responds to the need to face global challenges which can only be tackled from a collective perspective. In such case, it should pay special attention to consider the structural components and the specific characteristics and background of the communities. These capacities and resources vary significantly from one place to another, having great impact on their collective resilient opportunities (Gansauer et al., 2023).

A resilient community is more than the sum of resilient people, because relationships within a system produce effects that cannot be attributed to the mere aggregation of its parts (Lewin, 1951). Based on this Gestaltian premise, as a theory, community resilience was promoted by Suarez-Ojeda (2001), following the

appearance of the theory of individual resilience. Its growing popularity in Latin America has opened up a new dimension of community resilience, and besides the experience of natural hazards, also encompasses collective exposure to inequality, economic, cultural, moral and political poverty and multiple socio-structural difficulties. These issues, together with economic dependence on a single productive activity, social and emotional isolation, and stigmatization, have been identified as the ‘anti-pillars’ of community resilience, given that they weaken the ability to respond to disasters, catastrophes and stressors (Uriarte, 2013). Economic vulnerabilities, social disadvantages, high levels of residential mobility and lack of social capital, social networks and local organizations, are also barriers to recovery. All of these are common in rural contexts (Wickes et al., 2015).

Conversely, the pillars or dimensions that encourage community resilience are: a cohesive social structure with a low level of inequality, fostering of support networks and promotion of participation; government honesty, understood to consist of both the legitimacy of political leaders and their honest, fair and impartial decision-making; cultural identity, which refers to a sense of belonging and the concept of a “we” based on the group’s cultural characteristics and those of other groups; collective self-esteem, understood as pride for the physical environment and the productivity of its people; and social humour, described as the ability to lighten the despair felt in certain situations, analyse them objectively and even laugh in certain cases. To these five pillars, we add fatalism or religious beliefs, which can hasten the recovery process; socio-demographic characteristics that generate differences in collective ways of coping; and technical, human and natural resource-related preparedness which can prevent the devastating effects of catastrophic events (Uriarte, 2010).

Therefore, the pre-existing situation usually defines a community’s capacity to react to the events. Social and economic relations, shared values, customs, interests, and pre-existing structural conditions, have significant, lasting effects on communities’ capacities for recovery, adaptation and transformation (Uriarte, 2013). Besides, more factors influence community resilience: leadership; trust; governance; education; the development of social, emotional, instrumental and informational support networks; kinship and friendship networks; a sense of community; communication, planning and organisational skills; diversity of productive and economic activities; cooperative learning; participation; and community engagement. Also, social capital is critical for community resilience (Aldrich and Meyer, 2014; Matarrita and Trejos, 2013). Social capital is understood as a cluster of factors among which studies highlight leadership, social and support networks, common values, a sense of community and collective identity, attachment to the territory and a wide-reaching network of trust and reciprocity (Cáceres et al., 2021; Hernández et al., 2022). These attributes related to community resilience are relevant not just in rural settings. However, in contexts where there is a depopulation process underway, they acquire a different meaning. A decline in social ties and the exclusion from certain social networks, institutions and decision-making spaces hinder the mobilisation of resources which contribute to economic, environmental and social sustainability, something which is especially necessary in such geographical contexts. Besides, generates a negative impact on these communities and their social capital (Lugo, 2013).

The resilient approach in these communities entails the belief that people and the

environment are inextricably linked and should be considered as a single socio-ecological system (Gallopín, 2016; cited in Moberg and Hauge, 2011). This requires us to consider rural areas as complex systems subjected to stressors and disruptive events, in a constant battle to continue functioning (Adger, 2000) and above all adapt positively to the challenges they face (Folke, 2006). Folke takes into account the ability of communities to innovate, be creative and break with previous paradigms when he talks about effective community resilience. Community resilience in rural settings should have a fundamental component of activation, action and proactive behaviour. In today’s globalised and eminently urban world, these areas are often perceived as stagnant and passive spaces. Community resilience should help to neutralize these prejudices empowering its inhabitants, allowing them to be equipped with the resources they need to be stronger (Skerrat, 2013).

2. Method

2.1. Design

A systematic review was performed (Page et al., 2021). 10 databases were consulted, focusing on those most relevant to social sciences: Social Science Premium Collection, Publicly Available Content Database, ProQuest One Business, EconLit, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, ProQuest One Literature, Scopus, Web of Science, Redalyc, and Dialnet. The ProQuest Meta search engine was used for the first six databases mentioned. The identifiers were selected considering the specificities of the Spanish context. The initial search was conducted between October 2022 and November 2022. In this first stage, 278 documents were obtained and passed on to the screening phase. **Table 1** shows the identifiers used, search dates and number of documents that passed on to the screening phase in each of the databases.

Table 1. Search string, indicators and initial results according to database.

Database	Indicators	Initial results
ProQuest (Social Sciences Premium Collection, Publicly Available Content Database, ProQuest One Business, EconLit, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, ProQuest One Literature).	noft(resilience) AND noft(rural) AND noft(depoulation) OR noft(depoulated) OR noft (“isolated areas”) OR noft (“demographic challenge”) noft (resiliencia) AND noft (rural) AND noft (despoblación) noft (resiliencia) AND noft (rural) AND noft (vaciada)	46+5+1+2 1+1 56
Scopus	title-abs-key(resilience) AND title-abs-key(rural) AND title-abs-key (depoulation) OR title-abs-key(depoulated) Title-abs-key (resiliencia) AND title-abs-key (rural) AND title-abs-key (vaciada)	37+6+3+3 1 50
Web of Science	topic (resilience) AND topic (rural) AND (depoulation)	49 49
Redalyc	resiliencia AND rural AND despoblación (disciplines: Demography, Territorial Studies, Multidisciplinary (Social Sciences), Anthropology, Sociology, History, Politics, Economics and Finance, Psychology)	79 79
Dialnet	resiliencia AND rural AND despoblación resiliencia AND rural AND despoblado/a resiliencia AND rural AND vaciada	27 10 7 44
Total		278

278 texts were screened. Among these, 96 duplicates were found and were eliminated. 182 documents went on to the abstract-reading phase (40—ProQuest, 17—Scopus, 19—Web of Science, 78—Redalyc and 28—Dialnet).

2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

From this preliminary result, the abstracts were read to exclude: a) those documents where access to the full text was not available (ProQuest 1, Web of Science 1 and Dialnet 6); b) texts that did not make direct reference to depopulation in the title and/or keywords (Redalyc 53). This occurred because the Redalyc search tool does not allow screening in these two sections and one of its journals contains the term depopulation in its name; c) texts corresponding to books of abstracts were excluded (Dialnet 5). After these exclusion criteria were applied, a total of 116 documents remained, to be studied in further stages. For these texts, the following inclusion criteria were established: a) linguistic, texts whose language was English or Spanish; b) documents whose publication is not temporarily suspended; c) research related to rural areas of Spain, either exclusively or in combination with other countries; and d) specificity, texts directly addressing community resilience in depopulated rural areas or at risk of depopulation. A total of 22 texts were obtained, which constitute those definitively included in the review. In the full-text reading phase, the inclusion criteria were comprehensively taken into account. For later identification, the texts were numbered 1–22 according to the order in which they appeared in the initial search: ProQuest, Scopus, Web of Science, Redalyc and Dialnet.

2.3. Data analysis process

This phase started with the design of an extraction form. It included all the fields for the key information planned to extract: title, authors, year of publication. Besides, the study characteristics were incorporated: geographical scope (two papers address the case of Spain at the same time as other countries, four papers have a national scope, six texts address the regional level and ten texts are local in nature); typology; data source; specific topic of the paper; conceptualization of resilience; if social work, social intervention or mutual help appear in the text.

The data sheet was piloted with five studies and the disciplines from which the papers were done were also included. The missing data of the studies was reported. Relevant information about the final corpus is summarised in **Table 2**. The publications are presented alphabetically based on their authors.

Table 2. Publications included in the review.

ID	Authors	Date	Title of publication	Research and/or intervention
11	Adam-Hernández A and Harestein U (2019).	2019	A proposed framework for rural resilience—How can peripheral village communities in Europe shape change?	Interdisciplinary conceptual review (psychology, social ecology and community development) + empirical study proposal (mixed methods: participant observation, survey, guided interviews, focus group and discussion)
01	Cáceres-Feria R et al. (2021).	2021	Depopulation, community-based tourism, and community resilience in southwest Spain	Case study with exploratory approach and ethnographic methodology. Data collection: secondary sources and in-depth, informal contrast and observation interviews. Analysis: grounded theory + content analysis

Table 2. (Continued).

ID	Authors	Date	Title of publication	Research and/or intervention
03	Carchano M et al. (2021).	2021	The social economy as a factor of economic development and resilience of population in Rural Areas. A study of mediating effects in Castilla-La Mancha (Spain)	Empirical study. Two econometric studies. Structural equations model, following the partial least squares method. Analysis: mediation and moderation + simulations
08	Cortés-Ruíz M and Ibar-Alonso R (2021).	2021	Vulnerability and resilience in Empty Spain	Empirical study. $N = 251,224$. Surveys aimed at understanding seven aspects of the individual and family unit (economic, labour-related, family-related, environmental, social, health-related, personal) + two-stage cluster with Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) analysis
05	Czubala-Ostapiuk MR et al. (2022).	2022	Rural depopulation in Spain: Next Generation EU as a stimulus to accelerate the transformation	Empirical study. Deductive method. Mixed design. Bibliographic analysis + analysis of INE data, digitization index (DiGiX) and appraisal of the Government of Spain's Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan
06	De la Cruz Santos-Olmo, MAS and Cañizares-Ruiz, MC (2022).	2022	Rural depopulation and revaluation of heritage resources. Preliminary analysis in Campo de Montiel (Castilla-La Mancha, Spain)	Demographic and geographic perspective (population change and density + inventories, catalogues and actions). Fieldwork (consultation, geolocation, photo interpretation, open interviews with local agents and inhabitants)
20	Del Valle-Ramos C (2021).	2021	From the city to the mountains: environmental value, family relationships and work as factors of attraction for the neo-rural	Qualitative. 20 interviews on socio-demographic profile and family/household structure + residential history and reasons for displacement + assessment of and degree of satisfaction with new environment
16	Delgado-Notivoli A and Ramírez-García S (2020).	2020	Awareness of the problematisation of depopulation in the Spanish network of biosphere reserves	Constructivist methodology + participatory design of action proposals. Analysis of the socio-economic report of 49 Biosphere Reserves (from the Spanish Committee of the Man and Biosphere Programme) + reports from managers + guidelines of the Action Plan + interviews with managers of the biosphere reserves
14	Elizalde-San Miguel B (2017).	2017	Informal care in Rural Areas. New forms, new actors	Mixed design: quantitative (census and registry data) + qualitative (sociological discourse analysis of 20 in-depth interviews with older adults and key agents)
04	Gómez-Ullate M et al. (2020).	2020	Demographic challenges in Rural Europe and cases of resilience based on cultural heritage management. A comparative analysis in Mediterranean countries Inner Regions	International, interdisciplinary comparative case study research (Portugal/Spain/France/Greece). Statistical + qualitative analysis (bibliographic review + semi-structured interviews with key agents + surveys of inhabitants + participant observation)
09	Gracia-Bernal A et al. (2021).	2021	Those who did not entirely emigrate: Second rural residence and linked population. A well-kept secret until COVID-19	Sociological approach. Official and unofficial secondary sources as empirical material. Bibliographic, legislative and legal review and publications of regional institutions
02	Hernández-Ramírez M et al. (2022).	2022	Housing tactics: Searching for community resilience in depopulated rural contexts (Huertas, South West Spain)	Ethnographic case study. Data collection: Bibliographic and documentary information, 90 in-depth interviews with key agents and representatives of different sectors, development of housing census, interviews and informal contrast and observation conversations Analysis: triangulation, grounded theory + content analysis
17	Manzano-Sánchez JJ (2019).	2019	AlmaNatura, resilient rural reactivation	Case study. Descriptive, about the evolution of an example of a rural resilience project.
10	Martínez-Arroyo F et al. (2022).	2022	Rural development programmes: Lessons learnt, and knowledge advancement. A case study in Castilla-La Mancha (Spain)	Empirical study. Ordered probit cross-sectional analysis of 2013 LEADER projects submitted between 2014 and 2020. Dependent variable: Achievement index. Independent variables: Project characteristics, production unit profile and territorial characteristics.

Table 2. (Continued).

ID	Authors	Date	Title of publication	Research and/or intervention
12	Membrado-Tena JC and Hermosilla-Pla J (2019).	2019	The closure of the Cofrentes nuclear power plant in Valencia: threat or opportunity for the region?	Socio-economic territorial diagnosis. Descriptive and comparative studies. Quantitative techniques (census and register of inhabitants) + qualitative techniques (12 semi-structured interviews with key local agents).
21	Montes-Pérez C (2020).	2020	Territorial cohesion and sustainability in the Bierzo Valleys	Ethnographic case study. Conclusions following five-year study. Emphasis on conceptualisation of liquid rurality and abandonment of urban-rural dichotomy against depopulation.
15	Pineda-Iglesias S (2019).	2019	Almócita, ecomuseum and agroecology to beat depopulation	Case study. Explanation of the evolution of institutional and community practices to combat depopulation.
19	Ramos-Truchero G (2020).	2020	Food supply dynamics in Spanish rural areas: Managing daily food needs when shops are missing	Combination of methodologies: Review of secondary sources (reports, statistics and technical reports) + 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews in households. Interview analysis: specialized software.
13	Rodríguez-Doménech M and de los Á (2016).	2016	Demographic vulnerability in the European NUTS-2 regions. The case of Castilla-La Mancha	Theoretical review + comparative analysis of demographic vulnerability indices. Data collection: census, register of inhabitants, statistical data. Analysis: Geographic Information System.
07	Sansilvestri R et al. (2022).	2022	Can neo-rural initiatives bolster community resilience in depopulated coupled human and natural system? Insights from stakeholder perceptions in Central Spain	Exploratory study. Constructivist inductive model. Data collection: Secondary sources (technical reports and information available on websites) + 30 semi-structured interviews with sociodemographic data, Likert scale of perception and reasoned explanation. Analysis: Cross-sectional reading of answers.
18	Santofimia-Albiñana S (2017).	2017	The women of Tharsis today. Women as agents of rural development former mining towns: social intervention in Tharsis	Ethnographic exploration: applied anthropology (fieldwork + participant observation). Bibliographic information and previous data. Ethno-development intervention project.
22	Somoza-Medina M and Somoza-Medina X (2020).	2020	Territorial resilience and sustainability in Empty Spain	Collection of statistical data.

3. Results

The results present the various axes identified during the data analysis process, incorporating the main themes and trends discovered during the systematic review. Some specific aspects of the papers, along with common and differentiating features between the studies reviewed are also incorporated in this section.

Framework and methodological design:

The 22 manuscripts analysed have all been published recently, with dates ranging from 2016 (13) to 2022 (02, 05, 06, 07, 10). This suggests a current interest in the topic, even when depopulation processes in the Spanish context have been happening for decades. It may be for this reason, the conceptualization of related constructs and the methods and instruments used varied substantially among the studies analysed. This shows little consensus in the definitions and theoretical frameworks or forms of measurement adopted, as shown above. This lack of common lines is also identified in the main topics addressed in the papers reviewed. The literature relates to tourism (1, 4, 22), community development (11, 12, 15, 17, 18), heritage (4, 6), housing (2, 9), social-economy (3), environment (16) neo-ruralism (7, 20) and the impact of European funds and actions in these territories (5, 10) and its community resilience. Besides, there are multiple papers that address the relationship of depopulation with

vulnerabilities in general or specifically (8, 13, 14, 19). This shows a wide-range of topics that are currently being associated to community resilience in these geographical areas. May be the reason that different attempts to analyze, identify and strengthen community resilience in these territories are happening at the present.

Theoretical framework—the approaches to community resilience address the phenomena' concrete features by including the capacity to recover and sustain well-being in the case of an abrupt event but through the adaptation to changes that could happen gradually. So that, conceptualizations of community resilience that engage with the occurrence of 'slow disasters', with cumulative effects, are selected in the papers. This progressive deterioration of the community resources that leaves to extreme vulnerability of communities appears as an essential point. Besides, the intentionality to modify the causes of the phenomena is observed, not only as adaptive response. This suggests a proactive and deliberate effort to identify and address the underlying factors of the issue. This converges with a transformative resilience approach in the authors, nor maybe in the projects implemented and analyzed in the systematic review. This approach implies fundamental transformation in the systems, enhancing its capacity to deal with future disruptive events. It is seen as crucial in a globalized and ever-changing context. In this same line, the papers show an intentioned effort to relate the concept of community resilience with sustainability while admitting its own theoretical-practical space. Some of them mention the confusion existent between these terms.

Main methodological aspects—the investigations displayed a tendency to use mixed methods, involving quantitative and qualitative analysis. They tended to be exploratory studies, based on either inductive or deductive approaches: mainly ethnographic or sociological.

Regarding data collection, secondary sources stand out among the main tools used: censuses, registers of inhabitants, statistics, technical reports and socio-economic reports. Interviews were also frequent; above all semi-structured and in-depth interviews. Questionnaires were also used on the general population, usually complemented by interviews with key agents. In a smaller proportion of cases, techniques such as bibliographic reviews and direct and/or participant observation were used, either alone or as part of a larger study. Given that there are so many diverse approaches to designing studies, the corresponding methods of data analysis are equally wide-ranging. Some studies use geographic information systems; others did so using perspectives related to the historical, socio-economic or demographic evolution of the territories.

Community resilience assessment:

The demographic parameters of depopulation are, of course, mentioned in the studies: mainly quantitative indicators about demographic patterns or about the infrastructure in the territories. However, the conception of community resilience relates to the awareness of the community members of the problems and risks that they address too. For this reason, in addition to the quantitative indicators, the perception of the members that a critical situation has been reached is also analyzed as key activation factor of community resilience.

Even the difficulties to empirically operationalize the concept of community resilience is included in many studies, the authors carry out evaluations of community

resilience involving the following factors or dimensions: economic stability, associated to robustness and diversification of the local economy; quantity and quality of infrastructure services in the community; equal access to resources; well-connected social networks and social capital; provision and access to relevant and quality information; ability to work together and flexibly; proactive and competent leadership; robust, responsive and adaptable governance; common values of collective wellbeing; individual and collective involvement of community members.

As the appropriate context for community resilience is the local one, where there is proximity to the inhabitants, for this reason, full and efficient participation of residents in the initiatives developed in the municipalities is seen as crucial to measure. The texts underscore the fact that local communities are at the forefront of facing challenges, be they natural disasters, economic declines or public health crises. Only with a shared responsibility that necessitates the active participation of residents the initiatives in this level can be efficient.

Finally, those studies that intended to measure the project achievement of, mainly European, projects put into practice in these areas, focused in the number of jobs created and consolidated. These studies have found that young people and women are specially benefited from these projects, however there is a lack of diversification in the jobs and that the main impact of the projects happened in large municipalities. This can appear as a new factor that widens the gap among them and the small depopulated localities.

Complexity—the texts emphasise the difficulty involved in analysing rural environments as socio-ecological systems, focusing on the heterogeneity and constant mutation of these areas. They argue that classifying them according to their capacity to face adversity could have a constricting effect on such spaces' community responses (01, 06, 07, 11, 21). So that, Montes (2020) (21) highlights the idea of flow, liquidity and connectivity concerning rurality.

The complexity of the phenomenon of depopulation itself is also addressed, especially given its process-based, multidimensional character (03, 04, 05, 08, 11, 19, 20, 22), which presents difficulties for the detection, measurement and analysis of community resilience.

Endogenous resources- its importance was observed in two different senses in the texts analysed. On the one hand, endogenous resources are understood as those that must be developed to achieve higher levels of community resilience, put it into practice effectively and maintain it over time (02, 03, 06, 10, 11, 15, 17). The publications mention the appropriateness of the actions that this allows, the community participation that it requires and the endogenous decision-making that it feeds (10). On the other hand, endogenous resources complement the analysis of pre-existing scenarios. The texts highlighted that resilient rural communities have always existed, and been capable of diversifying, creating, supporting themselves and extending links to non-residents (04, 19).

Exogenous resources—the studies of Hernandez et al. (2022) (02), Membrado and Hermosilla (2019) (12) and Rodriguez-Domenech (2016) (13) state that this relationship must also aim for the mobilisation of exogenous resources, to use them for the communities' own benefit in crises. In this vein, Somoza and Somoza (2020) (22) stress the importance of directing interventions not only towards residents but

also towards those who have migrated and still maintain links.

Economic dynamism—the publications focus mostly on its promotion. This is based on entrepreneurship which sustainably uses natural resources and utilises the social economy and community-based tourism focused on local heritage (01, 02, 03, 04, 06, 09, 17). The activation of local tourism resources is mentioned frequently as a way to energise and mobilise local society. As shrinking population may lead to economic decline, job losses, financial instability, lack of resources for maintaining and upgrading infrastructure, tourism is seen as a strategy to counter its consequences. Community-based tourism is perceived as a tool for mobilisation and energization, in both the material and emotional sense. Community involvement should be, therefore, a core value of the economic practices as it appears as valuable instrument for promoting social relations and the enhancement of the collective well-being, building community resilience (Cáceres et al., 2021). The economic aspects of subsistence must be complemented by others, such as investment in education, health, basic infrastructure and digitisation, as well as a strengthening of regional identity, links with the region and shared culture. There are even calls for a paradigm shift, away from one that associates remaining in the village or town with failure (16).

Vulnerability—the establishment or perpetuation of vulnerability in these rural communities involves policymakers, meaning that it transcends the personal dimension. As the importance of the making-decision bodies is important in any context, due to the proximity with citizenship, in these cases it acquires a special meaning. The participation of communities appears as a core in the texts analyzed. In this vein, Sansilvestri et al. (2022) (07) draw attention to a relationship between vulnerability and arbitrary, non-participatory actions or decision-making by political authorities. It is striking how few publications mention this, given that social policies are a fundamental part of community development processes aimed at reducing or eliminating vulnerabilities.

Challenges and trends:

Differentiating community resilience from other related constructs such as sustainability can be difficult (01, 02, 11, 13, 18), due to its continuous development, malleability and flexibility. In response to these difficulties, an approach based on complex thinking or complexity paradigm was suggested in the papers. This approach is capable of articulating varied or a priori-distant knowledge to understand equally complex realities (Morin, 1997) (18). The complexity paradigm emphasizes the interconnected and dynamic nature of systems. This can be a strategy to overcome the difficulties mentioned.

Promoting tourism as a strategy to counter depopulation and enhance community resilience in rural areas is a multifaceted approach that can bring economic, social and cultural benefits. However, for this, it should be community-based tourism with the engagement of the local residents in the industry, ensuring that the economic benefits are distributed more equitably among the members of the communities. Tourism is seen as a revitalizing tool that can support the infrastructure and service improvement too, if managed properly and carefully so it does not mean over-commercialization, environmental degradation and cultural loss.

Other trend detected relates to housing in depopulated rural areas. This involves a multifaceted approach that mainly focus in housing stock, renovation, rehabilitation,

innovation and initiatives that engage the community in land-use planning. A holistic and community-driven approach is key to creating housing solutions that contribute to the revitalization of rural communities. This relates to other topic that appears repeatedly in the studies analyzed: the neo-rural inhabitants, who relocate from other regions to rural depopulated areas. This phenomenon is seen as an opportunity to the revitalization of these zones in various ways: increasing local population, having positive effects on the local economy, services and community dynamics; bringing diverse skills and experiences that can contribute to economic diversification and entrepreneurship; fostering a more dynamic and diverse environment; contributing to preserve local heritage and traditions while including new perspectives; they may actively engage with local community and participate in local events and initiatives, fostering social cohesion and a sense of belonging; and promoting agro ecological and green-energy practices, contributing to resilience of the area. For neo-ruralism to contribute to the revitalization of these zones, attention should be paid to avoid discriminatory practices and balance between the new residents and those that have been there since long time. The arrival of neo-rurals can bring positive changes, but for this it should be carefully planned and with the involvement of the community.

In any case, participation appears as an essential aspect of social capital in depopulated rural areas. The texts analyzed argue that participation can fuel a type of rural activation that becomes indispensable in these spaces, as a collective, flexi-dimensional and creative response (02, 04, 09, 12, 17, 21). It can even lead to a “rethinking of the people”, as proposed by Manzano (2019) (17).

The results show a great challenge related to the demographic unsustainability of the traditional care model in the rural depopulated areas. It makes a clear action niche for those disciplines and professions working with inhabitants in these spaces, as social workers and policy makers. New formulas to care for the elderly people and the incorporation of new actors to care activities should be tackled in the next future.

The studies comment on the importance of certain structural reforms (05, 06, 10, 13). The European Union and its funds often form part of such solutions. However, the role of governance is also stressed, especially of the municipal institutions, public policies and social and political entities. As mentioned, local councils have a critical role. A strong capacity to build and promote resilience is attributed to the relationships that occur within its framework (11). As a final aspect to highlight, the scarce mention and treatment of social disciplines and professions is striking. Relatively few texts address the role of social intervention, whether in terms of social policies, social services or social work, in the fight against depopulation (03, 12, 13, 14, 18). Indeed, few of these texts reflect on this issue only briefly. Social policies can be designed to address the root causes of depopulation, providing incentives to stay in rural areas and focusing in comprehensive community development: offering quality services, such as educational, healthcare, social services, employment and infrastructure. Access to these resources and services is critical for retaining resident and to attract new ones. The role of social professions is integral in countering depopulation. Social policies, services and social work can contribute to building resilient communities by addressing the economic, cultural and social challenges faced by rural areas.

4. Discussion

The objective of this research was to synthesise and analyze the relationship between community resilience and rural depopulation processes in the Spanish context, laying the foundations for future research in the matter. The results indicate that multiple approaches, methodologies and techniques are used. This finding is in line with the study of the construct in other geographical contexts and/or human collectives, especially when the focus moves away from community resilience in disasters triggered by natural hazards situations and extreme events (Marzana et al., 2013). According to this, subsequent studies should aim to unify conceptual criteria, clarifying, whenever possible, the relationship of community resilience with slow disasters or adverse situations sustained over time, such as depopulation. Similarly, we should try to do the same with the methodologies used for its study. The particular features of these slow disasters should be considered when evaluating community resilience. Stressors that have been eroding community resources and capacities for years must be taken into account when analysing the needs of these communities. Above all, these stressors must be identified and evaluated when designing, planning and carrying out interventions.

The publications analysed point to the need to extend the study of community resilience in depopulated areas from within other fields. Somoza and Somoza (2020) draw attention to the study of the phenomenon to date from geography, history, anthropology and sociology. There is, therefore, an opportunity to do so from within and for the disciplines of social intervention; something that, as mentioned above, rarely occurs according to the review we carried out. This multidisciplinary research of social intervention professions base may represent a novel source with which to interpret the phenomena and provide new perspectives. At the same time, they usually contain a fundamental component of action and intervention, which should also be harnessed. The practical, empowering and transformative approach of social intervention professions fits well with the premises of community resilience. For example, that community resilience cannot remain a theoretical construct but must instead become concrete practices (Carretero, 2018; Ruiz and Ramos, 2019).

The research and interventions addressed in the publications focus mostly on the promotion of economic dynamism as a response to population decline. This is based on entrepreneurship which sustainably uses natural resources and utilises the social economy and community-based tourism focused on local heritage (Caceres et al., 2021; Carchano et al., 2021; De la Cruz et al., 2022; etc.). Community-based tourism emerges as a tool for mobilisation and energization, in both the material and emotional sense. More than just an economic resource, community-based tourism represents a socio-ecological survival strategy. However, for community resilience to be strengthened, increasing the capacity for collective action and communal agency is essential (Caceres et al., 2021; Hernandez et al., 2022). Likewise, community participation must be boosted through these types of economic-social initiatives and local-based tourism (Carchano et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2022; Membrado and Hermosilla, 2019; etc.). Carchano et al. (2021) suggest that actions based on community participation lead to better results, compared to those based on politicized decisions. Consequently, the actions of public administrations must involve

showcasing and using existing resources (Czubala et al., 2022; De la Cruz et al., 2022) and taking on a management role that involves residents (Sansilvestri et al., 2022; Adam and Harestein, 2019; Montes, 2020), in a way that is consistent and maintained over time (Caceres et al., 2021; Manzano, 2019). This importance of continued collaboration with the local population encourages various professions to assume an important role. Social intervention professionals in general and social workers in particular face a challenge when it comes to these processes. They have been closely observing the needs of the inhabitants of these zones for decades, as well as their relationship dynamics and the social changes that have occurred. The strengths of these professions can make a significant difference when they are properly valued and utilised.

Community resilience is important to encompass the endogenous and exogenous resources and social capital in depopulated areas. This coincides with the perspective of social action disciplines, especially of community social work. Using these resources can help improve the quality of life and well-being of the population and help inhabitants to remain in these zones. The missions of community development, justice and protection of citizens are the essence of social intervention professions. They fit well with rural activation from a collective perspective and one which also addresses the social dimensions.

Far from denying that the activation of resources based on tourism, forests or the local environment can benefit, this study aims to include social intervention professions as promoters of socio-collective resources. In this line, educational, health, digitalization and recreational services should be strengthened, as well as social services themselves. The next step would be to seek to reinforce the sense of community, attachment to the territory and collective strengths.

At this point, social policies in particular and public policies in general, come into play. These should aim for the activation of these areas but with a focus on specialization and community autonomy. They should pay attention both to the peculiarities of the rural environment and, most importantly, the specific situation of each depopulated area or area at risk of depopulation. Accordingly, an effort should be made to strengthen the connection between policies and the reality of these geo-social areas, to correct any existing gaps (Gonzalez and Fernandez, 2022). These policies should be flexible, comprehensive, participatory and efficient, and avoid limiting the creative capacities of individuals and communities. Therefore, there is a challenge for social intervention professions in the study, design, planning, implementation and evaluation of actions and social policies in these zones.

The studies as a whole point to the importance of a coordinated effort, involving public-private partnerships, interdisciplinarity and cooperation between the key agents in each territory (Manzano, 2019; Santofimia, 2017; Montes, 2020). This coordinated effort should help to synchronise public policies with private initiatives and the work of the third sector (Gonzalez and Fernandez, 2022).

The papers analysed also demonstrate the need for structural reforms that facilitate the elimination of the barriers that undermine the pillars of community resilience, and those that reduce the impact of community resilience's so-called anti-pillars (Matarrita and Trejos, 2013). The interventions carried out in these areas, in addition to being creative, innovative, coordinated and participatory, must be

comprehensive and diverse (Montes, 2020) and consider the decision-making and organisational capacities of rural communities. These communities are political entities and as such should be considered (Kumpulainen et al., 2021). Making certain modifications to the way we understand them is crucial and involves leaving behind the urban-rural dichotomy and understanding rural communities as centres themselves. Urban power has gained the ability to establish in rural areas some services and infrastructure, sometimes those which are undesirable in urban centres. Moving towards public policies and social interventions that are valid for these spaces will only be possible if such actions are conceived with them in mind, and from their perspective. Empowering citizens is the only way to ensure that their quality of life improves and that they can advocate for their demands, interests and rights. In the face of approaches that identify only, or mainly, deficits, this empowerment must be done from the perspective of communities' strengths, to achieve greater success in the social interventions carried out (Palma and Pacheco, 2017).

Finally, it should be noted that a large proportion of the publications analysed used interviews as a data collection technique. We argue that future studies could incorporate focus groups to more deeply examine community resilience in depopulated areas. This technique promotes interaction between participants and allows them to focus on the diversity of their ideas, knowledge, attitudes, values and experiences, making it especially interesting for this scope of study (Hamui and Varela, 2013). Participatory action research might also be an interesting framework to apply in the study of community resilience in depopulated areas, given that the knowledge generated by the communities themselves is essential to understanding the context and promoting the necessary changes (Colmenares, 2012).

5. Conclusions

This review allowed us to identify the main components of the relationship between community resilience and depopulated zones, or those at risk of depopulation, in the Spanish context.

The literature analysed shows a relationship which associates these geographical areas with difficulties, needs and deficits more often than it does with strengths. It also shows that complexity surrounds the phenomenon, understandably so given that complexity is a common characteristic of social systems, community resilience, depopulation and situations of vulnerability. For those who work in these contexts, including social intervention professionals, requires specialization and the development of concrete resources and capacities.

The review flags up certain divergences in the terminology that need to be made clearer to advance the study of community resilience in these spaces. However, it does find common ground on which to build analytical and future scenarios. This systematic analysis also reveals the existence of a niche study area for disciplines other than those that already investigate this phenomenon. In this way, it draws attention to the involvement and commitment of social intervention professions.

Community resilience, in a transformative conception, protects people against adversity and is a preventive resource against situations of vulnerability, risk and exclusion. Therefore, a better understanding of the concept and its current

development, particularly in depopulated rural contexts, will promote the strengthening and well-being of affected communities and guide both professional practices and public policies related to their development. Especially in the social field.

Limitations of the present study

These relate mainly to the conceptual difficulty mentioned above. Besides, different results might have been obtained using other related terms or if papers in other languages or journals with less impact have been included in the review. Even so, we consider that this study incorporates knowledge that is both sufficient and valid enough to clarify the relationship between community resilience and depopulated areas. For future investigations, we suggest that other evaluators be incorporated into the review process.

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