Revista CENTRA
de Ciencias Sociales
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Summary

Information on
CENTRA's scientific publications
in social sciences

The **Andalusian Studies Center Public Foundation** –CENTRA–, attached to the Consejería de la Presidencia, Interior, Diálogo Social y Simplificación Administrativa of the Junta de Andalucía, is a scientific and cultural institution that already has a history of more than twenty years, and which has as its foundational objectives the promotion of scientific research and the generation of knowledge about the social, economic and cultural reality of Andalusia.

In accordance with these purposes and its nature, **CENTRA** has created ex novo in 2021 a line of scientific publications in the field of social sciences, in accordance with the universalist canons of scientific communication, made up of three book collections (Actualidad, Biblioteca de Investigación y Enfoques) and the CENTRA Journal of Social Sciences.

The **ACTUALIDAD** collection addresses issues of relevance and interest in the contemporary Andalusian social and political reality linked to the broader context of Spanish society, the European Union and, in short, global dynamics. It is characterized by a determined orientation to present empirical evidence of the phenomena considered, linking the data provided to its theoretical and explanatory analysis.

Even though it is a collection linked to the scientific community and research in the social sciences, it is also conceived under the broadest idea of dissemination for an audience that is not an expert in the topics covered. The collection, which has been published without interruption since 2005, is now structured according to a selection process for original manuscripts in accordance with universalist criteria of scientific quality and anonymous evaluation by academic peers external to CENTRA. It is available in digital format and is accessible by free download from the website of the Center for Andalusian Studies.

The newly created **BIBLIOTECA DE INVESTIGACIÓN** collection is made up of monographic research papers from different areas of knowledge in the social sciences. It therefore has the objective of publishing the results of exhaustive investigations in accordance with the standardized criteria of communication. In this way, this collection also allows those doctoral theses in the field of social sciences that meet these criteria to be published in it and that they are presented in a format compatible with editorial standards and the established length.

The **ENFOQUES** collection, also created ex novo, is aimed at bringing together under the same volume the academic results of seminars, scientific conferences, etc., that are the consequence of some academic initiative for research or debate whose result implies a collective work directed by an editor. or editors. This group nature does not imply any reduction in the commitment to the quality and scientific nature of the collection, since the generation and validation of scientific knowledge is a joint and community process that, as the frontiers of the social sciences have advanced, is becoming more and more necessary. However, this collective nature of the works published here does require scrupulous work by the editor or editors who coordinate the initiative, supervise the work of the different contributions, evaluate their substantive results, and integrate them into the unitary whole that the publication implies. final published manuscript.

Finally, and likewise newly created, the CENTRA Journal of Social Sciences is a semi-annual scientific publication for all areas of this field of scientific knowledge that is published in Spanish and English in electronic format, freely accessible and downloadable, and in Spanish in paper support. The journal has a miscellaneous nature for the social sciences as a whole that does not exclude the possibility of publishing debate sections and specific numbers of a monographic nature that, in any case, will be governed by the same canons of universalism and anonymous evaluation of scientific communication. than the rest of the texts presented. The journal is open to unpublished texts, written with the utmost scientific rigor, coming from the broad scientific community, both nationally and internationally.

In order to provide content to all this new initiative of scientific publications, and scrupulously guarantee the principles of scientific communication, there is an interdisciplinary Editorial Board made up of prestigious professors from universities and national and international research organizations.

ARTICLES
ARTÍCULOS

ARTICLES/ARTÍCULOS

The Priests of the Sea in the Late Francoist Period and the Political Transition: Their Participation in the Conflicts in the Fishing Sector on the Coast of Huelva

Los curas del mar en el tardofranquismo y la transición política: su participación en los conflictos del sector pesquero en la costa de Huelva

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of a group of priests affiliated with the Apostleship of the Sea in Huelva during the late Francoist era and the transition period, focusing on their involvement in the struggle for democracy and their impact on the political and trade union awareness of maritime workers along the coast of Huelva. Utilising a combination of ethnographic and historiographical methodologies, including interviews, life histories, and archival research, we explore how these priests both witnessed and actively participated in the trade union and democratic movements within one of Spain's most impoverished regions. Their advocacy for improved living conditions and their defence of the class interests of sailors and fishermen exemplified their commitment to living out the Gospel message within a divided Church, while also challenging the political and union structures of the Francoist regime.

KEYWORDS: Apostleship of the Sea; Stella Maris; Huelva; late Francoist period; the political transition.

The Spanish (original) version can be read at https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.67

RESUMEN

Este artículo se aproxima al papel desempeñado por un grupo de curas vinculados al Apostolado del Mar de Huelva en el proceso de cambio político durante el tardofranquismo y la transición, sus acciones de lucha por la democracia y su influencia en la concienciación política y sindical de los trabajadores del mar en la costa onubense. Hilvanando métodos y técnicas etnográficas e historiográficas como las entrevistas, la historia de vida y la labor de documentación archivística, analizamos cómo un grupo de sacerdotes fueron testigos y protagonistas de la lucha sindical y por la democracia en una de las zonas más empobrecidas del Estado español. Su lucha por las condiciones de vida digna y la defensa de los intereses de clase de marineros y pescadores fue su manera de vivir el mensaje evangélico en el seno de una Iglesia dividida y su forma de enfrentar las estructuras políticas y sindicales del régimen franquista.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Apostolado del Mar; Stella Maris; Huelva; tardofranquismo; transición política.

1. Introduction

In 1953, the current diocese of Huelva attained autonomy from the archdiocese of Seville, despite the opposition of Cardinal Pedro Segura, a prelate representing the integrist faction of the Spanish episcopate, which dated back to 1937 (Hurtado, 2006, pp. 38–43). Pedro Cantero Cuadrado assumed the role of its first bishop through a papal bull on 22 October 1953, officially taking office on 14 March 1954 (Carrasco, 2002; Vergara, 2004). Like Segura, Cantero aligned himself with the reactionary and traditionalist sector of the Spanish clergy (Mancha, 2020, p. 610) and exerted significant influence in the political arena during the dictatorship (Casanova, 2005; Casanova and Gil, 2009, p. 249). From 1954 to 1964, Cantero spearheaded the administrative and infrastructural development of the diocese of Huelva. Confronted with a shortage of priests willing to join the new diocese, he contacted other Spanish dioceses to request priests capable of fulfilling pastoral and parish responsibilities, as well as serving as educators at the seminary. Among those who responded was Ignacio Palacios Esteban, whose involvement with the Apostleship of the Sea and Stella Maris significantly impacted the Catholic Church's engagement in Huelva's fishing industry and shaped political awareness among seafaring individuals.

The Apostleship of the Sea is an international ecclesiastical organisation, catered to sailors, particularly merchant mariners docking at major global ports, who were able to access hospitality at Stella Maris centres affiliated with the organisation (Palacios, 2009). This initiative, initially pioneered by Anglicans and Protestants in the mid-19th century, was later adopted by the Catholic Church, establishing the first Stella Maris centre in 1921 at the port of Glasgow. In Spain, Stella Maris emerged in Barcelona in 1927, followed swiftly by Bilbao. Huelva's centre, initiated by Cantero Cuadrado on 22 August 1954, was inaugurated by Navy Minister Pedro Nieto Antúnez on 14 January 1962. Occupying the former Seamen's Institute premises, handed over by the Spanish Riotinto Mining Company, the centre featured amenities such as a chapel, guest accommodation for relatives, a cafeteria, recreational and conference facilities, a library, a television room, a bazaar and maritime social welfare services. Furthermore,

the project included the establishment of a nautical-fishing vocational training school under ecclesiastical auspices, provision of housing for fishermen and the creation of sports facilities (ABC, 14/1/1962, p. 27). The objective was to establish a seafarer's residence without differentiating between the merchant navy and the fishing fleet.

This article examines the role played by the priests of the Apostleship of the Sea in Huelva in the struggle for democracy and the political and trade union consciousness of sailors and fishermen between 1962 and 1983. In connection with Torres' research (2017), this article initiates a broader line of investigation into worker priests in Andalusian dioceses during the late Francoist period and the political transition. Following the methodological principles of ethnohistory, we combine methods and research techniques typical of social anthropology and contemporary history. The central focus of the analysis is a key informant, Ignacio Palacios, whose life story has been constructed from various interviews and testimonies given between 2015 and 2016. This was supplemented by the discourse emerging from seven ethnographic interviews with other priests and collaborators who, like Palacios, were prominent figures in the political changes along the coast of Huelva during late Francoism and the transition. Additionally, the work of archival, press and bibliographic documentation, particularly from the magazine *El Camarón*, has also been crucial for the historical analysis of the subject under investigation.

2. The dynamic priest of the Apostleship of the Sea and his team in Huelva

Ignacio Palacios was born in Burgos on 1 April 1938. He studied at the Piarist school in Santander and, at the age of eleven, entered the Jesuit minor seminary in Comillas (Cantabria), where he focused on Humanities. He pursued degrees in philosophy and theology at Comillas Pontifical University, later earning a degree in philosophy and letters from the University of Seville. At the age of nineteen, he discovered his fundamental concern: the challenges faced by seafarers (Palacios, 2013). Palacios, a member of the diocese of Santander, responded to the call for priests made by Cantero Cuadrado through the national leadership of the Apostleship of the Sea, becoming part of the diocese of Huelva with the aim of serving seafaring communities.

In 1962, upon his ordination to the priesthood, he relocated to Huelva as a professor of ecclesiology at the major seminary and assumed the role of diocesan delegate of the Apostleship of the Sea. He actively participated in national and international meetings of this institution, engaging in discussions on experiences at other ports and establishing collaborations with the chaplains of the fishing port of Concarneau (Brittany) and the merchant port of Birkenhead (Liverpool). Similarly to his colleagues, he also served as chaplain during different periods, encountering moments of great hardship, such as the retrieval of the deceased at sea and the subsequent delivery of their bodies to their families (Palacios, 2017). From 1962 until the early eighties, a group of priests, supported by religious sisters and laypeople, worked in the diocesan Apostleship of the Sea under Palacios' leadership, who noted that "they possessed extensive knowledge of the fishing sector and the maritime world, along with a strong sense of vocation" (2017, p. 549).

2.1. José López Boza

José López Boza was the first to join the group in 1965. Born on 14 February 1940 in Encinasola (Huelva), he entered the minor seminary of Sanlúcar de Barrameda at the age of eleven, completing the first four years of his humanities studies there; the fifth year was undertaken in Huelva, marking the opening of the seminary in the new diocese. He studied philosophy in Seville and theology at the Comillas Pontifical University, where he crossed paths with Palacios, who was a year ahead. He was ordained as a priest there in 1963.

> My first posting as a priest in the diocese of Huelva was in the parish of Cumbres de San Bartolomé, a mountain town. I maintained the desire to work with seafaring communities and repeatedly requested a transfer to Huelva, which was granted in 1966. I served as a chaplain—a requisite for obtaining permission from naval authorities—aboard various vessels, including merchant ships, coastal fishing boats, deep-sea vessels and freezer trawlers engaged in extended campaigns across fishing grounds off the coast of West Africa (Mauritania, Senegal, Angola). These experiences were reflected in the pages of *El Camarón*, a cyclostyle publication distributed to crews enduring lengthy stretches at sea (López. Interview, 8/3/2016).

José López Boza was both the manager and editor of *El Camarón*, a magazine published by the Apostleship of the Sea with limited financial and technical resources. The publication highlighted significant events in the fishing sector and exposed the poor working and living conditions experienced by sailors. Alongside Palacios, he accompanied the Bishop of Huelva, José María García Lahiguera (1964–1969), who was appointed as promoter of the Apostleship of the Sea in 1968, on a voyage to the port of Dakar (Senegal) aboard the refrigerated cargo ship *Sierra Espuña* in February of that year, aiming to gain first-hand insight into the lives of sailors from Huelva. In 1974, he relocated to Madrid, where he contributed to various print media outlets. He later secularised, earned a degree in communication sciences, and joined public service broadcaster Radio Nacional de España, where he worked until his retirement in 2005.

2.2. Urbano Vélaz Arrizabaleta

Urbano Vélaz Arrizabaleta, born in Barbarín (Navarre) in 1932, entered the seminary of the Vincentian fathers in Pamplona. After being ordained as a priest and serving in various locations, he settled in Huelva in the late sixties. He held positions as coadjutor of Ayamonte and later as parish priest of the fishing neighbourhoods of Isla Canela and Punta del Moral, where he actively promoted grassroots movements. Devoted to the Apostleship of the Sea, as a member of Palacios' team, Vélaz Arrizabaleta provided assistance from the reception centre at the Anglican Church in Walvis Bay (present-day Namibia) to over three thousand fishermen from the hake fleet fishing in South African waters. However, his strong advocacy for sailors led the racist authorities to refuse to renew his visa in 1974 on the pretext that "he allowed Spanish sailors to dance with native black women" (Palacios. Life story, 2015/2016).

After seeking secularisation, Vélaz Arrizabaleta continued his work as an English teacher and educator at the Nautical-Fishing School, which he co-founded and promoted with Palacios. He was also politically active and ran in the municipal elections of 1991 as part of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) candidacy in Ayamonte led by Isaías Pérez Saldaña, a former seminarian and teacher. He was elected to the town council on 13 February 1992 after the resignation of a socialist councillor, assuming the role of citizen participation overseer. He retained his councillor position in the 1995 elections. After seven years of engagement in municipal politics, he declined to stand as a candidate in the 1999 elections and passed away on 4 September 2001.

2.3. Carlos Acitores Balbás

Carlos Acitores Balbás was born in Torquemada (Palencia) on 7 January 1942. At the age of thirteen, he entered the seminary of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) in Villava (Navarre). After studying humanities and philosophy, he earned a degree in theology from the Dominican Faculty of San Esteban in Salamanca. Ordained as a priest in 1968, he spent a year in the parish of Atxuri (Bilbao) before moving to London, where he served as a chaplain at Stella Maris in the port of London for almost a year. Upon returning to Spain, he was assigned to Madrid and then to Grao (Castellón) for a year. He embarked for Walvis Bay and, confronted with the difficult conditions faced by sailors in the hake fleet, chose to remain there until he was expelled by the racist authorities three years later, returning to Spain in 1976. After sailing as an ordinary sailor in various fleets, he secularised in 1980, opened an insurance brokerage, got married in 1982, had a son and passed civil service exams for the Regional Government of Andalusia. He retired as head of the Fishing Service at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries' Provincial Delegation in Huelva.

2.4. Antonio Vergara Abajo

Born in Madrid on 20 June 1927, Antonio Vergara Abajo entered the seminary of Burgos in 1941 and later joined the Foreign Missions seminary. He was ordained as a priest on 20 June 1953. His aspirations to work as a missionary in Rhodesia were thwarted when he failed the medical examination, instead spending his first two years as a priest substituting in Moneo (Burgos). In April 1955, he, along with thirty-seven other priests from various Spanish dioceses, responded to Cantero Cuadrado's call and arrived in Huelva. His initial assignment was in Alosno, where he served as parish priest from April 1955 to July 1967 (Vergara, 2006). Later, he was transferred to La Palma del Condado (1967–1968) and Bollullos Par del Condado (1968–1976). Rafael González Moralejo, the bishop of Huelva between 1969 and 1993, and a well-known liberal (Mancha, 2020, p. 611), appointed him—among other roles—as the episcopal delegate of Caritas and administrator of the diocese, a position he held from 1976 until late 1980. In 1981, he applied for secularisation, a process that took fourteen years to be granted. He had a civil marriage on 2 July of that same year and a religious one on 2 October 1995. He served as the secretary of the Nautical-Fishing Vocational Training School before passing away on 9 May 2016.

2.5. Joaquín Brito Ramos

Born in Ayamonte (Huelva) on 11 February 1943, he entered the seminary of Huelva during his teenage years. He served as a priest in his home town and became involved in the Apostleship of the Sea, where he worked as a teacher and supervisor at the Nautical–Fishing School. Additionally, he held a position in a construction company as head of personnel and administration. He chose to secularise and married in 1975. Politically, he aligned himself with the Workers' Revolutionary Organisation (ORT), a party originating from the Workers' Vanguard, a Christian movement promoted by the Jesuits. He died of cancer on 3 June 2004.

2.6. Fernando Motas Pérez

Born in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in 1946, Fernando Motas Pérez was a Jesuit. During the summer of 1971, he worked in a hospital kitchen in Lyon, where he became interested in the Apostleship of the Sea after meeting a French Jesuit from the Workers' Mission. In the summer of 1972, he boarded a small shrimp fishing boat in Huelva working in Moroccan waters alongside thirteen other sailors. It was a challenging experience, with no set work or rest schedule, working with nets in cramped quarters with no privacy. In the summer of 1973, he left Las Palmas aboard a merchant cargo ship, where he spent two and a half months before returning to Granada, where he was studying theology. Before his ordination in 1974, he met with Monsignor Azagra, Bishop of Murcia and national promoter of the Apostleship of the Sea, to strengthen the institution in Las Palmas with help from diocesan priest José Hernández Francés. To familiarise himself with it, he spent the 1975/1976 academic year in Huelva and, alongside Ignacio Palacios' team, acquired the knowledge and experience he needed to establish the institution in his home town in 1976. A year later, a group of maritime workers formed a union, of which Motas, the port chaplain, served as coordinator until 1984, when he decided to step down due to health reasons. In 2000, the Provincial of the Society sent him to Andalusia as the head of various communities, including Granada, El Puerto de Santa María, Seville and Malaga.

2.7. Francisco Cruz Beltrán

Born in Cartaya (Huelva) in 1944, Francisco Cruz Beltrán entered the seminary of Huelva at the age of twelve, where he pursued studies leading to priesthood ordination, which took place in June 1968. His first assignment was to serve several villages in the mountains, and from 1970 to 1977, he served as coadjutor in the parish of Punta Umbría. In Madrid, he studied sociology and requested secularisation. Upon returning to Huelva in 1982, he joined the School of Social Work, later obtaining a professorship in sociology at the University of Huelva.

> During my time in Punta Umbría, I frequently went to sea as a sailor and acted as a chaplain for the Trasmediterránea ferry. I contributed to the magazine *El Camarón* as an illustrator and earned the certification of a second-class coastal fishing skipper. My dedication to seafarers and their families persisted in my academic pursuits, demonstrated by my dissertation titled "Social and Political Partici-

pation of Fishermen in Huelva", defended in 1983, and my doctoral thesis titled "Social Structure of the Andalusian Fishing Sector", defended in 1994, both under the guidance of Professor Vidal Beneyto. Beyond academia, I became deeply immersed in that milieu, to the extent of founding a folk group for which I composed protest songs highlighting the plight of Andalusia and its fishing industry (Cruz. Interview, 11/2/2016).

Politically aligned with the Socialist Party of Andalusia (PSA), for which he served as provincial secretary in Huelva from 1986 to 1990, he reveals:

> My Andalusian roots trace back to my encounter in Punta Umbría in 1972/1973 with Alejandro Rojas-Marcos, who was in exile from Seville due to a ruling from the Tribunal of Public Order (TOP). Later, I took part in the electoral campaign during the first democratic general elections in 1977 by organising a rally at a school in Punta Umbría. I collaborated with the PSA, which later renamed itself the PA, while pursuing my studies in sociology in Madrid (Cruz. Interview, 11/2/2016).

3. The influence of the Second Vatican Council

Just months after the opening of the Stella Maris centre in Huelva, the Second Vatican Council commenced on 11 October 1962, concluding on 8 December 1965. Prior to the Council, there was significant concern within certain segments of the Church regarding the maintenance of an ecclesiastical framework detached from the Gospel message. Themes such as incarnation in diverse contexts, evangelistic missions, intra-ecclesial dialogue, advocacy for the marginalised and autonomy from political influence were pressing matters, particularly for those who lived their faith and challenged official Church stances.

Pope John XXIII recognised the need for the Church to engage with modern society to promote its message of tolerance and respect, and he boldly confronted the more integrist and resistant Catholic factions. His commitment to the renewal and modernisation of the Church—*aggiornamento*—aimed to fundamentally reshape the Church's message, making it relevant to a world increasingly estranged from traditional institutions. Guided by this purpose, the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) was inaugurated, marking a pivotal moment in the Church's historical journey and standing as the most significant doctrinal and pastoral event of the 20th century. The council aimed to embrace the values of modernity, transitioning the Church, as articulated by Dominican theologian Congar, from being "a Church unto itself" to one "for humanity" (Estrada, 1985, pp. 28–52), advocating for social justice globally, championing human rights and engaging in dialogue with Eastern bloc nations, other Christian denominations and various religions, thus "ushering in a new era in the history of the Catholic Church" (Küng, 2002, p. 232). Consequently, the Second Vatican Council transcended the theological notion of the Church as a perfect society, recognised the rights to religious and political freedom, modernised the hierarchical ecclesiastical structure, initiated dialogue with diverse global cultures by forsaking Eurocentrism and ecclesiocentrism, reaffirmed and bolstered the role of the laity within the Church and underscored the Church's contribution to the social construction of the world (Hurtado, 2006; Alberigo, 2005, pp. 190–192).

The Spanish Church, taken aback by the council and remaining detached from its preparation and development, witnessed internal ecclesial rifts and tensions during the decade spanning from 1965 to1975 between progressive factions, who were pushing for a swift and comprehensive implementation of the council's mandates in the Spanish ecclesiastical context, and the integrists, who resisted the new conciliar principles, viewing many doctrinal or pastoral propositions as an affront to the tenets of the Spanish religious tradition as interpreted by traditionalist National Catholicism (Raguer, 1998; Martín, 2005; Montero, 2011; Mancha, 2020). These were tumultuous times socially, politically and religiously, marked by the significant involvement of Catholic workers' organisations in social movements, leading to frequent clashes with the Francoist civil authorities, who labelled them as Marxist. Concurrently, another conservative sector, aligned with National Catholicism and resistant to any change, persisted. Ecclesial movements already aligned with many Vatican II ideas found validation in the council's texts to further their socio-political engagement, often resulting in conflicts and fractures with the ecclesiastical hierarchy itself, culminating in the Crisis of Catholic Action (1966–1968).

In the Apostleship of the Sea, as in other ecclesial groups, two interpretations of the new Gospel message and its pastoral implications emerged: the traditional welfare-assistance model—centred on welcoming seafarers in Stella Maris centres—and one advocating for solidarity with the most vulnerable, adopting a political strategy of advocacy, protests and demands to defend the rights of seafarers and their families. Despite tensions, across Spain, particularly in Huelva, a pastoral approach of embodiment, humble commitment, prevailed, with the Huelva diocese acting as a mediator—or reconciler, as per Palacios—between the two visions of Christian presence in the maritime domain.

> The new approach prioritised denouncing injustices and defending the rights of seafarers over charitable endeavours. It was believed that such endeavours obscured society's true injustices, and that the Church's mission lay not merely in charity but in advocating for justice (Palacios, 2009, p. 12).

Aligned with the effort to reconcile both approaches, spearheaded by Bishop García Lahiguera upon his arrival in Huelva in 1964 and further championed by Rafael González Moralejo from 1969 onwards, the diocesan Stella Maris established a social services department diverging from the traditional charitable assistance model and incorporating scientific social work techniques and methodologies. Its objective was to foster social well-being within the fishing community through societal transformation and individual and collective autonomy, transcending the prevailing paternalistic paradigm in social services. Maribel Lasa, a Javerian religious sister, assumed leadership. However, this new initiative faced challenges and encountered resistance from some members of the Apostleship of the Sea in Spain:

> Some colleagues resisted and persisted with an assistance-focused pastoral approach. Moreover, we encountered opposition from certain sectors of society and the Church. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the unwavering support extended

to us by the bishops of Huelva, García Lahiguera and González Moralejo, evi-
denced by the pastoral letters they authored. José López Boza and I accompanied
García Lahiguera on his visit to Dakar in 1968, from 26 February to 9 March, and
I joined him on the trip to Saint Pierre and Miquelon in 1969, from 15 to 28 April,
this time by plane (Palacios. Life story, 2015/2016).

In line with its commitment to advocate for social justice, the Apostleship of
the Sea group fostered a comprehensive social movement among seafarers,
encouraging organisation in three spheres: trade unions, families and
communities. Stella Maris became a hub for deliberating, setting criteria,
proposing ideas and making decisions. In 1967, the Nautical-Fishing Vocational
Training School was established, as outlined in the centre's inception plan, with
the aim of equipping the Huelva fleet with skilled professionals—skippers and
mechanics—not only to enhance fishing techniques but also to bolster safety
at sea, thereby reducing the frequency of shipwrecks and accidents. This social
and educational initiative was complemented by resolute advocacy for the
rights of fishermen and their families, unwavering support for their grievances
and activism and the advancement of a broad grassroots movement in fishing
villages, where women played pivotal roles. Stella Maris became, in the last years
of the dictatorship, a venue that offered its facilities and material resources to
clandestine trade unions and political parties, akin to the actions of several
parishes, convents and religious orders.

4. *El Camarón* (1970–1979): denunciation and support

The reality faced by sailors was harsh, challenging and unstable, characterised
by frequent occupational accidents, family abandonment and low wages. In the
fishing industry, two primary groups existed: coastal fishing, which employed
artisanal techniques and operated in the waters of Andalusia, Portugal and
Morocco, and deep-sea or industrial fishing, which required ships to venture
far from their home ports for extended periods. Sailors found themselves
unrepresented by both the Spanish Syndical Organisation and the Fishermen's
Guilds. Despite the poor working conditions, there was no tradition of struggle,
demands or protests within the sector. Deep-sea fishing encountered various
challenges, including the lack of contract visas from relevant authorities,
outdated labour regulations, overcrowded living conditions for sailors, a
scarcity of freshwater impacting hygiene and cleanliness and long, exhausting
workdays leading to psychological strain, tension and anxiety, all contributing
to numerous accidents. The catalogue of labour issues persisted with economic
conditions linked to piecework, excessively lengthy campaign periods, paid
but untaken holidays, job instability, the continual dispersal of sailors among
various vessels—hindering organised movements to advocate for their interests
and working conditions—and the militarisation of the sector due to its reliance
on the Navy, where a labour grievance could be deemed sedition and referred to
a military tribunal (Zamora and López, 1975, p. 13).

Seafaring priests revolted against this reality and determined that the Apostleship of the Sea should fill the gap left by unions in the sector and foster the conditions for their establishment, while also serving as a conduit for sailors' interests and encouraging collaboration among seafarers, particularly among their families. Similar to numerous other Catholic Church organisations, the Apostleship of the Sea produced its own publications. Among them was *Hombres del Mar* (Men of the Sea), a magazine with a national focus, and *Platuxa*, aimed at the Newfoundland cod fleet. The objective of both was to "raise awareness and unite seafarers, both those from the merchant navy and fishermen, groups that had been overlooked and widely scattered across ports and seas up to that point" (Palacios, 2009, p. 9). The activist stance of these publications resulted in tensions with the Francoist authorities.

In line with this communication strategy, the Huelva branch of the Apostleship of the Sea opted to establish its own media outlet named *El Camarón*, which quickly faced challenges from the regime's officials. From January to May 1970, three newsletters were issued, composed and circulated among sailors by the priests of Stella Maris in Huelva. These bulletins covered current topics and underscored the necessity of organising to safeguard their rights and press for their demands. The enthusiastic reception and the need to increase the page count to accommodate the wealth of information and letters from sailors themselves spurred the group of priests to create a monthly magazine produced modestly via cyclostyle due to financial constraints. Its circulation averaged around six hundred copies per edition, limited by economic factors and the capacity of the duplicating machine. *El Camarón* was distributed free of charge to sailors and fishermen, although there were subscribers who contributed fifty pesetas annually in support. The inaugural issue of the magazine was released in August 1970 and it concluded until November 1979. José López Boza served as its editor, with Ignacio Palacios as director.

> Although modest, the magazine served as a powerful voice, reaching all seas, ports and vessels, acting as a catalyst for awakening consciences and informing those who would take months to return home of the advancements and social changes occurring in Spain during the turbulent years of the transition period (Palacios. Life story, 2015–2016).

Initially, the magazine was aimed at the workers of the freezer shellfish fleet based in Huelva, operating in the seas of Senegal, Angola and Mozambique, "but it quickly evolved into a focal point for the labour struggle in Huelva during the transition years"; a genuine "school of democracy" (Feria, 2005, p. 8) as it addressed not only maritime issues but also broader topics concerning labour and politics. The magazine emerged as a valuable tool for communication and political consciousness among the numerous and dispersed fishing community of Huelva. For the first time, sailors and fishermen were able to openly discuss their problems and propose solutions, igniting a powerful advocacy movement that underscored their struggle for improved living and wage conditions within the magazine's pages, which swiftly became a concern for naval authorities and shipowners. *El Camarón* represented the first tool of denunciation associated with the maritime labour movement, and its advocacy role "resulted in its seizure on multiple occasions by the Public Order Tribunal" (Feria, 2009, p. 86).

The release of a special edition in February 1971, dedicated to the collective agreement of freezer vessel workers, prompted the Naval Commander to lodge a complaint with the Civil Governor for subversive propaganda, leading the delegate of the Ministry of Information and Tourism in Huelva to declare it illegal. The Apostleship of the Sea sought official recognition for the magazine and its registration in the Register of Press Companies. Meanwhile, from May to November, the publication was renamed *Boletín del Apostolado del Mar* (Bulletin of the Apostleship of the Sea), reverting to the *El Camarón* title in December, along with its confrontational and accusatory style. It promptly covered the first collective agreement of the industrial freezer fleet, the first agreement of its kind in Spain. Workers in this sector had a distinct advocacy approach compared to those in the fresh fleet. The former aimed for changes in labour relations and social enhancements through collective bargaining, while the latter prioritised the preservation of acquired rights. The conflicts they encountered had a more significant impact as they unfolded in small and medium-sized towns.

Workers in the industrial fishing sector primarily advocated for three points: job stability within the company to ensure employment continuity; a change in the compensation and work system, which relied on piecework, thus demanding a guaranteed salary, payment for overtime hours and the establishment of a fixed workday; and limiting time at sea to a maximum of five months, followed by one month's holiday to maintain a balance between work and family life. On the other hand, workers in the fresh fleet, both artisanal and pre-industrial, did not challenge traditional structures of work and compensation, although they sought updates to them and the eradication of certain corrupt practices that had become widespread, primarily within the Fishermen's Guilds, entities reliant on the Spanish Syndical Organisation, whose senior leaders were appointed by the government. Workers called for the democratisation and oversight of the Fishermen's Guilds, transparency in remuneration—urging for written contracts—, the presence of sailors' representatives at auctions, access to sales receipts and payroll records and the elimination of intermediaries in sales at major ports, as the Fishermen's Guilds managed these transactions in smaller ports themselves.

The fishing sector began to simmer in the early 1970s. Conflicts between shipowners and fishermen escalated as the basic demands of the workers were disregarded by both the shipowners and the administration. On 30 November 1971, workers from the industrial freezer fleet signed the sector's first collective agreement, which entailed establishing a welfare fund and guaranteeing fishermen a minimum wage along with incentives, while also restricting sea campaigns to a maximum of eight months. However, none of the other demands—such as job stability within the company or paid rest—received attention from the employers. This led to discontent and disappointment among the workers, prompting them to launch protests demanding a new agreement. According to Zamora and López (1975, p. 15), the agreement was negotiated under conditions inferior to those already accepted in the fleet, and in some aspects, even fell below what was stipulated by regulations. Despite the overall frustration over the agreement's outcome due to the lack of desired social gains, it

catalysed a heightened advocacy consciousness among affected fishermen. Many workers united and acknowledged the imperative to persist in organised efforts to uphold their dignity as individuals and as a collective, marking an unprecedented development in the maritime labour landscape.

With this background, the second agreement for the freezer trawlers of Huelva was addressed, a process meticulously documented by *El Camarón*. According to a report published in the magazine *Sábado Gráfico* in December 1972 (Zamora and López, 1975, pp. 21–22), the labour situation of the workers was dire: workdays lasting between fifteen and eighteen hours for successive days—including holidays and eve days—without fixed meal schedules; both work and wages were piecework-based, with the most significant portion of the wage being the so-called fishing bonus; deplorable living conditions; lack of paid holidays; seasonal contracts, with the worker being dismissed without entitlement to compensation once the campaign ended; frequent occupational accidents due to fatigue and the scant concern of the shipowner in this regard; very poor quality food, which apart from a small portion, was paid for by the workers themselves. Moreover, there was the family separation lasting between six and ten months, a period that the shipowner tended to extend, leading to serious family problems.

In issue 15 of *El Camarón*, dated March 1973, an open letter from the sailors' representatives was published, informing about the commencement of negotiations for a new agreement on the 29th of that month and seeking support for their demands. The previous day, the sailors unanimously endorsed a preliminary draft of the agreement in an assembly, which applied to all freezer ships in Huelva city and its province engaged in shellfish fishing, and to all crew members, regardless of their rank. The preliminary draft highlighted aspects such as the establishment of a base salary, a share of sales, the probationary period, job stability within the company, living expenses fully covered by the companies, an eight-hour workday which could exceptionally be extended to four more hours but never exceeding twelve daily or two hundred and forty monthly, a limitation on sea time not exceeding five months, one month of shore leave paid by the company for every five months embarked, the right to a twenty-four-hour rest period for every thirty days at sea, the right to assembly and provision of air conditioning for ships lacking it (Zamora and López, 1975, pp. 45–48).

The employers declined to discuss the preliminary draft, citing the low profitability of the freezer fleet. This compelled the workers to seek assistance from a group of economists who prepared a report demonstrating the economic viability of their demands. The employers were only willing to offer minor salary improvements and thirty days of annual leave but refused to engage in discussions regarding the workday, piecework, living conditions on board, food provisions or family separation. In response, the workers organised a lock-in on 7 April at the Rocío Church in Huelva to protest the delay in reaching an agreement and to bring public attention to their plight. They penned an open letter to the bishop and the civil governor, expressing their frustration with the

five unproductive meetings held with the shipowners and emphasising that they were tired of hearing that their demands were just without any enforcement to ensure that companies respected their dignity and rights. The following day, at ten o'clock in the evening, the nearly eighty confined sailors departed from the church, having been accompanied by members of the grassroots Christian communities.

On 11 April, the press reported on the indefinite strike of over two hundred sailors whose vessels were docked in Dakar. Through the strike, the sailors protested against the breakdown of the agreement and expressed solidarity with their representatives. According to Palacios (2009, p. 76), this was the first—and possibly only—strike by Spanish fishermen abroad. This strike bolstered the morale of the workers negotiating the agreement. However, the naval authorities in Huelva responded by accusing the leaders of the revolt of sedition and demanding their immediate repatriation. One of the main goals of the group of priests was to achieve demilitarisation aboard ships, as it restricted the freedom of maritime workers. The shipowners presented a new proposal that was rejected by the workers as it did not address their fundamental demands. The negotiation collapsed, and the Labour Delegate issued a Mandatory Compliance Regulation, valid for two years, which reflected the shipowners' position but did not incorporate most of the sailors' requests. The information circulated by *El Camarón* outraged the shipowners, prompting them to cease acting as carriers for the magazine. Consequently, in May 1973, the seafaring priests penned a letter to sailors in Dakar, Luanda and Lourenço Marques (present-day Maputo, Mozambique), informing them of the shipowners' decision to halt magazine deliveries due to the dispute over the collective agreement.

Naval authorities actively sought to prevent the distribution of *El Camarón* and the Huelva court seized the magazine twice. Furthermore, the Public Order Tribunal (TOP) initiated two proceedings against Palacios in his role as director. The magazine's proponents were unequivocal from the start about their aim: to advance democracy, recognising that without it, the rights of workers and citizens would remain unacknowledged. In December 1975, after Franco's death, *El Camarón* issued an editorial reaffirming its unwavering commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It advocated for the involvement of maritime workers in forging a fairer and more democratic society, where the rights of assembly, expression and association would prevail. In January 1976, the magazine called for the release of all political and union prisoners. In the March edition, in response to the announcement of a new Association Law, it warned of the risks to the country's democratic future, stressing that it was the workers who had to spearhead democracy. Additionally, it endorsed the amnesty plea and advocated for abstention in the referendum on the new Electoral Law.

The group of priests also recognised the role of the wives of maritime workers, who gathered in small groups in almost every coastal town. The Francoist authorities threatened to halt these gatherings, deeming them illegal. Consequently, the priests set about creating a Provincial Association of

Families of Maritime Workers in 1975. They opted for a religious association as the legal entity, bypassing the need for authorisation from the Ministry of the Interior. The diocese of Huelva approved the association on 20 April 1976, although it had been operating provisionally since 18 November 1975. The association aimed to limit the duration of campaigns, increase holiday days and time spent at home and actively participated in the mobilisation organised by the Apostleship of the Sea at the national level. This effort led to the approval of regulations limiting seafaring time to five months, followed by one month's holiday. These mobilisations were crucial in improving the lives of sailors at sea, securing the release of crew members detained by African countries and persuading shipowners to negotiate agreements.

However, these demands expanded when women discovered the needs of their neighbourhoods, prompting them to lead a grassroots movement that attracted residents not involved in fishing activities. In issue 55 of *El Camarón*, dated September 1976, a review of the association's activities was provided, highlighting its collaboration with maritime workers in their demands, the establishment of nurseries in nine coastal neighbourhoods and the promotion of neighbourhood associations. The nurseries, along with Stella Maris facilities, served as venues for women to discuss and raise awareness about the neglect in maritime communities. These discussions sparked a grassroots movement calling for essential amenities such as lighting, sewage systems, transportation improvements and the development of social housing.

On 8 April 1976, delegates from the sardine fleet in Isla Cristina met with shipowners convened by the Fishermen's Guild to initiate negotiations for the agreement. Upon arrival at the guild, they were confronted only by the Civil Guard. Incensed, the sailors decided to stage a protest through the town's streets. Twenty demonstrators, including "a sailor from Huelva", Fernando González Vila, a naval mechanic affiliated with the General Union of Workers (UGT) who had led negotiations for the Freezer Fishing Fleet Agreement, and "the priest of Stella Maris in Huelva, Ignacio Palacios" (Blanco, 1976, p. 20), were arrested and transported to Ayamonte prison. According to Blanco (1976), eighteen of the detainees were released twelve hours later, while González Vila and Palacios were released after twenty-four hours upon posting bail of 5,000 pesetas. The case was eventually dismissed by the Public Order Tribunal (TOP) months later.

Starting from mid-1977, the magazine transitioned from a monthly to a bimonthly publication, with fewer pages than usual. The legalisation of trade unions and political parties resulted in Stella Maris losing some of its influence among maritime workers. The content focus shifted towards labour issues, backing neighbourhood associations in maritime areas and ecological concerns, particularly the pollution of the Huelva coast, which adversely affected fishing. In the May–June 1977 edition, issue 64, the magazine outlined the fishing policies of left–wing political parties and made its political stance clear in the editorial titled *Trabajador, vota a los trabajadores* (Worker, vote for workers). Simultaneously, it sharply criticised centrist and right-wing parties, asserting that "they are the

same old bosses with different labels". Issue 65 delved into the legalisation of trade unions, while issue 67 expressed support for Andalusian autonomy and the protests scheduled for 4 December. Additionally, it vehemently condemned the police repression resulting in the death of Manuel José García Caparrós in Malaga from police gunfire.

5. In conclusion: the new direction of the priests of the sea

The team of priests from Stella Maris in Huelva, along with their colleagues from the Apostleship of the Sea at the national level, embarked on a process of reflection during the transition period in response to the evolving social, political and ecclesial landscape. This reflection led to a renewed commitment by the institution to vigorously denounce injustices and advocate for the rights of maritime workers.

> We were entering an era of great hope with the Second Vatican Council, liberation theology, worker priests and other pastoral experiences dedicated to the gospel and the marginalised. We believed that the Church's mission was not merely charity but also the proclamation of justice, engaging fishermen and their families in addressing their challenges (Palacios. Life story, 2015–2016).

Although the regime prohibited the existence of left-wing trade unions and political parties, it reluctantly permitted Church associations, as stipulated in the Concordat signed in 1953 between the Catholic Church and the Francoist State. Aligned with their commitment to justice, the seafaring priests collaborated with clandestine trade unions, spending three years with Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and transforming Stella Maris into a hub for those advocating for democracy. Subsequently, they worked with the legal offices of other unions in Huelva, particularly with UGT, where Carlos Navarrete and José Antonio Marín Rite offered their expertise. They also forged connections with the Unitary Union led by Juan Ceada, a former seminarian and member of Workers' Vanguard. All the priests of Stella Maris established collaborative relationships with groups advocating for freedom and democracy from secrecy, although not all were actively involved in union or political activities, at least during the dictatorship. Regarding the role played by the group of priests, José López Boza asserts:

> I believe that Stella Maris played an important role and contributed to achieving democracy. It was not an easy path, but the group of priests [...] was determined to contribute their abilities, commitment, perseverance and their influence, whether significant or minimal, in social, political and union movements, so that democracy, and with it autonomy, became a reality. [...] I did not engage in political or union activities, although Ignacio and I had our passports revoked. Some of the priests of Stella Maris initially had contacts and collaborated with the PCE and CCOO, although later, during the transition, they leaned towards UGT and PSOE because they provided us with legal and labour advice and support (López. Interview, 8/3/2016).

Acitores highlights the work undertaken at Stella Maris to substitute trade unions: defending maritime workers, supporting their demands and raising political

awareness. This role was not confined solely to the fishing sector but was undertaken by Christian groups across nearly all social sectors.

> However, with the arrival of democracy and new union liberties, our services were no longer essential. The surrogate function we had been fulfilling for the banned unions during the Franco regime was drawing to a close. Chaplains from ports like Bilbao, London and Hamburg advocated for maintaining a traditional pastoral approach, centred on assistance and observance of Sunday rituals. Conversely, others, such as those in Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Huelva, Madrid and San Sebastián, championed a different paradigm, one responsive to the evolving political and union landscape. [...] I have never been affiliated with any union, but I am a member of PSOE [...]. Our group in Huelva was imbued with progressivism, leaning left, broadly speaking, although our views on political activism were not uniform (Acitores. Interview, 24/2/2016).

Cruz concurs with fellow colleagues in evaluating the role of Stella Maris, particularly in its substitute capacity for the prohibited unions:

> The work of Stella Maris in Huelva leaned more towards trade unionism than politics. We understood that our role on the ships primarily involved companionship, standing alongside the working people; we assisted with tasks, and although the shipowners did not pay us—at least in my case—they did enrol us with Social Security. [...] On the ships, we did not conduct masses or engage in religious practices. Instead, we were exemplifying a Church dedicated to those enduring the most hardship from their own circumstances, striving to adhere to the new directives established by the Second Vatican Council, which often prompted a re-evaluation of our priestly calling. It was crucial for us to raise awareness among maritime workers about defending their rights, recognising the surrogate role we played in light of the prohibition on class unions. However, with the recognition of these unions, our mission as the Apostleship of the Sea had essentially concluded (Cruz. Interview, 11/2/2016).

Palacios concurs with Cruz's assessment and that of other interviewees that with the arrival of democracy, there was no longer a niche to occupy or a surrogate role to play, as these responsibilities fell within the purview of other societal realms. Between 1980 and 1983, Palacios assumed the role of national director of the Apostleship of the Sea, a position he held until he embarked on a new chapter of his life in December of that year by joining the Regional Government of Andalusia in Seville. Here, he had the opportunity to continue his extensive work in the fishing sector, a pursuit that resonated with his socialist convictions. Following his retirement in October 2006, Palacios dedicated himself to disseminating his experiences, insights and recollections through various publications, thereby enriching the knowledge of researchers and maritime workers (Palacios, 2017). He passed away in October 2020 at the age of 82.

The priests along the coast of Huelva bore witness to and actively participated in the struggle for democracy during the waning years of Francoism and the subsequent political transition within one of Spain's most economically challenged regions. Their involvement in the fight for democracy and their advocacy for the interests of sailors and fishermen reflected their interpretation of the Gospel message, albeit not universally embraced within the Church. They demonstrated a commitment to the most vulnerable, stepping into the void left by the absence of class unions and nurturing the political consciousness of maritime workers.

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ARTICLES/ARTÍCULOS

Acceleration in Digitalisation: Social Networks, Civic Involvement and Electoral Processes in the United States and Latin America during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Los años del aceleramiento de la digitalización: redes sociales, implicación cívica y procesos electorales en Estados Unidos y Latinoamérica durante la coyuntura de la pandemia del COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an acceleration in digitisation in practically all aspects of social life. Most notably, during the early stages of the health crisis, digital media became almost the only channel through which people could express themselves, in light of the social distancing measures that were decreed in most countries. In this article we analyse how this historical moment impacted civic participation among US and Latin American citizens, especially during the elections that were held in these countries. The article adopts a qualitative approach based on an analysis of information from the main academic studies and media coverage of the selected case studies. The experience of the 2020 US electoral process, the midterm elections in Mexico in 2021 and the presidential elections in Chile and Colombia are all considered. In all cases, the campaigns resorted to digital strategies in order to gain support. The study concludes that we find ourselves at an undeniable watershed moment, although its implications are not yet fully known, largely because it is not clear whether the use of new technologies really contributes to the strengthening of democratic values.

The Spanish (original) version can be read at https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.60

RESUMEN

La pandemia del COVID-19 implicó un aceleramiento en la digitalización en prácticamente todos los aspectos de la vida social. De forma muy notable, en la primera etapa de la crisis sanitaria, los medios digitales se convirtieron casi en el único canal mediante el cual las personas podían expresarse, tomando en cuenta las medidas de distanciamiento social que se decretaron en la mayoría de los países. En este artículo de revisión realizamos un análisis de cómo este momento histórico tuvo un impacto en la participación cívica de los ciudadanos en Estados Unidos y en Latinoamérica, en especial, durante los procesos electorales que se celebraron en estos países. El enfoque del artículo es de carácter cualitativo, a través de un análisis de información de los principales estudios académicos y cobertura periodística sobre los casos de estudio seleccionados. Se narra la experiencia del proceso electoral estadounidense del 2020, las elecciones intermedias en México en 2021, así como las elecciones presidenciales en Chile y Colombia. En todos los casos, las campañas tuvieron que recurrir a estrategias digitales con el fin de generar adhesiones. El estudio concluye que estamos en un innegable cambio de época, pero sus implicaciones son de pronóstico reservado, en buena medida porque no está claro si el uso de las nuevas tecnologías realmente contribuye a fortalecer valores democráticos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: redes sociales; medios digitales; Latinoamérica; Estados Unidos; COVID-19.

1. Introduction

It is no secret that the 2010s laid the foundations for a new form of civic involvement that was gradually adopted by public and private institutions as a way to connect with new markets and citizens, whether to keep them informed or to attempt to persuade them for a specific purpose (De Zúñiga and Shahin, 2015). Digital media emerged during the 2000s, but for the most part it played a secondary role (Vukanovic, 2009). However, this changed rapidly in the last two decades.

It is possible to argue that these technologies were embraced first by users for a range of purposes before being adopted by organisations (El Ouirdi *et al.*, 2016). This is worth mentioning since there was initially great reluctance in both the public and private sectors to take the arrival of digital platforms seriously, most of all social networks (Treem, 2015). Over time, it became clear that cyber interactions resulted in real-world effects that could no longer be ignored, and a number of organisations initiated efforts to use these tools to their advantage.

In any case, it is vital to note that the end of the last decade brought with it a paradigm shift in the way that we communicate and interact with one another. Nowadays, the myriad communication methods available—text messages, videos and voice messages—enable us to connect with others with an ease that would have been unimaginable a few years ago (Sharma and Shukla, 2016). However, it is also true that it has become easier to pinpoint which segments of the population are more likely to have a greater affinity with a particular message being transmitted (Vinerean *et al.*, 2013).

In ten years, we have experienced significant, irreversible changes in the way in which we consume entertainment, receive news and communicate with others.

During this time, the foundations were laid for an interconnected society in which digital tools play a vital role not only in how we maintain personal contact, but also how we participate in social life, carry out our daily activities and even operate professionally (Felmlee and Faris, 2013).

By the beginning of 2020, it had become evident that institutional communication, marketing strategies and the method of receiving information would have to be viewed through another lens. A new landscape had been created where technologies converged, presenting enormous challenges and opportunities, as well as obvious risks (Venegas-Vera *et al.*, 2020).

The risk factor is of utmost relevance, since at the end of the decade the reality was far different from the optimistic predictions of many academics and opinion leaders regarding the fervour surrounding digital platforms. At some point, digital platforms, especially social networks, were viewed as a tool to strengthen our capacity for democratic expression (Loader and Mercea, 2011; Castells, 2012).

The legitimacy of online media sources was initially established through the discrediting of certain mass media outlets, which tend to pander to a variety of outside interests rather than pursue basic journalistic rigour. In the eyes of many, these new platforms were considered democratising and even libertarian spaces. Cyberspace was viewed as an alternative that was capable of standing up to the status quo and even changing the power distribution in various contexts (Herman and Chomsky, 2010; Castells, 2011; Tarman and Yigit, 2013).

But this only became reality on very few occasions during the first part of the last decade. Far from resulting in a better-informed society, in many cases the evidence seems to suggest that in fact the opposite occurred. The accumulation of perceptions, especially those that were not based on verifiable facts, gave rise to a phenomenon known as *post-truth*, in which empirical and verifiable information is simply ignored. Speculation and conspiracy theories abound in cyberspace during the proliferation of this sensation (Suiter, 2016; Hannan, 2018).

Over time, it has become evident that the virtual public sphere was subject to manipulations and distortions that rivalled or even surpassed what had taken place with the traditional media. This went beyond *fake news*. A fierce dispute over narrative began in polarised contexts that only heightened the differences in profoundly unequal societies (She *et al.*, 2017; Kubin and Von Sikorski, 2021).

Social networks are more adept at strengthening preconceived beliefs than provoking discussions on public matters. Users tend to follow the accounts of those with whom they essentially agree (Van Bavel and Pereira, 2018). This has caused heightened tension at a time of deeply rooted differences in terms of beliefs and convictions, where citizens are strongly divided in terms of religion, politics and other social issues.

For this and other reasons, doubts began to arise about the role these new types of media played in supporting democratic coexistence. The ethics of various

organisations that use algorithms to influence user consumption were also called into question. And of course, suspicions lingered about social networks that use their users' personal information for purposes other than those initially stated (Beaufort, 2018; Petrescu and Krishen, 2020).

The former became evident in the case of companies that employ technology to suggest and offer products and/or services based on users' search preferences. The practice of personalised advertising was long associated with the non-consensual exploiting of user browsing data. On the other hand, we have the case of Facebook and the enormous controversy that arose in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Heawood, 2018; Hinds *et al.*, 2020).

These issues found themselves in the public debate before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic; the health crisis sparked greater dependence on technology, which in turn resulted in a marked acceleration in digital interaction (Kaur *et al.*, 2020).

In this article we will reflect on some of the implications and trends observed regarding civic participation in the 2020s, a decade so inextricably linked to and impacted by this historic event, in addition to the influence of these digital tools in the elections that unfolded during this juncture. The overall aim of this investigation is to examine the contextual similarities and differences of digital civic engagement in the United States and key Latin American countries. This research uses a qualitative methodology before employing a documentary technique, selecting academic studies and relevant media articles to then perform an in-depth analysis of recent events (Díaz *et al.*, 2003; Vargas *et al.*, 2015).

2. Social media and civic engagement

It is important to understand that the advent of new information and communication technologies brought with it fresh power dynamics. At first, some even argued that digital social networks would be able to stand up to the established powers (Kreiss *et al.*, 2011). However, others expressed scepticism, warning of the risks that these tools pose. Interest in this nascent issue began as exploratory research at the end of the 2000s, but in the following years empirical data would become available (Chadwick and Howard, 2009), eventually generating information on various case studies from key moments in history.

The democratising potential of social networks, which during the last decade had been used as a space to unite and take collective action, gradually gave way to the discouragement of broad social groups frustrated that these platforms were failing to meet their potential (De la Garza, 2020). On the other hand, it can also be argued that it was not society that was capitalising on these technologies, but those in power, although this was not so obvious at first.

The 2010s began with the WikiLeaks releases and the Arab Spring revolutions, while notable Ibero-American movements such as 15-M in Spain, Chilean Winter and #YoSoy132 in Mexico also emerged (De la Garza *et al.*, 2019). All of them constituted acts of protest that were organised via social media, bringing about transcendental changes in governments, political systems and the prevailing legal framework regarding a number of issues.

However, mobilisation ceased and eventually became institutionalised. In a broad sense, these social movements could be viewed as catalysts propelling the careers of new actors and political parties in these countries. Yet the first digitally organised movements were not successful in bringing about far-reaching systemic change, as we have pointed out. This is particularly the case in Mexico, Chile and Spain (De la Garza and Yllán, 2020).

The fact that further protests broke out in Latin America in 2019 only underscores the argument that these social mobilisations failed to fulfil their purpose. Especially dramatic was the case of Chile, a country that was considered a model of development in the region for many years. Unlike in 2011, the protests at the end of the decade saw people of different ages and social strata take to the streets (Jiménez-Yañez, 2020; Rivera-Aguilera *et al.*, 2021). As in the Chilean Winter, however, technology played an important role. The same can be said of the cases of Ecuador and Colombia, which were also the scene of important mobilisations in 2019 (De la Garza and Robles, 2020; González and García, 2022).

The protests held throughout these Latin American countries were further proof of the articulating power of social media. But above all, they bore witness to deep social unrest that transcended the generation of so-called digital natives. Social inequality, lack of access to basic services, violence and anti-democracy were some of the triggers of the mobilisations that shook the entire region to its core (Valenzuela and Sáez, 2020).

In the end, they served to confirm certain observations that were made during the first demonstrations promoted online. Social networks are merely digital tools for connecting with others, but in times of social upheaval they have the capacity to fan the flames of collective unrest (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2012).

They can be used for sharing messages, videos calling for protests, or for transmitting content that raises awareness or distorts reality, as the case may be. Various studies have shown that social networks have contributed to citizen empowerment at different points in time (Vlachokyriakos *et al.*, 2016; Lin and Kant, 2021). But it is also true that citizen unrest often remains in cyberspace.

The intensity and popularity of digital platforms have played a pivotal role in strengthening calls for protest on several occasions. It is also true that they have contributed little to generating in-depth public deliberation on matters of collective interest (De la Garza *et al.*, 2021).

While the power of social networks might have been underestimated (or not fully understood) during the early years, by the early 2020s it was clear that hardly any social movement could exist were it not for cyberspace, and any electoral hopefuls would be unable to gain traction without the use of these tools. It is important to consider that all of this occurred even before social distancing measures were enacted in much of the world, which eventually forced virtually all interactions to take place online.

3. COVID-19 and the acceleration of digital interaction

The political effervescence that was growing at the end of the decade was momentarily halted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. For several weeks, even months, the discourse of social mobilisations occurring outside of cyberspace in most, if not all, countries revolved around the spreading of a virus of which very little was known (Heiss, 2020).

But even this historical juncture was not exempt from the disinformation that is able to proliferate through social networks. Conspiracy theories of all kinds spread, while all kinds of remedies and preventions that lacked scientific basis were also recommended. Unfounded news stories triggered shortages of some products and collective panic in broad sectors of the population (Rocha *et al.,* 2021).

There are also cases of the regrettably inevitable politicisation of tragedy (Dai *et al.*, 2020), although opposition parties in various modern democracies were guilty of the same (Altiparmakis *et al.*, 2021).

When selecting our case studies from four countries in the Americas, Internet access was taken into account. We begin with the case of the United States, which has fairly wide access, with at least 80% of the population having an Internet connection. Next is Mexico, which has the largest Spanish-speaking community in the world. Finally we study the cases of Colombia and Chile. In the former, more than half of the population has access to the Internet (60%), while the latter has the smallest digital divide in the region (Pew Research Center, 2021; Gavira González, 2022; González, 2022; Zamarrón, 2023).

4. Case studies: presidential elections in the United States and Latin America

An emblematic case that ushered in a shift in political communication was the United States presidential elections in 2020. It is important to remember that the vote swayed in favour of Donald Trump, who was acquitted during impeachment proceedings, marking only the third time in the history of the United States that a trial of this nature was held (Jacobson, 2020).

The Democratic Party, meanwhile, was far from choosing its candidate. A record number put their name forward for nomination, but history would repeat itself, as the final choice would come down to Vermont State Senator Bernie Sanders and whoever could successfully challenge him, as in 2016. Sanders, a political veteran, used social media with great skill, as he had done in his previous election campaign. The COVID-19 pandemic erupted just before the Democratic Party decided on its representative in the upcoming presidential election (Altamura and Oliver, 2022).

Despite Donald Trump's strong footing in the polls at the start of the year, his mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to the perception that he could be defeated. In this regard, it is important to remember that the last US president who failed to win re-election was George H. Bush in 1992, 28 years earlier. In the end, various sectors of the Democratic Party realigned their support and joined the candidacy of Joe Biden to the detriment of Bernie Sanders, and the former vice president won the party's nomination (Bisbee and Honig, 2020).

This marked the beginning of the electoral campaign in the most powerful country—and one of the largest—in the world, a fact that has historically contributed to candidates having to launch strategically planned campaigns. As such, they usually prioritise swing states, those that could be won by either party, over those that they believe they will win with relative ease (Duquette *et al.*, 2017).

Since traditional rallies were either banned or severely limited in terms of their capacity, the campaign was mainly fought through the mass media, and, most notably, digital media. In fact, the traditional conventions at which each party nominates their presidential candidate were held online for the first time in history (Landman and Splendore, 2020).

On the other hand, the voting method was also the subject of fierce public debate. Voters could choose between voting by mail and in person. Given the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, an unprecedented proportion of voters were expected to opt for postal voting (Persily and Stewart III, 2021).

However, an interesting trend emerged that would complicate the electoral process: according to polls, Republican Party voters were more likely to vote in person, while their Democratic counterparts favoured postal voting. Before the campaign, there was speculation that the vote count could be somewhat distorted on election day, given that the first votes to be counted would put Donald Trump in the front seat. As it transpired, this was indeed the case (Clarke *et al.*, 2021).

Emotionally charged messages between supporters on both sides of the party divide also grew in number and intensity in an increasingly polarised climate (Chaudhry *et al.*, 2021). Despite the fact that the opinion polls tipped in favour of Joe Biden for almost the entire course of the campaign, President Donald Trump never contemplated the possibility of losing the election (Bender, 2021).

On election night the forecast was still mixed, but as the mail-in votes arrived and were counted, Joe Biden's advantage widened until it became insurmountable. Donald Trump ignored the results and claimed that election fraud had been committed (Wolff, 2021).

The post-election process opened up a rift between those who upheld the democratic institutions and those who considered themselves aggrieved by the alleged irregularities. Even President Trump himself began an online campaign to raise funds for his legal defence and to collect evidence of the supposed irregularities (Tollefson, 2021).

As Donald Trump repeated his claims of electoral fraud, the mass media chose to cut away from the president's live speech on the grounds that they would not cover attacks on democracy. Tension continued to grow and, despite the ongoing pandemic, in-person protests condemning the alleged fraud even popped up in various parts of the United States (Justwan and Williamson, 2022).

The situation reached its boiling point after angry Trump supporters, attending a rally called by the president during which he used incendiary rhetoric, attacked Washington, D.C.'s Capitol Building. Scenes of the president's supporters violently storming the Capitol were broadcast around the world (Moats, 2021). These events, among other things, resulted in Donald Trump's social media accounts being suspended (Hennig, 2021).

There are many conclusions that can be drawn from the 2020 presidential elections in terms of political communication and active civic participation. The first is that, as has been seen in the last decade, the social movements that were launched in the virtual realm did not gain visibility until they left cyberspace (Red, 2013).

Against the backdrop of the pandemic, it was clear that the political dispute could be largely resolved through digital media, with little participation in the streets. A notable exception, of course, is the protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd, which spread through the country's largest cities (Reny and Newman, 2021).

Similarly, by this time it was inconceivable for a political communication strategy to not be centred around digital media. At this point, the mass media were being discredited by broad sectors of society (Hmielowski *et al.*, 2022).

It was also evident that the narrative on matters of public interest was being disputed over social media. Millions of Americans were convinced that the election had been stolen from Trump, even though there was overwhelming evidence to suggest otherwise (Woodward and Costa, 2021). But once again, the digital media were effective in reinforcing the beliefs of the millions of users who argued that there were alleged irregularities (Aguado, 2022).

Another important takeaway is that in this case, it was not just the large traditional media consortia that adopted a position on the matter during the aftermath of the

elections; two of the largest social networks, X/Twitter and Facebook, decided to cancel the accounts of President Donald Trump, as mentioned above (Hobbs, 2021). Although they did so under the auspices of preventing the spreading of baseless opinions, their actions indicated their stance regarding the issue.

The year 2020 served as proof that cyberspace would be one of the main battlefields not just for subsequent electoral contests, but also for any regional or national power disputes that may take place. The following electoral processes that played out in the region confirmed this.

5. Mexico, 2021

The legislative elections in Mexico in 2021 stood out from those previously held in the country for a number of reasons. It is important to remember that Mexico's presidential term is the longest in the continent, with the winner leading the government for six years without the possibility of re-election. Meanwhile, the country's Chamber of Deputies holds elections every three years (Cruz, 2021).

The elections in question differed from those held before in that they coincided with the elections for 15 governors, the leading authority in each of the country's states. The electoral calendars, and the terms of a number of state governors, had been modified to make this possible. Almost half of the governorships were at stake, since Mexico has 32 states, making this an unprecedented event (Ahuja, 2021).

It is also true that the make-up of the political spectrum had changed drastically in the wake of the 2018 election. The ruling party, MORENA (National Regeneration Movement), only formally registered as a political party in 2014. Just four years later, in the 2018 presidential elections, it won more than half of the seats in the presidential election and a majority in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) achieved the worst results in its history, while the National Action Party also took a huge step backwards in terms of electoral support (Aragón Falomir *et al.*, 2019).

Although some contend that Mexico had already been highly polarised for a few years, political conflict increased significantly since Andrés Manuel López Obrador won the race for president. The president of Mexico holds a press conference every weekday morning in which he provides updates about his government; however, he often uses it as an opportunity to lash out at his critics and opponents (Andrade *et al.*, 2021).

Excerpts of the president's morning statements are shared by the public and private media, as well as via social media. Digital platforms in particular foster the intense exchange and spreading of information by both the president's supporters and detractors (Plascencia *et al.*, 2022).

The electoral process was complex not only because of the positions that were being disputed—as it would have ramifications on both the national and local level—but also because of the wide-ranging COVID-19 prevention measures that were in place at the time. Face-to-face events were restricted, with the use of digital means being favoured for that very reason (Bautista-San Juan, 2022).

An interesting aspect of the electoral contest was that the narrative established at the national level by the government and opposition parties was replicated somewhat on a regional level; however, in others, a regional logic prevailed, depending on the specific state. How exactly this played out was determined by the interaction between the political forces in each state. In other words, some gubernatorial elections replicated the same polarisation that was happening on a national scale, while a few states had a dynamic of their own (De la Garza, 2022).

Two historically antagonistic parties, the PRI and the PAN, unexpectedly decided to join forces, alongside the PRD, in an attempt to prevent MORENA from building on its majority. They also created coalitions in several (although not all) disputed states in order to prevent MORENA from triumphing all over the country (Yáñez, 2022).

If we look at the ruling party, the electoral strategy was implicitly defined by the president himself. At the morning conferences, he confronted the opposition, including the electoral authorities, and argued in favour of continuing the alleged transformation he was spearheading. In most cases, candidates of the MORENA-led coalition in both the deputies and municipal elections, including those for governor, sought to align their elections pledges with the discourse and platform of President López Obrador (Espino, 2021; Estrada, 2022).

The political communication employed by the opposition, on the other hand, was much more varied, in theory because the coalition was not all-encompassing. Although the coalition was strong in most of the disputed districts and states, part of the media time set aside for it was used to promote each of the parties that formed it. In addition, in other states in which they were not in coalition, they ended up competing with one other. The only message that they managed to transmit loud and clear was that they wanted to prevent a total victory for MORENA (Palma, 2021).

The participation of Movimiento Ciudadano, a party that hoped to finish third by taking advantage of the discord between the ruling party and the opposition coalition, is also noteworthy. Its main goal was (and is) to convey messages of a social-democratic tone, while establishing an identity that diverged from the populism of MORENA and that did not carry the burden of having already held office, as was the case with the other opposition parties (Noyola Rodríguez, 2022).

Both the incumbent party and the opposition leveraged social media to promote their candidates, comment on different aspects of the elections and share news with which they had some degree of affinity. Digital journalism also took on a prominent role (Falomir and Lucca, 2020).

Given the ongoing elections, it is clear that any new communicators who emerged on digital platforms would either support the government or oppose it. In fact, one

could say that few new voices appeared in these new media that were unaffected by the polarisation that had come to be a key feature of Mexican politics (Gómez and Ochoa, 2021).

Finally, the election results revealed that both the opposition and the government performed similarly. On the one hand, the ruling party lost several seats in the Chamber of Deputies, although it held onto a simple majority that would be enough for it to pass secondary laws but not to make changes to the Constitution without the support of other political forces. Despite this ambivalent outcome, its greatest success was winning 11 of the 15 disputed governor elections (Bravo Regidor, 2021).

The opposition coalition was a complete failure on the state level, as it lost practically all elections in which the PRI, PAN and PRD ran together. The National Action Party managed to win the states of Querétaro and Chihuahua alone, while Movimiento Ciudadano won in the pivotal state of Nuevo León. The Green Party successfully defeated MORENA in the state of San Luis Potosí, but at the national level the two parties continued to form a coalition, so even this was seen as a victory for the ruling party (Varela *et al.*, 2021).

However, the most unexpected defeat for the ruling party came in what they thought was a stronghold, Mexico City, where MORENA lost most of the boroughs it contested. It also lost several local and federal offices that it thought were safe (Cota, 2021).

It is hard to say whether the pandemic hindered voting in the 2021 legislative elections. On the one hand, voter turnout was higher than in previous midterm elections, although it was 10% lower than that recorded during the 2018 presidential elections (Vallejo, 2021).

However, the most dire predictions of those who suspected that the electoral process would not be able to go ahead never came to fruition. The National Electoral Institute (INE) ensured that the elections went smoothly, and reports of anomalies were lower than in past years.

6. Chile and Colombia

The elections in Chile in 2021 and in Colombia in 2022 were characterised by a deep desire for change that had manifested itself in the streets in previous years. In both cases the traditional parties had been replaced by new representatives from both the left and the right (Martínez and Olivares, 2022), and they both occurred during the pandemic years, even though preventive measures had relaxed somewhat with respect to 2020.

Chile witnessed insurrectionary protests that had the goal of calling for a constitutional convention. As such, the 2021 presidential election was significant, largely because the winner would have the opportunity to lead the administration that implemented the approved Constitution (Dulci and Sadivia, 2021).

The selection process within the different political forces was more complex than in previous elections. The traditional Concertación coalition and right-wing parties had seen their influence diminish over time (Titelman, 2021). Therefore, there was a distinct possibility from the outset that the future president would be chosen from among the ranks of a movement or political group different from those that had governed the country since its transition to democracy.

Seemingly as a sign that the Chilean election would be a fascinating one, the primaries held by coalitions on the left and the right produced unexpected results. Gabriel Boric, who rose to prominence following the 2011 social movement known as the Chilean Winter, prevailed over the favourite, Daniel Jadue, representing the Communist Party. Meanwhile, in the traditional right-wing coalition between National Renewal and the UDI (Independent Democratic Union), Sebastián Sichel Ramírez defeated Joaquín Lavín, who was considered to be the favourite (Montes, 2021).

In these primaries, an interesting fact was that at least five candidates earned over a 10% share of the vote. The candidate who won the first round, José Antonio Kast, did so with just over 27% of the votes, while Gabriel Boric, from the Apruebo Dignidad (Approve Dignity) coalition, also advanced to the second round (Paul, 2021).

The two candidates made extensive use of social media to help strengthen their messages. Gabriel Boric knew the importance of the medium; earlier in his life he had been a student leader, leveraging online platforms to promote his message and recruit followers to his cause. José Antonio Kast was no stranger to the potential that social media presented either, using it to unite a radical group of followers, which helped propel him from also-ran status in 2017 to having a serious chance of winning the presidency in the following elections (Adetunji, 2021).

Eventually it was the young Gabriel Boric who would win the second round by a wide margin. These pandemic-era elections ushered in the displacement of traditional political forces, the demonstration of greater political plurality in the country and new coalitions capable of catapulting a candidate into office (Honorato and Rubiños Cea, 2021).

Colombia's 2022 elections followed a similar pattern. Discontent at the polls spilt out into the streets. In this case, Gustavo Petro, who led a coalition called the Historical Pact (Riera Bosqued, 2021), ran for the third time. Politicians from traditional coalitions also stood as candidates:

Gustavo Petro and Rodolfo Hernández both made it to the second round. The latter ran as an independent and surprised many by beating the traditional right's candidate, Federico Gutiérrez. Both Petro and Hernández took advantage of the excellent possibilities offered by social media. Petro sought to put forward an image of moderation in a country that had traditionally feared the left. Hernández, on the other hand, hoped to connect with a younger electorate (Franco, 2021).

The second round was a lot closer than the first. Rodolfo Hernández's candidacy received support from members of the traditional political forces who were wary of the arrival of Gustavo Petro, while the latter boasted the ability to unite both the left and discontented citizens.

As in the Chilean elections, the traditional political class experienced a setback in the second round. The dissatisfaction that had been manifested on the Internet and in the real word ended up provoking a change of government. In the end, the results favoured Gustavo Petro, something that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

7. Conclusions

Table 1
Particular context and shared features of the selected case studies

Case study	Particular context	Common features
United States	Presidential elections in the first year of the pandemic	Strategic use of social media in electoral campaigns. Digital media acts as a channel of expression and activation for society. Political and social polarisation in cyberspace.
Mexico	Midterm elections (national) in the second year of the pandemic	
Chile	Presidential elections (internal, and first and second rounds) in the second year of the pandemic	
Colombia	Presidential elections in the third year of the pandemic	

Source: own research (2023).

The beginning of the new decade validated the trends that had emerged in previous years. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments from across the political spectrum enacted social distancing measures. But even at the peak of confinement, the wheels of politics continued to turn.

The struggle for power, especially in elections, called for the use of technology to unite citizens at times when physical contact was scarce. That being said, the pandemic, even with all the tragedy it entailed, did not bring about the chaos that some initially predicted. And even when there were strong social movements in the countries examined in this article, political power was achieved through institutional means.

However, it is also true that much of the discussion on public affairs became strident if not downright toxic. Social media gave shape to various movements and allowed people to rally around certain issues, but it also reinforced technopopulisms that revolved around a discourse that was equal parts exclusionary and anti-democratic.

It is also important to mention that the rise of social media coincided with a moment in history when broad segments of society began to question the *status quo* and the powers that be. It has been a stomping ground for organising dissent since the early 2010s, and this trend has only further consolidated itself over the years.

Although it initially impacted public life sporadically, as we mentioned, over time cyberspace became a key battleground given that most current disputes are resolved there. Whether this reality actually contributed to creating better governments or solutions for citizens is the subject of another debate, but the COVID-19 pandemic very possibly contributed to accelerating a trend that had been clearly demonstrated for some time.

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ARTICLE/ARTÍCULO

Big Data in Social Sciences. An Introduction to the Automation of Textual Data Analysis Using Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning

Big data en ciencias sociales. Una introducción a la automatización de análisis de datos de texto mediante procesamiento de lenguaje natural y aprendizaje automático

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ABSTRACT

Innovations in the field of computer engineering and artificial intelligence provide new methodological opportunities for scientific research, giving rise to the study of emerging social phenomena that are born in and inhabit virtual spaces. The purpose of this paper is to familiarise the social scientist with the widely established processes in massive text analysis using machine learning techniques that give rise to what we know today as natural language processing (NLP). First, a brief overview of the history of NLP and its relation to text analysis in the social sciences is given. Then, in each section of the text, the steps to follow when applying NLP to social research are assessed, providing information on software, tools, data sources and useful links, with the aim of offering an introductory and simplified guide to serve as an initial approach to this discipline. Finally, the main challenges that the social sciences face when implementing NLP techniques are examined and assessed.

HOW TO REFERENCE: Taboada Villamarín, A. (2024). *Big data* en ciencias sociales. Una introducción a la automatización de análisis de datos de texto mediante procesamiento de lenguaje natural y aprendizaje automático. *Revista Centra de Ciencias Sociales*, 3(1), 51–75. https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.51

The Spanish (original) version can be read at https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.51

RESUMEN

Las innovaciones en el campo de la ingeniería computacional y la inteligencia artificial brindan nuevas oportunidades metodológicas para la investigación científica, permitiendo el estudio de fenómenos sociales emergentes que nacen y habitan en los espacios virtuales. El propósito de este trabajo es familiarizar al científico social con los procesos ampliamente establecidos en el análisis masivo de texto mediante técnicas de aprendizaje automático que dan lugar a lo que hoy conocemos como procesamiento de lenguaje natural (PLN). En primer lugar, se lleva a cabo un breve recorrido por la historia del PLN y su relación con el análisis de texto en las ciencias sociales. Luego, en cada sección del texto, se valoran los pasos a seguir cuando se aplica PLN a investigaciones de carácter social, proporcionando información sobre programas informáticos, herramientas, fuentes de datos y enlaces útiles, con el propósito de ofrecer una guía introductoria y simplificada que sirva como acercamiento inicial a esta disciplina. Por último, se examinan y evalúan los principales desafíos que las ciencias sociales enfrentan al implementar técnicas de PLN.

PALABRAS CLAVE: datos masivos; procesamiento de lenguaje natural; ciencias sociales; aprendizaje automático, minería de texto.

1. Introduction: big data applied to the social sciences. Natural language processing (NLP)

Natural language processing (NLP) refers to the branch of computational sciences that, combined with linguistics, enables certain computer systems to process and "understand" human language (Bird, Klein and Loper, 2009). Language, in the form of written text, constitutes a primary source of human documentation of great importance in social research contexts. Text analysis has developed greatly, incorporating numerous research techniques and methodological tools that have made it possible to refine the use of this information, both as a primary and secondary data source, especially in the field of qualitative approaches.

However, the importance of the text as a unit of analysis is a concept shared by a number of branches of knowledge. Computational science has demonstrated a growing interest in automating and developing machines that are capable of bridging the gap between human language and "machine language". Parallel efforts have been made in the two disciplines to extract substantive information from text corpora, a process known as text mining (Justicia de la Torre *et al.*, 2018), resulting in certain points of convergence that are decisive for bringing about methodological advances in social research.

The specialised literature suggests that the need to develop machines capable of performing automatic text translations in various languages arose as a result of the outbreak of the Cold War, with Russian to English translation being most prominent. In response to this demand, the first symbolic textual analysis systems using machines started to emerge (Johri *et al.*, 2021). Meanwhile, although text analysis had already consolidated itself in the fields of anthropology and sociology, towards the end of the Second World War,

the Chicago School's pioneering works examining the relationship between migrants and soldiers took on a methodological significance (Abbott, 1997). At that time, the systematisation of textual data analysis, both from primary and secondary sources, required considerable effort in terms of labelling, organisation and text management. This manual work led to the development of various methodological branches that to this day determine the different methods of analysis used in qualitative research.

In its early stages, natural language processing grounded its work in Chomsky's theory of syntactic structures, which was strongly criticised by other linguists (see Radick, 2016; Hockett, 2020). Its detractors argued that human language involves complexities that go far beyond the association rules and comparative models that played such a vital role during the nascent years of computational logic. This argument, which continues to this day, shifted in favour of the machines as a result of the advances made in computing following the incorporation of statistical calculations in machine-based human language processing for the very first time (Bitter *et al.*, 2010). These developments made it possible to address the peculiar and variable characteristics of human language, overcoming the limitations of approaches based solely on syntactic rules.

This paradigm shift culminated in the 1990s, coinciding with the growth of telecommunications and the widespread use of personal computers, shaping what we currently know as the information society (Castells, 1997). The "statistical stage" increased the complexity of text analysis, leading to the launch of the first computer programs specialising in qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS), such as ATLAS.Ti (1993) and NVivo (1999). Thanks to these developments, it was now feasible to carry out text tagging tasks in a semi-automated manner for the first time. Word counting and frequency calculations encouraged the development of approaches such as content analysis and techniques that bordered on mixed analysis and triangulation.

From the first rudimentary techniques to the present day, the information society has undergone significant changes that have set a new stage for NLP and, therefore, opened up the possibility for further advances in textual analysis methods and techniques in social research. Developments in the field of ICT—which led to the creation of new social, scientific and technical models—have brought about three main challenges.

Firstly, intense competition in the international market, due to the inclusion of economies from the East and the Global South, has resulted in an unprecedented reduction in material costs in the technology industry. As a consequence, telecommunications structures have expanded and become more interconnected, turning them into the backbone of the virtual society. Secondly, advances in areas such as computing, applied mathematics, statistics and robotics have imbued these interconnections with intelligence, giving rise to what we know as artificial intelligence. This artificial intelligence moves away from the classic approach to computing based on action and reaction, and instead adopts interactive models that

are capable of generating multiple responses to a wide variety of inputs. Lastly, the central element that feeds these two infrastructures—and is influenced by them—is what we call big data.

On a global scale, a growing interest in research of this object of study can be seen. From the perspective of social scientists, big data refers to all parts of the digital footprint generated as a result of interactions between humans, between humans and machines, and between machines in the virtual realm. Previous research (Gualda *et al.*, 2023) has highlighted that text analysis has become one of the most popular methodological approaches when combining big data technologies with the social sciences. This is mainly due to the fact that a considerable percentage of digital footprints are stored as text.

The world wide web continuously records thousands of interactions that occur on platforms such as social networks, personal blogs, websites, instant messaging services and digital forums. This information is a reflection of new narratives, discourses, social representations, interactions and relationships that transpire both in online and offline settings, contributing to phenomena that are characteristic of our contemporaneity, such as the spreading of false news, hate speech, viral trends, polarisation of information, distrust in democratic and scientific establishments, virtual relationships and networks of influence, among others.

While the exploration of new forms of socialisation and their structures is of utmost importance to social research, scientists frequently come up against a number of issues when trying to access these new realities. The problems often posed by these types of data include managing large volumes of information, the dizzying speed with which they are generated, the unstructured format in which they are stored and questions related to their extraction and ownership (Gillingham and Graham, 2017; Gualda and Rebollo, 2020). In addition, the lack of interdisciplinary teams and knowledge of the available tools place considerable constraints on this type of research.

In the context of text analysis, the statistical focus has been replaced by neural networks and machine learning, which, upon further inspection, seems to permit more complex analyses while being more straightforward to apply. For this reason, this work strives to reduce the technical deficiencies that are currently evident in the social sciences and encourage us to explore resources that bring us closer to emerging social problems and build bridges with other disciplines and objects of study.

The following pages provide an introduction to the steps required to apply natural language processing (NLP) to research. Practical information is provided on the procedures and resources used to carry out these analyses, including available text data sources, information extraction techniques, and data cleaning and processing, as well as the main types of analyses that can be performed. Finally, the greatest challenges that the social sciences face when implementing NLP techniques will be examined.

2. Computer programs for working with natural language or mining digital texts

When seeking to analyse big data or data from digital sources, it is common to resort to software and programming environments that are not traditionally part of a social scientist's training. However, advances in computing and data analysis have simplified the complexity of programming, making it more accessible to all types of users.

New programming tools have taken a leap forward by revolutionising the way in which we analyse data. On the one hand, it is commonplace to open source software with environments and extensions that can be downloaded free of charge, and which often boast a virtual community that constantly shares information and resources. On the other hand, such software is able to process and apply statistical calculations much quicker, providing greater autonomy and control when refining algorithms. It is also able to handle larger volumes of data and can easily connect to various digital sources and resources. In addition, these approaches incorporate innovative predictive statistical techniques which were not previously available in traditional statistical computer programs.

There are currently two predominant approaches to natural language processing that can be chosen, depending on whether the researcher wants to use a programming language or a computer program with a user interface that does not require any code to be implemented. The latter approach is a more accessible alternative for researchers who lack knowledge in computer science, but who still wish to apply these kinds of analyses.

The two most recognised and widely adopted programming languages in the field of data analysis are R (The R Project for Statistical Computing) and Python. Both are high-level programming languages that have a more accessible syntax that is more similar to that of human language rather than machine language. The R programming language is commonly used with the RStudio integrated development environment, and there are several free courses and manuals for beginners available. Social researchers often favour the R programming language because of its greater statistical analysis and data visualisation potential. Different codes that can be easily applied to different types of data have been shared widely on the Internet. With Python, on the other hand, the use of the Jupyter Notebook environment is recommended, which gives users an interactive way to run code. Python offers many possibilities for both statistical and visualisation purposes. If we compare both languages in terms of their data analysis capabilities, R and Python have similar features, although Python is more widely used by data scientists.

For those who choose not to use programming languages, a wide variety of computer programs can be used to run the same algorithms without having to write code. This article proposes two completely free computer programs that are growing in popularity in the academic community: Orange Data Mining and RapidMiner. They

can both be downloaded locally onto a personal computer, and their respective websites offer short video tutorials for performing a wide variety of analyses.

3. Textual data sources

As already mentioned, natural language processing (NLP) techniques and methods are applied by analysing units of text or words written in human language. These texts are of a considerably wide variety and origin, since they can come from any number of sources where speech or writing is used. However, in order to use text mining techniques, the data must be in digital format. Under this premise, original text data sources and resources involving human language fall under one of three categories, based on their nature and the context in which they were created, each of which involves different procedures and considerations: 1. Analogue text, 2. Transcribed audiovisual text and 3. Digital text.

3.1. Text from analogue files

First of all, we have analogue resources, i.e., all classical and historical texts that were written by hand or typewritten and have been printed but are not yet digitised. Examples of these are historical archives on cities, correspondences between royals and officials, manuscripts and certificates. In social sciences these are classified as secondary data sources and are frequently used in fields such as history, philology and anthropology, although they are also highly valuable in any line of research wherein the goal is to study a specific historical moment or recover information pre-dating the use of computers.

These types of resources have enormous potential when NLP methods and techniques are applied. The only drawback, however, is that they must have previously been digitised in order to be used for this purpose. In fact, most of the pioneering projects that laid the foundations of the digital humanities centred around digitising historical sources (Piotrowski, 2012). Thanks to this, nowadays there are numerous open databases that can be used by researchers from all over the world free of charge. What's more, in the event that the text they are searching for is not found in these databases, there are highly effective tools available that allow them to digitise them. These types of resources can also be of great value for machine learning and for understanding specific language types at specific points in time.

"Culturomics" (Michel *et al.*, 2011) was one of the first experiences that achieved widespread success, leveraging the 15 million books digitised by Google—currently available on the Google Books service—to create a database of more than 500 billion words from books written between the years 1500 and 2008, and which has recently been updated with words from up to 2019. The underlying purpose of this project was to generate a kind of "digital collective memory" that could be consulted to find out more about the use of words and linguistic resources throughout history.

In a similar vein, numerous sources of historical texts can be found, such as databases containing newspapers from several decades ago, permitting researchers to inquire about specific events from the past. However, before these texts can be used online, they must first be processed in order to store them in a file format that is compatible with programming languages. One of the most common options is to save them as plain text files, commonly known by their extension ".txt".

3.2. Text from audiovisual files

Next we have texts that are transcriptions of audiovisual media. As is often the case in qualitative research, researchers may wish to work with texts acquired from voice or audio notes, songs, television scripts, radio programmes or conversations that take place in offline settings. For these examples, as long as the transcript is stored as a digital version, the NLP processing tools are equally valid.

Of particular use in this regard are resources that automatically convert audiovisual files to digital text, such as the free tools offered by Zoom and Google Docs. Once the text file has been obtained, the next step, as in the case of analogue resources, is to convert it into a format that is compatible with the computer program that is going to be used. The most commonly used formats are plain text files with the ".txt" extension, JavaScript Object Notation with the extension ".json" and Comma Separated Values files with the ".csv" extension. Occasionally, these files may first need to be structured by the researcher.

3.3. Text from digital files

Lastly are digital texts that can be found on Web 2.0. These are texts that have been originally written online and are either fully or partially accessible in the virtual realm. In natural language processing, these resources are widely used because of their diversity, quantity and ease of access. These characteristics, combined with the classic attributes of large datasets, make digital resources the most suitable for process automation and computational textual analysis. These types of texts are available as both secondary and primary data sources for research purposes, although in such digital texts there is also an abundance of unsolicited data (Ruelens, 2022).

The digital resources that store information that can be exploited through natural language processing (NLP) techniques are mainly found in the following areas: 1. Social media, 2. Opinion blogs and virtual forums, 3. Websites, 4. Online newspapers, 5. Scientific databases and online encyclopaedias, 6. Search engine tools and 7. Instant messaging apps. In most of these cases, the data are not specifically oriented to a determined research project; it is the responsibility of the researcher to gather the information and make it relevant to their objectives. However, some

of these resources may be primary data sources, as they can be used to create texts in particular digital environments. One of the most commonly used methods are structured interviews conducted in instant messaging applications such as Gmail and Outlook. There are also cases of researchers posing a question in a virtual forum and subsequently analysing the answers written by users (see examples in Dahlin, 2021; Holtz *et al.*, 2012; Murthy, 2008).

4. Mechanism for selecting and extracting information

Once the source or repository that houses the relevant data for the research has been identified, the next step involves downloading and storing said data. The procedure and means for extracting them largely depend on two key elements: firstly, the type of access granted to these data; and secondly, the platform or computer program used to analyse and exploit the text.

Regarding the type of access, the information to be extracted can be found in different types of domains: 1) private, wherein to access the data you must request permission from the owner, pay a fee or be the owner of the domain or a member of a specific community; 2) semi-private, as is the case when data owners offer application programming interfaces (APIs) that allow partial access to the data; or 3) open, wherein the data are completely public and available for download and use by anybody who is interested.

4.1. Download via API

Application programming interfaces (APIs) are a way of accessing software that allows external users to extract specific information (Qiu, 2017). In essence, an API serves as a communication key provided by the owners of the computer program, allowing users to directly access and obtain certain types of information. There are always access limitations depending on the permissions granted by the owner, although, in most cases, APIs grant the necessary permissions to extract the information required for the research.

A major advantage of working with APIs is the direct and established link between the computer program the information is requested from and the computer program that makes the request, as they use specific codes that remain the same. This streamlines the process of querying and extracting information. However, one of the drawbacks of using APIs is the need to obtain access and authentication keys, which can only be provided by the owners, meaning that requests may not necessarily be authorised. Lastly, APIs can either be used free of charge or for a fee. Links to free APIs for the main social media networks are provided in Appendix 1.

4.2. Web scraping

The practice known as web scraping refers to the process of extracting information from web pages by using software or programming code (Vilkova, 2020). The information obtained via this method is an exact replica of what is written in the domain that has been accessed, and the process is generally carried out in an automated manner using robots that simulate human behaviour on the website. This technique can be applied to various types of websites, social networks and even search engine results.

A significant advantage of web scraping compared to APIs is that it does not require a prior request for access, which makes it possible to perform on virtually any web page. However, this technique also presents additional challenges and requires more complex code. Although there are applications and websites that offer the ability to perform web scraping without the need to write code, these are usually paid-for computer programs or they offer only a limited free period. In the area of social research, web scraping could prove useful in order to gain access to opinion platforms and extract information from blogs and forums that cannot be accessed via an API.

4.3. Direct file download

The most practical and convenient option is to use data sources that allow you to download files directly. In such cases, the domain owner provides a user-friendly interface that allows you to specify search filters and manually download data in various formats. However, it is common to encounter limitations when it comes to downloading information due to the limited capacity of the servers. When researchers need to download large datasets, it is recommended to look for APIs that establish a direct connection with the data, as they are able to generate automated queries.

It is important to also consider the type of format in which the data is made available. In the case of files stored as Excel spreadsheets, the information can be handled easily as long as it does not exceed one million records (Microsoft, 2022). However, when the project at hand involves working with large amounts of data, it is advisable to store the information in formats such as comma-separated values (.csv) or in JavaScript object notation (.json), which contain data in a machine-readable format based on key-value pairs. When the data is only available for download in a digital document format like PDF (portable document format), it is recommended to convert the file to plain text.

5. Cleaning and preparing texts for analysis

Once the data has been stored properly, the next step is to clean and prepare the text, which will make it easier to perform analyses later on. In the field of data science, this is a vital and time-consuming step when working with large datasets. Properly cleaning the data helps ensure the satisfactory performance of the algorithms applied and, therefore, the quality and veracity of the results (Bird *et al.*, 2009). In the specific case of NLP, the chosen strategy mostly depends on the degree of complexity of the analysis to be applied. However, there are two unavoidable actions in textual data processing regardless of the tools used and our objectives.

5.1. Removing stop words

The first step involves excluding what are known as "*stop words*". Human language, in general, is characterised by the presence of connectors and auxiliary words that give coherence and continuity to communication. However, the main ideas and meaning of sentences are found in nouns, adjectives, verbs, and in some cases adverbs, which contain the substance of what we are trying to express or communicate. In text mining, the aim is to simplify the content and keep it homogeneous. To do this, the whole text is converted to lower case and all external links—such as hyperlinks—emoticons and similar characters are removed, if there are any.

Secondly, stop words, such as conjunctions (and, nor, but, same as, because, etc.) and prepositions (to, before, under, near, with, against, of, etc.), are also eliminated. Usually, statistical packages for natural language processing incorporate this function, automatically deleting any stop words. Even so, it is advisable to carry out some kind of test to find out which other words that are not included in the generic dictionaries are of little value to the corpus.

After carrying out the initial cleaning process, a word frequency analysis can be performed in order to identify irrelevant concepts. However, the number of words deleted must be kept to a minimum in order to preserve the integrity of the original information. The exclusion of these words during the subsequent cleaning stage should be clearly documented in the methodology section, providing adequate justification for the decisions made by the researcher. See Figure 1 for an illustrative example of how text is presented after automated cleaning.

Figure 1
Example of automated text cleaning with the Python NLTK library

Texto original:

"Existing big datasets of biological data brings a big challenge for the traditional computational algorithms. To have a better understanding of complex biological networks and existing relationships among the components, network models have been using for a long time." (Alinejad-Rokny, 2016).

Texto tras limpieza automática:

"existing big datasets biological data   brings big challenge traditional computational algorithms better understanding complex biological networks existing relationships among components network models using long time".

Source: own research.

5.2. Tokenisation and dictionary creation

The next step is to tokenise the text. Tokenisation is the process by which text is broken down into unique words or sentences (Saleem *et al.*, 2021). Its purpose is to reduce the text corpus down to the smallest unit size that will be processed as a single piece of data. Continuing with the previous example, the text can be fragmented into unique words known as unigrams so that the first sentence received by the machine will look as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Example of automated sentence tokenisation by unigram

Tokenización de frase mediante uni-grams:

["existing", "big", "datasets", "biological", "data", "brings", "big", "challenge", "traditional", "computational", "algorithms"].

Source: own research using the Python NLTK library.

It may also be an interesting idea to combine two words for the minimum unit, as this offers greater context for the words analysed. Word pair fragments are known as bigrams. Figure 3 shows an example of this type of tokenisation.

Figure 3

Example of automated sentence tokenisation by bigram

Tokenización de frase mediante bi-grams:

["existing big", "big datasets", " dataset biological", "biological data", "data brings", "brings big", "big challenge", " challenge traditional", "traditional computational", "computational algorithms"].

Source: own research using the Python NLTK library.

The most traditional tokenisation methods are by unigrams and bigrams, as shown above in the examples. However, tokenisation is possible by sets of as many words as desired, also known as "n-grams" (Saleem *et al.*, 2021). The final choice of number of words to group together will depend on the type of the corpus we are working with. In addition, performing analyses on different degrees of tokenisation will allow us to compare and give consistency to the results. Tokenisation is an automated process. In general, the software or code allows you to decide the number of grams by which you wish to tokenise the text.

Finally, these "tokens" will be transformed into numerical language, converting them into vectors in order for the machine to be able to count and perform calculations with the words. The vectorisation process can be carried out with multiple libraries and statistical packages, and we must find the transformation that best suits our specific needs. In this step it is important to consider the amount of text, our hard drive's computational capacity and its speed. This vectorisation will create a dictionary that, to put it simply, assigns each token a unique number, followed by a second number that indicates the number of times that this token is repeated in the sentence. In the example below, the word "existing" is assigned the number 1, the word "big" is assigned the number 2, and so on.

Figure 4

Example of dictionary creation

Frase 1. "existing", "big", "datasets", "biological", "data", "brings", "big", "challenge", "traditional", computational", "algorithms"

De modo que el diccionario se vería de la siguiente forma:

Entrada 1. (1,1), (2,2), (3,1), (4,1), (5,1), (6,1), (7,1), (8,1), (9,1) (10,1)

*Véase que en el caso de "big" 2, se le añade el recuento de dos ya que aparece dos veces en la frase.

Source: own research using the NLTK library.

6. Application of algorithms using machine learning techniques for text analysis

Machine learning is the branch of artificial intelligence where computational engineering meets mathematical statistics (James *et al.*, 2013). The main difference between this and classical programming is that until now the machine's actions were determined by a computer programmer, who was responsible for establishing a specific rule assigning a determined output to each input. Machine learning, on the other hand, allows the machine to learn the various inputs and outputs by itself, enabling it to generate new output patterns without there necessarily being prior programming (Müller and Guido, 2016). This type of engineering is what has made it possible for computer-based natural language processing to increase the complexity of textual analyses, refining the lexical variation and simplifying its multiple relationships, and bringing machines ever closer to the way humans use language.

As already mentioned, textual data analysis has long been used in the social sciences. This type of data is generally used in qualitative or mixed approaches, which in turn have gone on to form different methodological approaches. The objective of the research, as well as the medium and nature of the data, condition which type of analysis is chosen. However, most authors with experience in this field agree that the qualitative data analysis and, therefore, most text analyses, must necessarily involve two aspects: "data management and interpretation" (Gibbs, 2012, p. 23).

Data management serves to classify, label, order and reorganise the information, a vital step that will help establish the fundamental methodology of its subsequent interpretation. At present, this first "administrative" phase is carried out with the help of private computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), such as ATLAS.Ti and NVivo, combined with the researchers' theoretical criteria. Although these programs have undergone great developments in recent years, many of their limitations can be overcome using NLP techniques and machine learning tools.

Machine learning techniques offer a number of possibilities when it comes to managing large text corpora or unstructured datasets, which also opens up new opportunities for using such data when performing statistical analyses, such as correlations and time series. These techniques are not only able to be used for classical content analyses or categorisation, which focus on quantitative approaches, but they also facilitate the development of discursive analyses by uncovering key patterns and concepts in voluminous and complex datasets. Ultimately, the choice of one tool over another will depend on the nature of the research and its objectives, as well as whether or not the researcher wishes to triangulate data and contrast methods and results.

Machine learning, in turn, branches into two types of learning based on the characteristics of the data (inputs) that the researcher uses and the intended actions that the researcher wishes to perform with the obtained results (outputs). In the

case of categorising or classifying data lacking associated information, unsupervised learning is used. On the other hand, when a portion of the labelled data is available and we wish to predict the labels of future observations, supervised learning is used. The distinguishing features of each learning approach are described below, as well as the main types of analyses that can be carried out (see Figure 5).

Figure 5
Main types of text analyses using machine learning
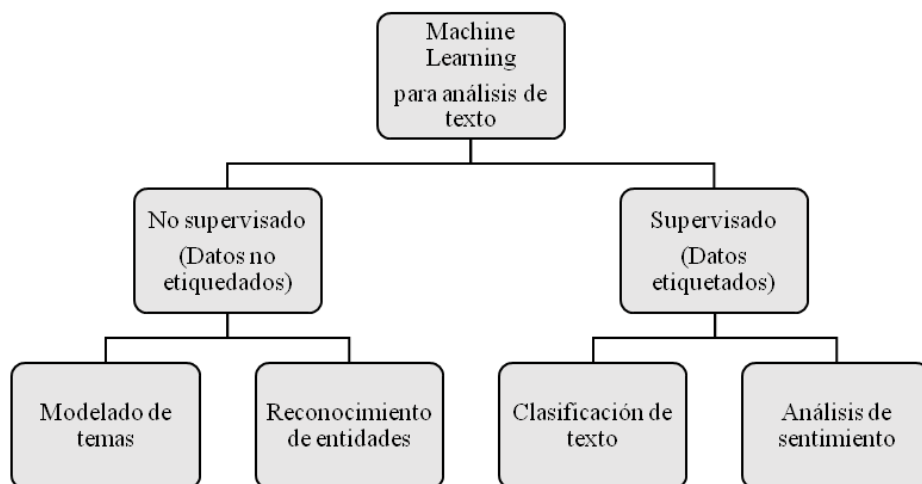
Source: own research.

6.1. Unsupervised learning

Unsupervised learning is employed when working with unlabelled data, in other words, data that are not classified or that have previous responses associated with each piece of data or observation. The goal of this approach is to group observations based on their similarity or to perform entity recognition using statistical distance calculations. In doing so, the machine unveils patterns that cannot be seen by the naked eye (Müller and Guido, 2016). This methodology is especially useful for analysing textual data, since it allows us to gain a first look at corpora that are not classified or that lack prior information regarding their content.

Among the many examples we find in the current literature are works in which these approaches are used to discover the discourses and narratives found on social networks, as well as to carry out massive reviews of the literature. One example is the work conducted by Lindstedt (2019) in which unsupervised learning was applied in order to identify the main topics investigated in the literature related to social movements between 2005 and 2017. Another is the research carried out by Pavlova

and Berkers (2020), the objective of which was to analyse the discourses on mental health present on the social network X/Twitter.

6.1.1. Topic modelling

Topic modelling is a text analysis technique based on unsupervised machine learning that is widely used in text mining (Nikolenko *et al.*, 2017), the purpose of which is to discover the statistically significant topics found in the texts analysed in order, as in the examples mentioned above, to be able to obtain substantial generalised information regarding a set of texts.

This technique can be implemented using various algorithms, with latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) being the most widely used in the scientific literature. LDA groups together the most frequent words based on their similarity. However, recent research comparing the performance of different algorithms has revealed the limitations of LDA. In recent years, the BERTopic algorithm has been proposed as a promising alternative, although it has yet to be widely adopted in social science work (Egger and Yu, 2022).

Regardless of the algorithm used, through topic modelling we can classify texts grouped by similarity and differentiated from one other by distance, while we also obtain a series of keywords from each group which, depending on the researcher's criteria, must be given a descriptive name based on the set of words in question.

Figure 6
Example of output from the LDA algorithm applied to a text corpus

```
[(0,
  '0.028*"collaborative" + 0.028*"recommendation" + 0.024*"system" + '
  '0.023*"filtering" + 0.022*"user" + 0.017*"base" + 0.017*"algorithm" + '
  '0.016*"datum" + 0.012*"recommender" + 0.011*"method"'),
 (1,
  '0.019*"system" + 0.015*"recommendation" + 0.014*"model" + 0.013*"base" + '
  '0.011*"use" + 0.010*"collaborative" + 0.010*"user" + 0.009*"image" + '
  '0.009*"algorithm" + 0.009*"content"'),
 (2,
  '0.024*"datum" + 0.012*"review" + 0.012*"research" + 0.011*"literature" + '
  '0.011*"quality" + 0.011*"model" + 0.010*"analysis" + 0.010*"management" + '
  '0.010*"use" + 0.008*"study"'),
 (3,
  '0.026*"analysis" + 0.026*"research" + 0.015*"social" + 0.010*"datum" + '
  '0.010*"study" + 0.009*"network" + 0.009*"technology" + 0.009*"use" + '
  '0.007*"information" + 0.007*"bibliometric"'),
 (4,
  '0.014*"datum" + 0.013*"system" + 0.012*"study" + 0.011*"analytic" + '
  '0.009*"learn" + 0.008*"research" + 0.008*"information" + 0.008*"management" '
  '+ 0.007*"collaboration" + 0.007*"decision"')]
```

Source: own research in Python Jupyter Notebook.

Figure 6 shows a concrete example illustrating the results of applying latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) analysis to a text corpus composed of various investigations in the fields of business and technology. This specific case was implemented using the Python programming language in the Jupyter Notebook environment by using the Gensim library. However, as summarised in Table 1, it is feasible to carry out this procedure in a number of environments and even to use the software mentioned in Section 2 without requiring prior programming knowledge.

Figure 7

Example of a graphical view of the LDA algorithm
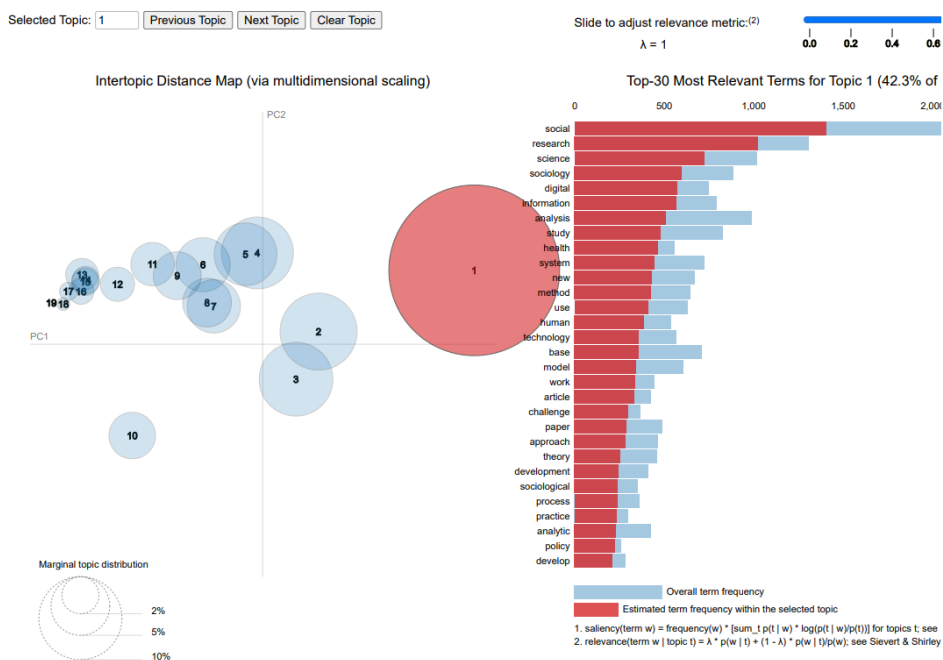
Source: own research using the Python pyLDAvis library.

Figure 7 shows a way of viewing this algorithm using the pyLDAvis library. This tool allows us to gain a better understanding of how clusters and topics are distributed, as well as the most relevant words associated with each of them. The next step is to extract the information and, based on a study of a sample of the texts selected for each group, make thematic deductions and assign a name to each cluster.

6.1.2. Character or entity recognition

Another of the most-used techniques in unsupervised learning is entity recognition, or more specifically, named entity recognition (NER). In this process, the machine is able to detect predefined entities in a text corpus. The algorithm can detect where in the text people, places, companies and numbers, among other elements, are mentioned (Calzolari, 2020). This can be an interesting way to label texts and organise them quickly and effectively. These entities are recognised using pre-existing dictionaries that the algorithm consults to detect nouns in the corpus that have been previously labelled in other text corpora. For this reason, although we apply this technique as part of unsupervised learning, the reality is that it is a mixed method that combines aspects of supervised and unsupervised learning.

Figure 8
Example output by applying NER

Source: Li (2018).

Figure 8 shows a specific example of the output displayed on screen when applying the spaCy library for visualisation in the Python programming language within the Jupyter Notebook environment. These libraries also offer the ability to store classifications in lists or databases, enabling them to be used and processed in the future.

By applying both topic modelling and entity recognition, we are able to label and classify texts that were originally unstructured. As we have already mentioned, these analyses can be applied both in environments that require programming and in coding-free software. The advantage of this type of technique is that it enables us to quickly create generalised topic and concept maps. However, the researcher plays a much more important role when interpreting the topics and hypothesising.

It is important to note that in the case of topic modelling, it is the researcher who must decide on the number of clusters into which they wish to classify their texts. Although there are evaluation metrics that can be used to statistically compare the results, with the consistency metric being the most popular (Stevens *et al.*, 2012), the current literature argues that these metrics should be considered in an indicative manner. Ultimately, the meaning and significance of the results obtained will come down to the researcher's theoretical criteria.

6.2. Supervised learning

Supervised learning is the approach used to process labelled or classified data in order to make predictions about the classification of future observations with the same criteria and characteristics (Shahbaz *et al.*, 2022). Using this type of algorithm, the machine is instructed with a training dataset which provides it with the input characteristics and the corresponding output labels. The main objective of this is to enable the machine to predict what the label will be for a new observation. Supervised learning can reach considerable levels of complexity, and the current possibilities in this field are wide and diverse.

This type of approach is especially useful in identifying specific categories, predicting results and assigning labels to new texts based on previously established patterns. Unlike unsupervised learning, which focuses on general and descriptive analytics, supervised machine learning is suitable for more precise and targeted applications. Supervised machine learning techniques have been used in the scientific literature in a range of contexts. For example, Naseeba *et al.* (2023) employed this approach to classify newspaper articles, while Khanday *et al.* (2022) focused on detecting hate speech on social networks. Mbona and Eloff (2023), on the other hand, applied supervised machine learning techniques to bot identification, and Shevtsov *et al.* (2023) explored its usefulness in electoral analysis.

6.2.1. Text classification

Text classification can be very useful in studies involving large volumes of data. In this scenario, it is first necessary to classify the set of texts and the predicted outputs, and then apply this knowledge to the rest of the corpus to allow the algorithm to perform the classification automatically. In this sense, it is advisable to start based on previous knowledge of possible theoretical categories and typologies in order to generate labels that can either support or refute hypotheses. Therefore, the prior labelling task carried out by the researcher must be solidly grounded and follow a comprehensive coding process, which will allow the algorithms to make predictions with greater accuracy. Before performing this labelling, a clear and detailed coding guide must be created to ensure that coders follow uniform and solid criteria when classifying the text unit to be analysed.

Text classification can be carried out using various algorithms. As with topic modelling, we found multiple papers in the recent literature that evaluate the performance of different classification algorithms (Dogra *et al.*, 2022). In the area of social sciences, one of the most widely used types of algorithms in scientific research are support vector machines (SVMs), which are able to classify text groups with high dimensionality (Joachims, 1998).

It is important to note that, when using classification algorithms, the training data must have the same characteristics as the data to which the algorithm is going to be applied. For example, if the algorithm has been trained to obtain two response classes, such as "extremist" and "moderate", this algorithm's output will always correspond to these two labels. Therefore, if the new sets of texts are expected to contain additional categories that are not provided for in the labelled sample, a new sample in which the additional categories are labelled will be needed and the algorithm will have to be retrained.

6.2.2. Sentiment analysis

Sentiment analysis is a broad analysis type commonly found in the field of business and other social sciences. It has traditionally been carried out through customer satisfaction surveys. However, the increase in the number of digital commerce platforms has led to the development of new methods that, in turn, have enabled these analyses to be applied to new and varied areas of research such as electoral analysis, studies on migration and hate speech and communication studies, among others. Sentiment analysis using machine learning allows us to identify emotions in large text corpora. This works with the same logic as text classification; however, as with the NER technique, there are multiple already trained dictionaries that, without the need to previously label a sample of the database, the algorithm can use to recognise the sentiment in our text corpus.

In both cases the result is a text corpus labelled according to previously established theoretical criteria, unlike in unsupervised analysis. When creating a classification algorithm, the goal is to obtain the highest percentage of accuracy in the prediction model we have generated. Supervised learning models are evaluated by following an established procedure.

First, a sample that requires labelling is extracted from the text corpus. This sample is divided into a training set (70%) and a test set (30%). The model is trained using 70% of the sample data by showing it the observation or data and then the output response. Once the model is trained, its classification ability is evaluated using the other 30% of the sample data, or the test set. Based on the accuracy obtained in this evaluation, a decision is made on whether the model is accurate enough to classify the unseen data. In order to achieve a suitably generalised model, a large-volume text corpus is needed. In addition, the level of precision the model is found to have must be specified in the research methodology.

Table 1

Main libraries for each type of analysis and programming language

Type of Analysis	Python programming language	R programming language
Topic modelling	-Gensim -scikit-learn	-topicmodels -LDA
Entity recognition	-SpaCy -NLTK	-spacyr -openPLN
Text classification	-NLTK -TensorFlow (Keras)	-TM -Caret
Sentiment analysis	-scikit-learn -Keras	-tidytext -quanteda

Source: own research.

7. Conclusion

This work offers a synthesised guide to the basics of applying natural language processing (NLP) in social science research within the framework of machine learning. First, it provides an overview of the history and origin of natural language processing, followed by the practical aspects of applying NLP techniques. Details are given of some of the programming languages and software that can be used to carry out analyses, as well as the various text sources and the methods for extracting and storing them. Next is a section on text cleaning and processing, followed by a description of the various types of analysis techniques that can be applied to natural language processing.

Although in the international scientific literature there is a growing interest in the transdisciplinary integration between the different branches of social sciences and computer techniques, there is a clear need to continue developing research and pedagogical works that encourage and motivate social scientists to adopt and actively use these types of techniques in their studies. The implementation of these methodologies can provide significant benefits, such as deeper and more rigorous data analysis, identification of hidden patterns and trends and a more complete and enriching understanding of social phenomena.

This guide is intended as an introductory resource for researchers interested in delving into the field of machine learning and NLP. Its fundamental purpose is to provide clear and effective guidance that helps researchers choose between the many widely validated approaches, programs and algorithms that are available, since the incredible amount of options can be overwhelming for those who are in the early stages of their training in this field of study.

It is worth pointing out that while more recent work employing natural language processing (NLP) in social science research supports the effectiveness of the techniques discussed here, the current discussion identifies significant challenges that social researchers will face in the near future.

First of all, one of the main challenges encountered by social researchers is the existence of biases both in the models used and in their training process. It is essential to keep in mind that machines tend to reproduce the prejudices inherent in human beings. Therefore, it is crucial to avoid such biases in all stages of the process, from data extraction to training the algorithms (Zwilling, 2023).

Another challenge lies in the current inability of models to "understand" the cultural particularities and jargon expressions found in the data. These particularities and expressions are often of significant value to social researchers, and their correct interpretation is crucial to ensure an accurate and relevant analysis (Sambeek, 2021).

Finally, it is worth highlighting the notable dearth of properly annotated datasets that are suitable for training supervised models in the context of social sciences. In many cases, the lack of labelled data for specific areas or topics of interest in fields such as sociology and political science is rather evident. This leads to the need to resort to transfer learning techniques and devise specific strategies aimed at addressing this limitation, with the primary objective of achieving results that are both reliable and representative.

These challenges underline the need to continue researching and developing NLP applied to the social sciences in order to overcome the current restraints and ensure a rigorous and robust analysis of the texts in this field. In addition, it is essential to highlight the importance of making these analyses replicable and reproducible by indicating in the methodology section the libraries, tools and environments used, as well as the verifications and modifications made, from cleaning the text corpus to evaluating and visualising the results.

8. Appendix

Appendix 1. Links to the most popular social media APIs

Platform	API
Facebook	https://developers.facebook.com/docs/graph-api
Instagram	https://developers.facebook.com/docs/instagram
X/Twitter	https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs
YouTube	https://developers.google.com/youtube/v3/docs/
Reddit	https://www.reddit.com/dev/api/

Source: own research.

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ARTICLE/ARTÍCULO

Evaluation of a Positive Psychology Programme for the Promotion of Well-Being and Emotional Health in Rural Elderly People

Evaluación de un programa de psicología positiva para la promoción del bienestar y la salud emocional en personas mayores del ámbito rural

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ABSTRACT

Population ageing is one of the primary challenges contemporary society faces. In particular, older people living in rural areas may face additional barriers when accessing mental health resources and services, thereby increasing the risk of social isolation, depression and other emotional health problems. The aim of the study is to evaluate an intervention for the improvement of well-being and emotional health in older people. A quasi-experimental investigation was conducted with pre-intervention and post-intervention measures. The sample consists of 24 people aged 65 to 85 years. The programme consisted of a total of six sessions. The efficacy of the intervention programme was evaluated. The findings reveal a significant increase in scores among the experimental group compared to baseline measures, relative to the control group. It could be suggested that the intervention programme based on positive psychology promotes an increase in emotional well-being, which favours healthy ageing.

KEYWORDS: emotional well-being; healthy ageing; elderly people; positive psychology; perceived health.

The Spanish (original) version can be read at https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.65

RESUMEN

El envejecimiento de la población es uno de los principales retos de la sociedad actual. En particular, las personas mayores que viven en zonas rurales pueden encontrarse con barreras adicionales para acceder a recursos y servicios de salud mental, lo cual aumenta el riesgo de aislamiento social, depresión y otros problemas de salud emocional. El objetivo del estudio es evaluar una intervención, desde la perspectiva de la psicología positiva, para la mejora del bienestar y la salud emocional en personas mayores. Se llevó a cabo una investigación cuasi experimental con medidas preintervención y posintervención. La muestra está formada por 24 personas de 65 a 85 años. El programa consta de un total de seis sesiones de 90 minutos de duración y se realizó de manera presencial. Los resultados señalan que el grupo experimental incrementó significativamente sus puntuaciones con respecto al inicio, y en relación al grupo de control. Se podría sugerir que el programa de intervención basado en psicología positiva promueve un incremento del bienestar emocional, lo cual favorece un envejecimiento saludable.

PALABRAS CLAVE: bienestar emocional; envejecimiento saludable; personas mayores; psicología positiva; salud percibida.

1. Introduction

Population ageing is one of the primary challenges contemporary society faces. According to Pérez Díaz *et al.*'s report (2022), nearly 20% of Spain's population were elderly in 2021, with a majority residing in urban areas. Nonetheless, the proportion of elderly individuals relative to the total population is significantly higher in rural regions. Indeed, 28.3% of residents in rural municipalities (with 2,000 or fewer inhabitants) are elderly. Castile and León emerges as one of Spain's regions with the highest elderly population proportions. As per data from the National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2022), this community ranks third nationwide in terms of age, with its inhabitants being on average 48.14 years old. Various studies (Dean *et al.*, 2008; Grunert *et al.*, 2007; Schnettler *et al.*, 2014) suggest that socioeconomic and demographic factors, along with lifestyle choices, play a role in shaping the quality of life among older adults. Consequently, disparities in the quality of life may exist based on whether individuals reside in rural or urban settings. In rural areas, accessing essential resources like healthcare services, food, transportation and social support can be challenging. This adversely affects the overall physical, psychological and social well-being of the population, especially older adults (Galea *et al.*, 2018). While this scenario could impact both quality of life and the adoption of health-promoting behaviours, the precise influence of urban versus rural environments remains incompletely understood within the scientific community (Mohd *et al.*, 2010). Delving into health behaviours, some studies propose that various psychological factors, such as social context, symptom perception, health beliefs and emotional states, may influence these behaviours (Amigo, 2020; Pinto *et al.*, 2021). Regarding emotional states, the authors highlight their significant impact on health behaviour, suggesting that a general sense of well-being encourages greater engagement in healthy behaviours.

Considering all the above, this research is grounded in positive health psychology, which explores positive elements and acknowledges that individuals bear some responsibility for maintaining their health (Amigo, 2020; Danis *et al.*, 2019). Hence, it is believed that individuals can cultivate and embrace healthy lifestyle habits linked to their emotional well-being through psychological and social factors. In this context, the evolution of positive psychology has been instrumental in incorporating positive elements like strengths or positive emotions, previously overlooked in clinical health psychology research (Vázquez *et al.*, 2006). Positive psychology is a field of study that focuses on the positive aspects of personality, well-being (Seligman, 2011) and optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Its pillars encompass positive emotion, engagement, interpersonal relationships, meaning and accomplishment. The PERMA theory, proposed by Seligman (2002; 2011), upholds the central axis of character virtues and strengths, viewing well-being as a multidimensional and relational construct. Within contemporary positive psychology, the concept of psychological capital is prominent, denoting cognitive, affective and psychosocial resources (Casullo, 2006). The authors underscore the relevance of considering this construct, which encompasses emotional capacities like self-esteem and resilience, as well as skills for forming emotional connections with others, such as emotional intelligence and empathy, alongside values-related abilities such as gratitude (*ibid.*). According to Lombardo (2013), initial findings emphasise the importance of studying psychological capital in old age, both for deepening understanding and for designing interventions that integrate its associated positive aspects.

In this context, and in connection with positive psychology's approach to addressing health in older adults, the "well-being paradox in old age" is proposed. This paradox stems from the observation that despite ageing involving various losses at emotional, physical and cognitive levels, among others, levels of well-being and life satisfaction remain similar or even higher than those of younger individuals (Carstensen, 1993). Ortiz and Castro (2009) suggest that older adults not only manage to adapt to the changes and deficits inherent in ageing, but they also learn to reassess their priorities and set new goals, thereby enhancing their personal competencies. In another study, Scheibe and Carstensen (2010, cited in Lombardo, 2013) assert that older adults can maintain high levels of emotional well-being despite biological decline, psychological and social losses and social prejudices that stigmatise them. Conversely, Ruch *et al.*'s study (2010) concludes that positive psychology can promote healthy ageing by facilitating adaptation to the changes inherent in this life cycle and by nurturing positive experiences, traits and connections (happiness, pleasure, well-being with the past and hope for the future, strengths, etc.). Therefore, considering the findings of prior research, it appears evident to suggest that older adults could benefit from a health promotion and emotional well-being programme, given that this stage of life offers positive aspects, such as having more leisure time, thereby providing greater opportunities for personal

fulfilment (Lombardo, 2013). Cassullo *et al.* (2019) highlight psychology's role in identifying and addressing social and environmental issues that impact the quality of life of older adults. They also stress the importance of developing a positive psychology programme, as it could foster positive emotions and coping strategies amidst daily challenges.

Therefore, in light of the conclusions drawn from this research, the researchers aim to implement initiatives that enhance the health and emotional well-being of older adults, emphasising the positive aspects of health and appreciating individual strengths (Wikler, 2019). It is noteworthy that two primary focuses of health psychology, as outlined by Matarazzo (1980), include health promotion and maintenance, as well as disease prevention and treatment. As highlighted by Jiménez *et al.* (2016), programmes directed at older adults from the perspective of positive psychology incorporate techniques designed to enhance emotional well-being. In the study by Avia *et al.* (2012), engagement in autobiographical memory work yielded improvements in self-esteem and life satisfaction. Conversely, Killen *et al.* (2015) contend that fostering gratitude resulted in heightened well-being, increased resilience and a notable reduction in stress. In other studies exploring interventions aimed at fostering gratitude, an increase in resilience was observed, resulting in heightened positive affect and levels of happiness, alongside a reduction in both negative affect and depression following the intervention (Salces-Cubero, 2018). Alternative approaches incorporating various elements, such as strengths practice, forgiveness and gratitude, yielded a significant decrease in anxiety and depression states, as well as an increase in specific memory levels, life satisfaction and perceived happiness (Killen et al., 2015; Ramírez *et al.*, 2014).

However, despite the evident benefits and scientific interest, interventions based on positive psychology targeting older adults remain scarce; authors like Ranzijn (2002) underscore the necessity to study their application in this demographic due to the association of ageing with stereotypes of loss and decline, often overlooking gains and areas of growth. Moreover, they suggest that positive psychology can enhance mental and physical health, leading to a reduction in dependence and the costs of care associated with ageing. Lastly, given the increase in longevity in the population, a rise in demand for psychological care for this group is anticipated, underscoring the importance of anticipating the potential and limitations of developing and applying interventions based on positive psychology with older adults.

In summary, positive psychology seems to provide an ideal framework for a health promotion programme tailored to older adults, aiming to enhance their understanding of health and well-being from an optimistic standpoint, highlighting their capabilities rather than limitations. In this context, the concept of subjective well-being, which pertains to how individuals experience their emotions, holds relevance. Vázquez and Hervás (2009) connect subjective well-being with the significance of emotions throughout an individual's life. This subjective well-being will be one of the factors considered when assessing the

Evaluation of a Positive Psychology Programme for the Promotion of Well-Being and Emotional Health in Rural Elderly People

https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.65

effectiveness of an intervention programme specifically designed for older adults in rural areas, with the objective of fostering their well-being and emotional health. The outcomes obtained could hold significant implications for the formulation of mental health policies and initiatives targeting older adults in rural regions. From this perspective, the programme aims not to dwell on shortcomings but rather to contemplate the positive aspects of each individual's health, thereby nurturing their strengths.

2. Method

2.1. Design

A quantitative research study was conducted employing a quasi-experimental design with non-randomised pretest-posttest and cross-sectional measures. A convenience non-probabilistic sampling method was used to select the independent groups.

2.2. Participants

The sample comprised 24 older adults, including 20 women and 4 men, aged between 65 and 85 years (M = 73.91; SD = 6.80). Of the total (N = 24), participants residing in the Tiedra municipality (Valladolid) (n = 14) were allocated to the experimental group, while those in the Villamuriel de Cerrato municipality (Palencia) (n = 10) formed the control group. All participants from both groups completed all evaluations.

2.3. Procedure

We proposed conducting a six-session workshop titled "Living My Emotions Healthily" (see Appendix A), offered free of charge to the town councils, as part of the regional active ageing initiative funded by the Social Services Management of the Castile and León Regional Government through regional income tax allocation. Both town councils responded positively, facilitating the organisation of the workshop, including scheduling dates, times and venue. Additionally, posters and infographics were designed to promote the activity among the over-65 population in both municipalities.

Two requirements were established in the inclusion criteria, given that the activity was funded as part of the active ageing programme. It was stipulated that the group must consist of at least 10 people and that participants must be over 65 years old, aligning with the definition of seniors put forth by Fernández-Ballesteros *et al.* (2004), which considers individuals as seniors from that age in the European context. Another inclusion criterion was that all participants attended all six sessions

of the intervention programme and completed the required documents, including informed consent forms, pre- and post-intervention evaluation questionnaires and inter-session questionnaires. Regarding exclusion criteria, older adults with severe illnesses and/or dementia were not eligible to participate. Individuals who did not meet the age requirement of 65 years were referred to other programmes tailored to their needs.

2.4. Instruments

Two *ad hoc* questionnaires were selected, each containing a limited number of items (13 and 9) and employing a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Very much), to encourage participation and simplify the process for participants, considering the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample.

For evaluation purposes, an *ad hoc* questionnaire was distributed, collecting sociodemographic details (age, gender, municipality and living arrangements), comprising 11 Likert-type items assessing the participant's health and emotional well-being at the workshop's outset. Subsequently, the same questionnaire will be readministered upon completion of the activity to gauge changes compared to the initial responses (*Ad hoc evaluation questionnaire at the end of each session*). Additionally, at the end of each session, a satisfaction evaluation questionnaire comprising 9 Likert-type items is being distributed, assessing the level of satisfaction with the activities conducted in each session. The aim is to evaluate which activities are better received and prove most beneficial for health and emotional well-being in this population.

2.5. Data analysis

Analyses were conducted to assess normality and homoscedasticity assumptions. Descriptive measures were calculated for the overall sample and intervention groups (experimental and control) to confirm pre-intervention equivalence in sociodemographic variables. The paired samples *t*-test was used to compare pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control groups, assessing improvements and significant differences. Mixed-design factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Cohen's *d* coefficient were applied to evaluate effect size. A descriptive analysis of perceived quality and satisfaction with each session of the programme was performed using the "End of Session Questionnaire". SPSS Statistics version 25 software was employed for analysis.

2.6. Results

The variables were verified to meet the statistical assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity. As depicted in Table 1, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted, confirming the normality hypothesis ($p > 0.05$) for both the age and pre-intervention result variables. Moreover, to assess the assumption of homoscedasticity, the

Evaluation of a Positive Psychology Programme for the Promotion of Well-
Being and Emotional Health in Rural Elderly People

https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.65

Levene test for equality of variances was initially performed for the Age variable (data with $p < 0.05$ are presented in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 1), indicating equal variances with a p-value of $p = 0.746$. Subsequently, the Box M test yielded a p-value of $p = 0.195$ (Table 3), exceeding 0.05, thereby allowing us to assume equality and proceed with the corresponding parametric test analyses.

Table 1
Shapiro-Wilk normality tests for N<49

	Intervention group	Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
Participant age	Experimental	0.922	14	0.238
	Control	0.932	10	0.465
PRETEST results	Experimental	0.956	14	0.651
	Control	0.897	10	0.201

Table 2
Levene test for equality of variances to check homoscedasticity assumption

		F	Sig.
Participant age	Equal variances assumed	0.108	0.746

Figure 1
Representation of homoscedasticity assumption for the Age variable
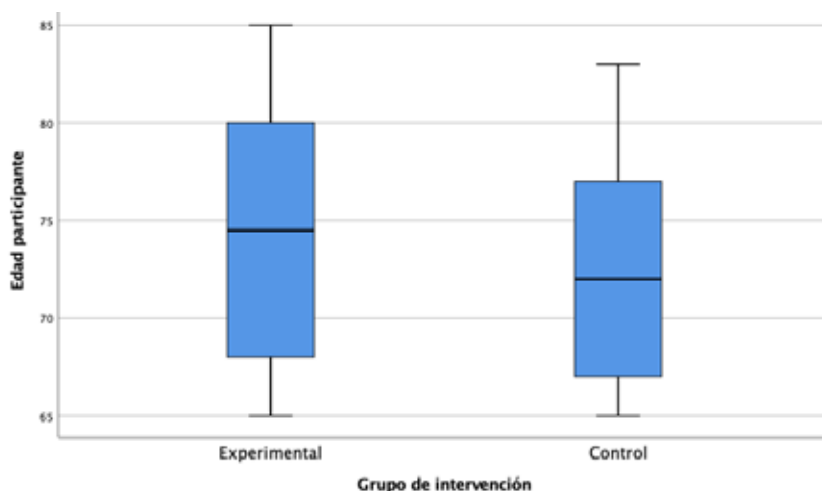
Table 3
Box's M test for equality of covariance matrices

Box's M	5.243
F	1.567
df1	3
df2	25,755.6
Sig.	0.195

Tests the null hypothesis that observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables are equal across groups. Design: Intersection + INTERVENTION_GROUP Within-subjects design: PRE_POST

Descriptive information about the sample, specifically the intervention groups (experimental and control), is presented in Table 4, including descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and range, as well as the quantitative variables of age and pre- and post-intervention scores, both for the overall sample and within the experimental and control groups.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics (Mean, SD and Range) for sample, experimental group and control group on quantitative variables age, pre-intervention results and post-intervention results

	Intervention group	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Deviation
Participant age	Sample	24	65	85	73.92	6.801
	Experimental	14	65	85	74.71	7.151
	Control	10	65	83	72.80	6.477
Pretest results	Sample	24	25	44	35.00	5.413
	Experimental	14	27	44	36.29	4.268
	Control	10	25	42	33.20	6.512
Posttest results	Sample	24	31	49	40.33	5.105
	Experimental	38	49	43.00	3.464	38
	Control	10	31	43	36.60	4.766

Figures 2 and 3 depict normal Q–Q plots for the Age variable of the participants in the experimental and control groups, respectively.

Evaluation of a Positive Psychology Programme for the Promotion of Well-
Being and Emotional Health in Rural Elderly People

https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.65

Figure 2

Q-Q plot of the Age variable for the experimental group
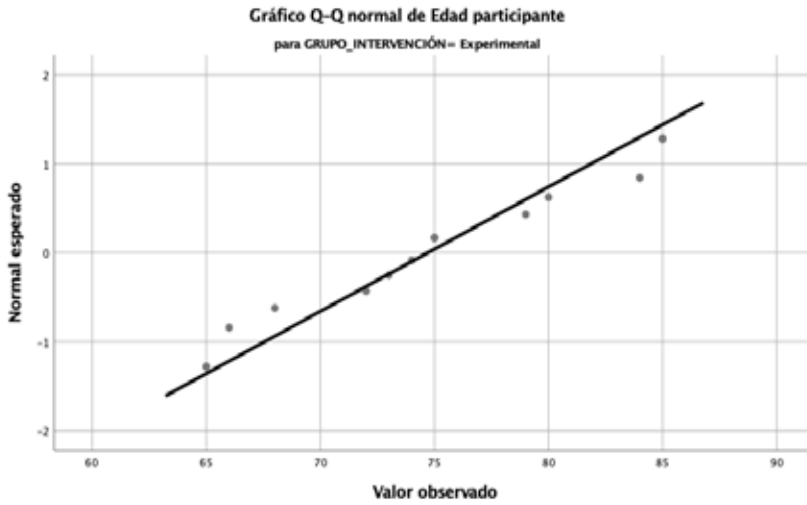
Figure 3

Q-Q plot of the Age variable for the control group
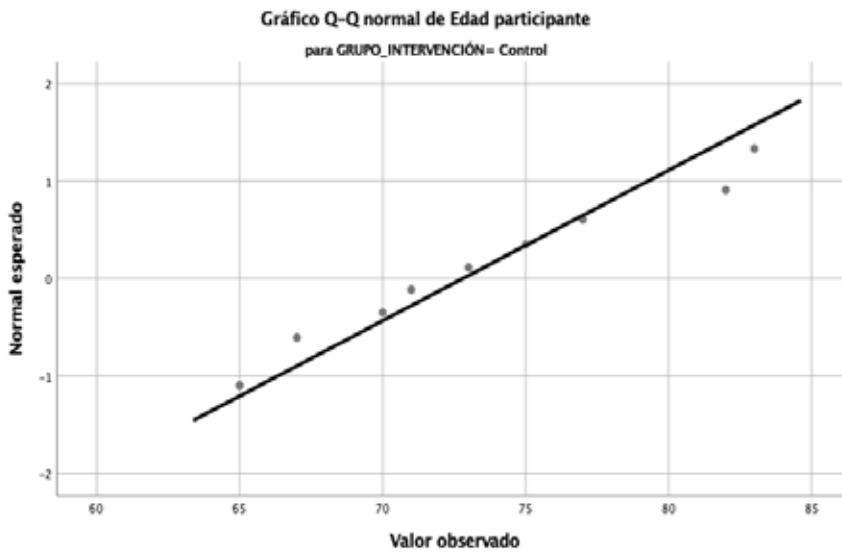
Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the distribution of pretest scores obtained before the intervention by participants in both the experimental and control groups.

Figure 4

Pretest scores for the experimental group
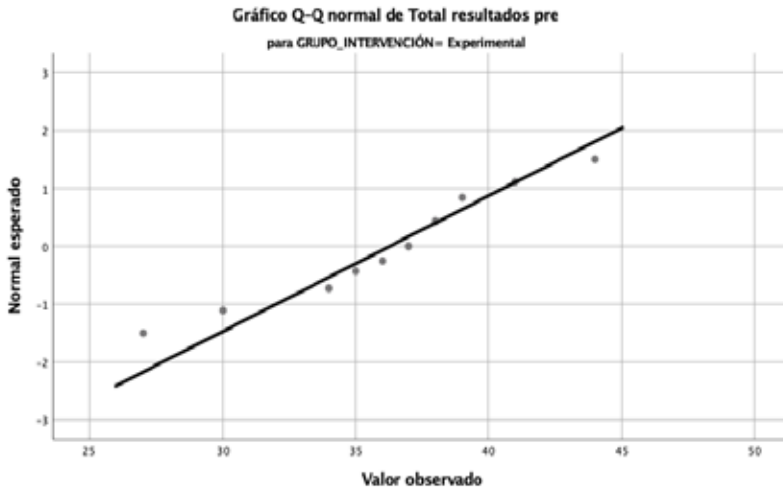
Figure 5

Pretest scores for the control group

Evaluation of a Positive Psychology Programme for the Promotion of Well-Being and Emotional Health in Rural Elderly People

https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.65
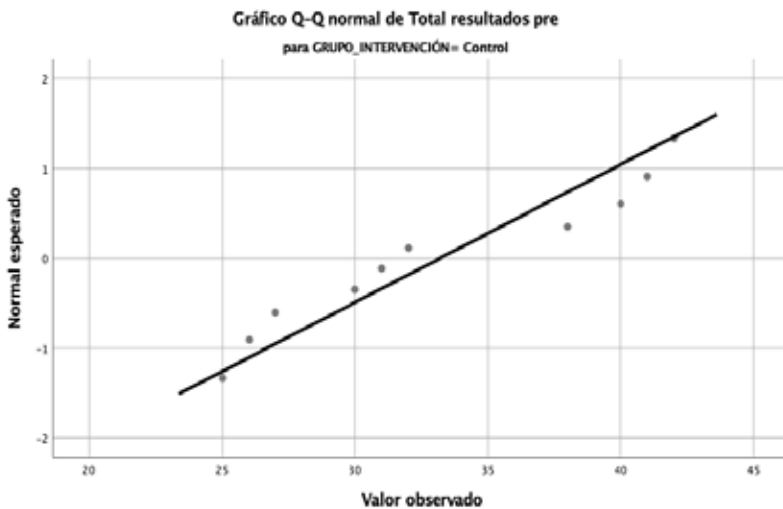
Figures 6 and 7 display the distribution of posttest scores obtained by participants after the intervention, with each graph representing the respective experimental and control groups.

Figure 6

Posttest scores for the experimental group

Gráfico Q-Q normal de Total resultados post
para GRUPO_INTERVENCIÓN= Experimental
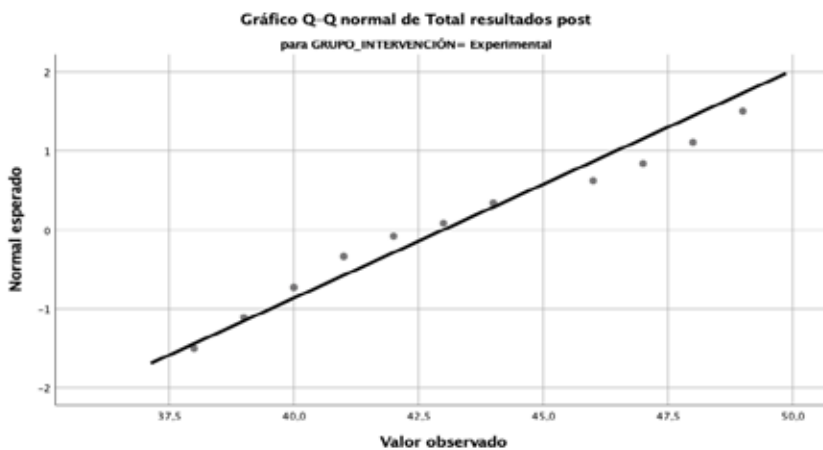
Figure 7

Posttest scores for the control group

Gráfico Q-Q normal de Total resultados post
para GRUPO_INTERVENCIÓN= Control
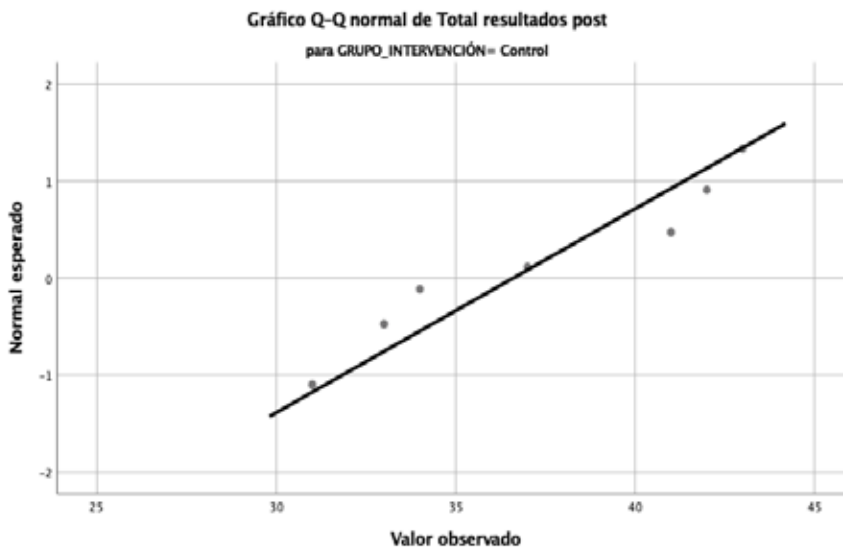
In the Student's paired samples t-test for mean comparison, it was assessed whether there were differences in pre-intervention and post-intervention scores. This test was conducted separately for each group and for different dimensions of the questionnaire: emotional understanding, subjective well-being, social factors and total scores at the beginning and end. Table 5 presents the changes in each group and for each dimension at pre- and post-intervention. The significance level scores reveal differences in all dimensions of the experimental group, suggesting that the intervention programme led to improvement in emotional understanding, subjective well-being, social relationships and overall health and emotional well-being for the participants. On the other hand, the control group's scores indicate significant differences in posttest results compared to pretest results in subjective well-being and total score. However, no differences were observed in emotional understanding and social factors. Therefore, it cannot be affirmed that the reminiscence programme resulted in an improvement in their health and emotional well-being.

Table 5

Student's paired samples t-test for measures in the experimental and control groups, difference of paired samples

G[1]	Mean		Deviation		t		df		Sig. (bilateral)	
	EG	CG	EG	CG	EG	CG	EG	CG	EG	CG
EU[2] Pre-Post	-1.786	-1.000	2.392	1.826	-2.794	-1.732	13	9	0.015	0.117
SW[3] Pre-Post	-2.786	-1.500	2.119	1.650	-4.920	-2.875	13	9	0.000	0.018
SOC[4] Pre-Post	-2.143	-0.900	1.610	1.595	-4.979	-1.784	13	9	0.000	0.108
TOT[4] Pre-Post	-6.714	-3.400	3.950	2.914	-6.360	-3.690	13	9	0.000	0.005

1 EG and CG: experimental group and control group. 2 Subjective well-being. 3 Emotional understanding. 4 Total test scores.

The ANOVA results revealed a significant interaction between pre- and post-intervention groups in Emotional understanding (F = 0.759; p = 0.393), Subjective well-being (F = 2.560; p = 0.124), Social factors (F = 3.502; p = 0.75) and total scores (F = 5.048; p = 0.035), indicating improvements in health and emotional well-being due to the programme implementation. These findings suggest distinctions between participants in the experimental and control groups (refer to Table 6). Moreover, the effect size calculations in Table 6 demonstrate a higher impact in the experimental group.

Table 6

*Means, standard deviation of variables in each group and analysis of intervention
group x moment interaction*

Scores	Experimental group		Control group		F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared	Cohen's d		effect-size r	
	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)				Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Emotional understanding	17.43 (2.563)	19.21 (1.805)	16.00 (2.906)	17.00 (2.309)	0.759	0.393	0.033	0.521	1.06	0.252	0.470
Subjective well-being	11.07 (2.093)	13.86 (1.657)	9.40 (2.914)	10.90 (2.558)	2.560	0.124	0.104	0.658	1.373	0.312	0.566
Social factors	7.79 (1.051)	9.93 (0.997)	7.80 (1.814)	8.70 (1.160)	3.502	0.075	0.137	-0.006	1.137	-0.003	0.494
Total score	36.29 (4.268)	43.00 (3.464)	33.20 (6.512)	36.60 (4.766)	5.048	0.035	0.187	0.561	1.536	0.270	0.609

The subsequent graphs illustrate the results obtained from repeated measures
ANOVA analyses, depicting the marginal means before and after the intervention
in Emotional understanding (see Figure 8), Subjective well-being (see Figure 9),
Social factors (see Figure 10) and Total scores (see Figure 11) for both experimental
and control groups. Therefore, the reminiscence programme may not be as effective
in enhancing health and emotional well-being as the positive psychology-based
programme.

Figure 8

Mean scores in emotional understanding
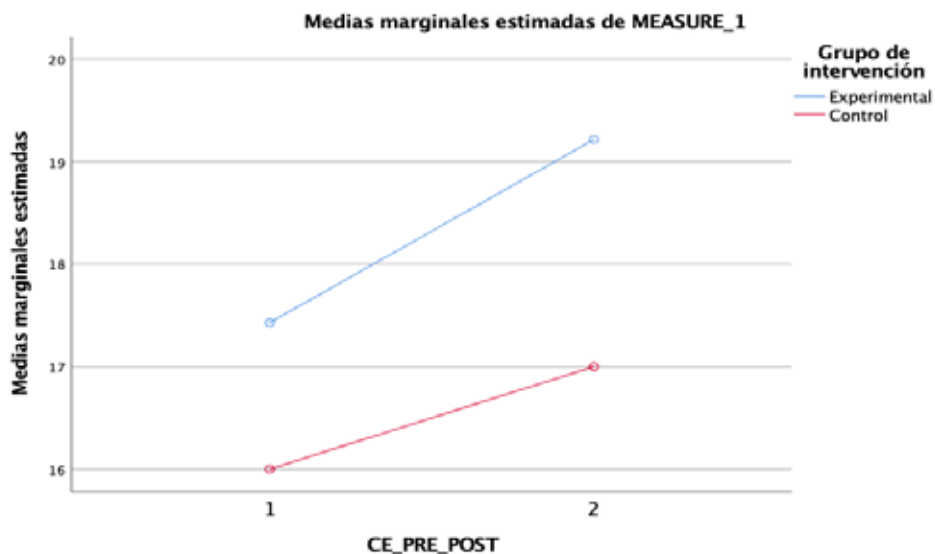
Figure 9

Mean scores in subjective well-being
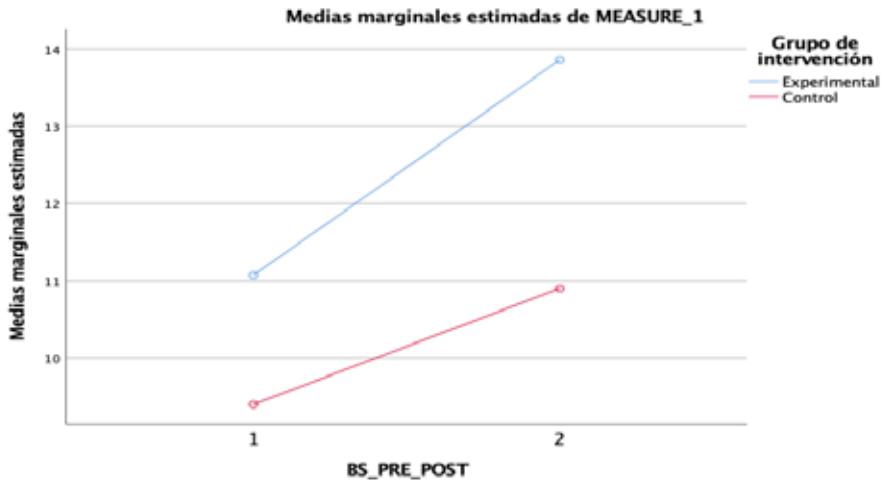
Figure 10

Mean scores in social factors
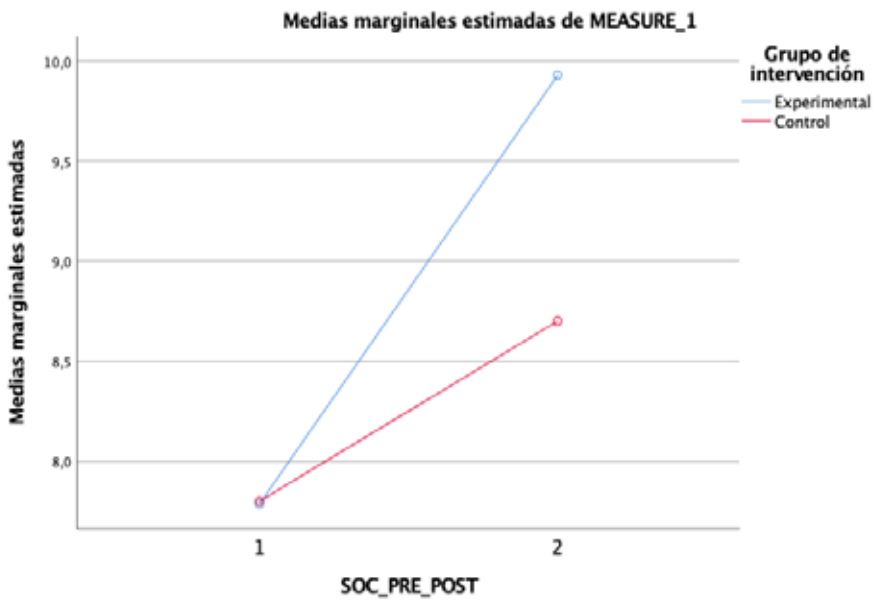
Figure 11

Mean scores in total health and emotional well-being
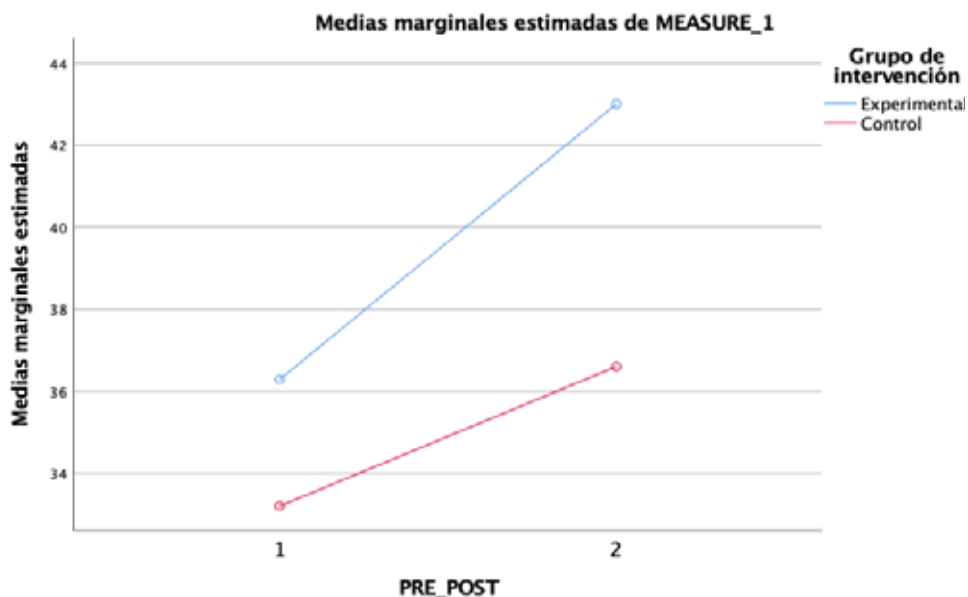
The results validate the three hypotheses posited at the outset of the study. The evaluation of the perceived quality of each intervention session was conducted at the conclusion of every session, utilising a brief questionnaire to gauge participants' satisfaction levels with each session. All sessions received high ratings.

3. Discussion

The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention targeting older adults, particularly those living in rural areas of Castile and León, using a positive psychology programme to ascertain its impact on their well-being and emotional health. The results, obtained by comparing scores from the *ad hoc* questionnaire administered at the beginning and end of the intervention between the experimental and control groups, suggest that the observed improvements may be attributed to the programme.

Participants in the control group underwent a reminiscence-based programme, and although some improvement in the results was observed, it was not as significant as the scores of participants in the experimental group, which may be more attributable to the placebo effect than to the specific content of the programme itself (Amigo, 2020). It is noteworthy that initially, there was concern that conducting only six sessions might be limiting, given the short period to assess the programme's effectiveness in improving emotional well-being. However, upon

completion, it was found that this duration actually proved advantageous, as all participants continued to attend without absenteeism, facilitating the involvement of everyone and ultimately preventing programme drop-out.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Firstly, the time constraint is significant due to the limited time available for developing and implementing the pilot programme. Consequently, the primary limitation of the study is the small sample size (n = 24). With a longer timeframe, the programme could have been expanded to include more groups, thereby increasing the sample size. The small sample size hampers the generalisability of the results and impacts the achievement of statistically significant outcomes. Secondly, the measurement instruments used is identified as a limitation. As highlighted by Jiménez *et al.* (2016), there are still few appropriate and specific measurement instruments for older adults, despite the increasing interest in positive psychology and the development of valid and reliable tools in this area. Moreover, in rural areas, older adults may have lower levels of literacy and reading comprehension, and they may perceive completing a test or questionnaire as an assessment, potentially leading to participation without careful reading or adding additional stress. It would be beneficial to precisely define the evaluation protocol and adapt measurement instruments to the elderly population.

Despite the mentioned limitations, it is crucial to emphasise that research related to intervention programmes for the prevention of illness and promotion of well-being and health is particularly noteworthy. Therefore, it is valuable to find ways to measure the impact of these activities on the elderly and how they affect their emotional well-being, as it encourages them to socialise, interact with peers and engage in meaningful projects, thereby preventing illnesses.

In conclusion, the programme offers several additional benefits that may not be easily quantifiable but are perceived by participants through the feedback they provide. The programme fosters social engagement and enables older adults to connect with individuals of different ages, fostering significant intergenerational relationships. Moreover, it promotes active ageing by encouraging participants to participate in diverse activities that enhance flexibility and cognitive stimulation, which is especially beneficial as they age. Lastly, it is essential to note that the programme brings various resources closer to the elderly, which is particularly crucial in the rural context of Castile and León, where emotional education may be lacking. Engaging in these programmes can assist older adults in normalising and accepting their emotions, thereby enhancing their quality of life and emotional well-being.

Evaluation of a Positive Psychology Programme for the Promotion of Well-Being and Emotional Health in Rural Elderly People

https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.65

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Appendix A

Summary table of programme session content

Session and objective	Activities
Session 0. PRE Presentation and evaluation. In this session, the group is greeted to foster connections among participants, and vital information about the programme's operation is provided. Concurrently, evaluation questionnaires for the study variables are distributed.	- Welcome. - Programme presentation. - Informed consent. - Evaluation protocol. - Commencement of exploring our strengths.
Session 1. What do we mean by health?	- Greeting and welcoming participants. - Psychoeducation: Health from a biopsychosocial perspective. - Experiential part: Gratitude and health. - Presentation of cross-sectional dynamics. - Experimental group activity: "The jar of gratitude".
Session 2. How can I take care of my self-esteem? In this session, we delve into the concept of self-esteem, experiencing how it can aid and support us in everyday challenges.	- Greeting and welcoming participants. - Cross-sectional activity. Theoretical part: - Psychoeducation: What is self-esteem? - Experiential part: Self-esteem within groups. Empathy and emotional intelligence. - Compassion and self-compassion: "I'm kind to myself". - Experimental group activity: "I admire myself/you because…". - Control group activity: "The circle of virtues". - Session 2 evaluation questionnaire. - End of session and farewell.
Session 3. How do my thoughts influence my mood? The goal of this session is to comprehend the impact of thoughts on our lives.	- Greeting and welcoming participants. - Psychoeducation: Thoughts. - Positive thoughts versus negative thoughts. - Mindfulness as an ally. Experiential part: - Thought-related activities: Mindfulness and thoughts. - Experimental group activity: "Mr Positive and Mr Negative". - Control group activity: "Hey, I succeeded!" - Session 3 evaluation questionnaire. - End of session and farewell.
Session 4. I live my emotions healthily In this session, we present some "mental blocks" and provide resources to help the mind function for the individual's benefit. Speaking kindly, refraining from getting lost in thought and gratitude as an antidote to negative biases are effective coping tools.	- Greeting and welcoming participants. Theoretical part: - Psychoeducation: Essential elements for understanding my emotions. Emotional regulation. Values. Experiential part: - Activities related to emotional regulation and values. - Mindfulness and metaphors. - Session 4 evaluation questionnaire. - End of session and farewell.
Session 5. I create healthy bonds with my environment The objective of this session is to learn how to communicate assertively. Addressing acceptance and cognitive flexibility will also contribute to improving resilience.	- Greeting and welcoming participants. - Cross-sectional activity. - Psychoeducation: Assertive communication and boundary management. - Acceptance and flexibility. - Resilience. - Experiential part: Activities related to social skills and resilience. - Experimental group activity: "What a difficult situation". - Role-playing. - Control group activity: "Letter to my past". - Session 5 evaluation questionnaire. - Conclusion and farewell.
Session 6: Closing session The objective of this session is to conduct a post-intervention measurement of the programme participants for evaluation purposes. It also provides a space for participants to share their experiences during the sessions and discuss how they can continue their practice once the programme is completed.	- Greeting and welcoming participants. - Conclusion of cross-sectional activity. - Final programme evaluation questionnaire. - End of session and farewell.

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Susana, a licensed general health psychologist, has been with the Colectivo para el Desarrollo Rural de Tierra de Campos Association since 2017. Her work revolves around developing initiatives to foster psychological, emotional, occupational and social well-being across diverse demographics, including older adults, individuals facing social exclusion, those with disabilities and people in dependency situations. Alongside conducting workshops on emotional management and personal assistance courses, she provides individual psychotherapy. Her approach is influenced by humanistic and positive psychology, and she holds training in EMDR Level II.

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With a PhD in psychogerontology, Jesús heads the master's programme in general health psychology at the Valencian International University. His research delves into psychogerontology, covering psychological assessment, treatment and intervention for older adults. Jesús has spearheaded numerous projects aimed at enhancing the quality of life for older adults through intervention programmes. He specialises in social intervention and research methodologies in social and health sciences.

Francisco Rivera Rufete

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ARTICLE/ARTÍCULO

Permanent and Temporary Workers: Trust in Trade Unions in Times of Boom and Bust

Indefinidos y temporales: la confianza en los sindicatos en tiempos de bonanza y de crisis

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses to what extent labour flexibility and the latest Great Recession opened a gap between stable and precarious workers with respect to their trust in unions. For this purpose, four surveys from the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research conducted during both the economic boom years and the recent Great Recession are utilised. A comparison of means and several linear regression analyses are applied. On a scale from 0 to 10, trust in unions fell from 4.5 in 2005 to 2.5 in 2014. However, the data indicate that neither labour flexibility nor the Great Recession fractured temporary and permanent workers with respect to their trust in unions.

HOW TO REFERENCE: Martínez Pastor, J. I. (2024). Indefinidos y temporales: la confianza en los sindicatos en tiempos de bonanza y de crisis. *Revista Centra de Ciencias Sociales, 3*(1), 99–117. https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.84.

The Spanish (original) version can be read at https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.84

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza si la flexibilidad laboral y la última Gran Recesión abrieron una brecha entre los trabajadores estables y precarios con respecto a su confianza en los sindicatos en España. Para ello se utilizan cuatro encuestas del Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas llevadas a cabo en los años de bonanza y de la última Gran Recesión. Se comparan medias y se aplican varios análisis de regresión lineal. En una escala de 0 a 10, la confianza en los sindicatos en España cayó del 4,5 en 2005 al 2,5 en 2014. Sin embargo, los datos indican que ni la flexibilidad laboral ni la Gran Recesión fracturaron a los trabajadores estables y precarios en relación a su confianza en los sindicatos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: sindicatos; sindicalismo; estables; precarios; precariado; temporales; temporalidad.

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, sociology has investigated the impact that shifts in occupational structures have on trade unions (Van Gyes, Witte and Pasture, 2001; Martín Artiles, 2023), the purported union crisis (Lipset and Meltz, 2004; Fernie and Metcalf, 2005; Martínez Pastor, 2022) and the nexus between unionism and civil society (Heery, Williams and Abbott, 2012). There have been studies evaluating the performance of unions and their relevance in the 21st century (Boeri, Brugiavini and Calmfors, 2001; Bennett and Kaufman, 2007) as well as the emerging organisational dynamics within union movements (Chun and Agarwala, 2016; Roiz Ceballos, 2022). In Spain, considerable attention has placed on how pivotal social changes of the 21st century, such as immigration (Cachón Rodríguez, 2000; Haba Morales, 2002; Baylos Grau, 2009), work-life balance (Miguélez *et al.*, 2007) and non-standard employment arrangements (Francesconi and García Serrano, 2004) have influenced trade unionism. Analyses have also delved into union membership, a traditional topic in union studies (Gutiérrez, 1994; Simón, 2003; Martín Artiles *et al.*, 2004; Cebolla Boado and Ortiz, 2014), participation in trade union elections (Malo, 2002; 2006) and the ramifications of crises on union representation (Sánchez Mosquera, 2022). Rodríguez Álvarez and González Begega (2022), utilising data from the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (CIS), observed a decline in trust towards unions in Spain following the 2008 crisis.

Nevertheless, scant attention has been given to a crucial inquiry: the impact of labour flexibility on workers' trust in trade unions. The research question of this article is as follows: Do workers with temporary contracts trust trade unions less than those with permanent contracts? Additionally, the article raises another previously unexplored issue: What were the effects of the latest Great Recession on the potential trust gap in trade unions between stable and precarious workers? Did this crisis produce a gap between them, or did it increase or decrease an existing one?

Fernández Macías (2002) previously compared trust in trade unions between permanent and temporary employees using data from the CIS in the nineties. He found no significant differences between the two groups. Polavieja (2003),

on the other hand, analysed the effects of contract type segmentation on union involvement using the same data and the *Encuesta de Conciencia y Biografía de Clase* (Survey of Class Awareness and Biography) from 1991. He concluded that having a temporary contract decreased participation in union activities and that, additionally, temporary workers subjectively identified less with the unions and felt more frustrated with them.

Addressing the study of salary earners' trust in trade unions is worthwhile for the following reasons. Firstly, because several decades have passed since the surveys used in the mentioned research were conducted. During these decades, changes in occupational structure have intensified, and labour market flexibilisation has continued its course, placing Spain at the forefront of temporary employment among all OECD countries until the latest labour reform in 2022.

Secondly, this analysis is very novel as it attempts to discern whether trust in trade unions between these two groups varies depending on the economic cycle. The economic cycle has a significant effect on employment-to-unemployment transitions, especially among temporary workers. They are the first to be laid off when times are tough, and many often enter a cycle where they alternate periods of multiple temporary contracts with periods of unemployment (Muñoz Comet and Martínez Pastor, 2017). Thus, it is intriguing to understand the impact of the economic cycle on trust in unions among temporary and permanent workers. Does the crisis create a divide between them if one doesn't exist during times of prosperity? Or does it exacerbate an existing gap?

The third rationale for examining workers' trust in unions pertains to the constitutional recognition of their power. Unions serve as the primary intermediaries between labour sellers and buyers. Their agreements with employers affect a significant number of workers, regardless of their affiliation status. Collective agreements carry legal weight through *erga omnes* extension clauses. According to ILOSTAT data, collective bargaining coverage stands slightly above 70% in Spain (Martínez Pastor, 2022). Therefore, it is valuable to ascertain the level of trust salary earners have in unions and how labour flexibility and the Great Recession have impacted this trust.

2. Labour flexibility in Spain

Labour flexibility was introduced to Spain through temporary contracts, which were of little significance until the mid-1980s. The proliferation of temporary contracts can be traced back to the reform of the Workers' Statute in 1984. During a severe crisis and unprecedented levels of unemployment, the socialist government of that era implemented a series of measures to combat unemployment, including this reform. Up until then, there was a direct correlation between a temporary contract and the temporary nature of the task for which the worker was hired; one could not hire someone temporarily if the task was indefinite. As a result, temporary employment in Spain remained relatively low. The reform of the Workers' Statute in 1984 permitted the use of temporary contracts for tasks that

were not inherently temporary, aimed at reducing unemployment. The immediate advantage for employers was evident: the dismissal costs for temporary workers were significantly lower than for permanent ones. While these temporary contracts could not be applied to those who were already employed, they could be offered to new hires.

Faced with uncertainty about the performance of a new hire and considering the disparity in dismissal costs between temporary and permanent workers, employers overwhelmingly opted for temporary contracts when making new hires. Indeed, over the past few decades, it has been commonplace for approximately 90% of new contracts signed each month in Spain to be temporary. While the majority of salary earners were able to secure permanent contracts during their careers, a significant proportion continued working under temporary contracts in the mid-stages of their careers, constituting around 10–15% of salary earners (Martínez Pastor and Bernardi, 2011). The entry into the labour market for all generations entering employment since the mid-1980s has been through temporary contracts.

Several successive labour reforms implemented in recent decades aimed to reduce temporary hiring, but with very limited success. The reform of 2022 has been the most successful in this regard, as it managed to decrease the temporary employment rate from 25% to 17% in one year. However, concurrently, there has been a notable increase in the number of workers with discontinuous permanent contracts. Despite the reduction in temporary employment with this latest reform, the proportion of workers with temporary contracts at ages far from the typical entry into the labour market remains high. According to the Spanish labour force survey (EPA), 12% of salary earners aged 40 to 59 were in temporary positions in the second quarter of 2023.

For decades, the Spanish labour market has been characterised as divided between the stable—those with permanent contracts and better employment conditions—and the precarious—temporary workers with worse conditions (Polavieja, 2003). This division has resulted in greater fragmentation of the workforce, with a core of protected workers and another segment more exposed to instability, especially during times of crisis. This characteristic feature of the Spanish labour market may have implications for trust in trade unions. In the following section, it will be demonstrated that, *a priori*, there are reasons to believe that labour flexibility has eroded the trust of temporary workers by creating a division between them and the stable workers. These reasons are rooted in two concepts. Firstly, flexibility fosters a more individualistic mindset, one that is removed from traditional class commitments and indifferent to trade unions. Secondly, flexibility has led to a divide among salary earners, resulting in a conflict of interests between the stable and the precarious. The outcome could lead to a decreased trust of temporary workers in trade unions, as they may perceive that their interests were not adequately defended. However, alternative hypotheses have also been proposed that suggest the opposite. They argue that it is precisely the vulnerability of flexible workers that may have cultivated increasingly negative attitudes among them towards companies and positive attitudes towards trade unions. The following section elaborates on these hypotheses.

3. Theories and hypotheses

Building on the arguments advanced by Fernández Macías (2002), who synthesises the postulations of Lash and Urry (1987), Bilbao (1993; 1999) and Alonso (1999), there are grounds to suggest that temporary workers exhibit less trust in trade unions compared to permanent ones. Two mechanisms underlie this hypothesis. The first is linked to the concept of post-industrial identity. This argument can be outlined as follows. The shift from an industrial to a post-industrial society has led to alterations in the employment dynamic, consequently shaping a new identity among workers. The traditional industrial employment dynamic was characterised by stability and a long-term commitment between the company and the worker. The worker's identity could be characterised as collectivist and work-focused.

The advent of the post-industrial era reshapes the employment dynamic, which now leans towards greater instability and flexibility, aligning with a decentralised production model responsive to fluctuating demand. In this contemporary landscape, workers' identity leans towards individualism rather than the work-centric focus of industrial society, placing greater emphasis on consumption. This individualistic outlook, detached from collectivism, is particularly evident in short-term employment arrangements characterised by minimal commitment between worker and employer, thus being more typical of temporary workers. Bilbao (1999) explored the correlation between the emerging mindset of the post-industrial and "flexible" worker and their stance towards trade unions, stating: "This consciousness of individuality elucidates the temporary worker's disposition towards trade unions, which tends to be either directly negative or simply passive" (Bilbao, 1999, p. 138, cited by Fernández Macías, 2002).

Spain provides a compelling illustration of the transformation in occupational composition. In the mid-1970s, nearly a quarter of the workforce was engaged in the primary sector, with another 35% in the industrial sector. Services employed only four out of every ten workers. Fast forward four decades, and the primary sector now employs merely 4% of the workforce, while the industrial sector employs 22%. Consequently, services now encompass almost three quarters of the workforce. Additionally, there is a significant proportion of temporary contracts, comprising approximately 25% of salary earners during economic downturns and exceeding 30% during the latest period of economic upturn. However, following the aforementioned 2022 reform, the temporary employment rate decreased to 17% in 2023[1].

The other mechanism supporting the hypothesis that temporary workers trust trade unions less than permanent ones is based on the segmentation of the labour market between stable and precarious workers and the conflict that arises between them in defending their interests. According to the theory of the dual labour market, the labour market is divided into two clearly differentiated segments: the primary and the secondary (Piore, 1975). The primary segment is characterised by high wages, good working conditions, opportunities for advancement, equity, established procedures regarding labour standards and above all, stability. The characteristics of the secondary segment include lower wages and poorer working conditions, and short-term employment relationships.

Several authors have posited the idea that this segmentation of the labour market poses a conflict of interests between permanent and temporary workers. It is believed that workers in the secondary segment are a threat to the *status quo* of those in the primary segment, as they work under worse labour conditions, earn less and have short-term employment relationships rather than permanent contracts with higher dismissal costs. In this context, trade unions would have opted to prioritise the interests of permanent workers, given that they constitute their main source of membership, sidelining temporary workers (García Serrano, Garrido and Toharia, 1999). Polavieja (2001; 2003, p. 194) encapsulates this perspective when examining union representation strategies from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s: "Neither the content of collective agreements nor the dynamics of the wage determination process have been particularly favourable to the interests of temporary workers. Furthermore, the evidence [...] suggests that permanent workers have bolstered their bargaining position due to the cushioning effect provided by temporary workers."

Standing (2013; 2014, p. 8) echoes similar sentiments, introducing a new social class termed the precariat. This class is characterised by insecure, unstable employment that rapidly transitions from one job to another, "often with incomplete contracts". In a debate with Jan Breman (2014) regarding an article published in the *New Left Review*, Standing (2014, p. 12) contends that "the old proletariat still enjoys secure employment and benefits from both businesses and the state, so it is expected that their unions will prioritise their interests over those of the precariat. Breman and his supporters fail to grasp why the precariat rejects traditional unions."

From this standpoint, it is reasonable to anticipate that temporary workers trust trade unions less than permanent ones (hypothesis 1).

However, Fernández Macías (2002, pp. 140–141) presents arguments suggesting the opposite hypothesis, asserting that temporary workers may trust trade unions more than permanent ones. He indicates that the impact of flexibility on workers' identity shift is not as significant as commonly assumed and could even counter the assertion made in the first hypothesis. If temporary workers face greater flexibility, insecurity and job instability, they are likely to develop negative attitudes towards companies rather than trade unions, which are theoretically expected to advocate for their interests as workers. Concerning the theory of segmentation and its implication of conflict between the interests of stable and precarious workers, the author observes that Spanish unions, unlike their American counterparts, are class-based rather than occupation-based, casting doubt on the notion that their strategy aims to segment the working class. The underlying argument of Fernández Macías (*ibid.*, p. 141) in proposing the hypothesis that temporary workers trust trade unions more than permanent ones is based on the need of temporary workers for their interests to be defended: "[...] the weaker their position in the labour market, the more they need support and institutional defence, the more positive their attitude towards collective defence of interests at work."

If this argument holds true in terms of trust, it follows that *temporary workers trust trade unions more than permanent ones (hypothesis 2)*.

Having outlined why some may trust trade unions more than others, it is worth devoting a few lines to discussing the potential effect of the Great Recession. As is known, the unemployment rate in Spain rose from a low of 8% in the second quarter of 2007 to a peak of 27% in the first quarter of 2013. Given that temporary workers are the most vulnerable to unemployment and, above all, to alternating periods of unemployment with others where they string together temporary contracts, it is to be expected that during the Great Recession, the gap between the employment situations of temporary and permanent workers who retained their jobs would widen.

The impact on the disparity in trust in trade unions between temporary and permanent workers could have manifested in the two directions outlined in hypotheses 1 and 2. On one hand, it is plausible that permanent workers who retained their jobs perceived union efforts as successful, particularly amidst a context where one in every four workers was unemployed. Conversely, temporary workers, more susceptible to economic fluctuations, might have viewed union initiatives as less effective in serving their interests, leading to diminished trust. In this regard, Pérez Díaz (1987, p. 118) previously noted, in the aftermath of a crisis, that "in hard times, unions have established a clear hierarchy of priorities at the expense of those at the bottom."

Should this pattern have occurred during the Great Recession, it is conceivable that the gap between temporary and permanent workers would have widened, with temporary workers placing even less trust in unions than their permanent counterparts (hypothesis 3).

Alternatively, the Great Recession could have bolstered the scenario posited in the second hypothesis. In a climate marked by high turnover and notable instability, particularly affecting temporary workers, their animosity towards employers may have intensified, coinciding with a more favourable perception of trade unions.

If this supposition holds true, *one could anticipate that throughout the crisis, the disparity between temporary and permanent workers diminished, with temporary workers demonstrating increased trust in trade unions (hypothesis 4)*.

4. Data and variables

To examine these issues, the analysis utilised four surveys conducted by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (CIS), as detailed in Table 1. The initial two surveys align with the zeniths of the preceding significant period of economic prosperity (in 2005 and 2006), while the latter pair correspond to the most challenging phases of the Great Recession (in 2013 and 2014). Leveraging these surveys facilitates the comparison of effects across these distinct historical periods.

Table 1

Surveys used in the analysis

Survey number	Valid cases (salary earners responding to the dependent variable)	Fieldwork date
2588	1,154	12–18 January 2005
2657	1,154	18–25 October 2006
2984	951	1–8 April 2013
3021	935	1–7 April 2014

The samples are nationally representative, and their characteristics are akin; each of the four surveys encompasses the same independent variables under scrutiny and, as delineated, align with the peaks of prosperity and the depths of the Great Recession. Given that the article focuses on comparing temporary and permanent workers, only salary earners have been selected, although the author has also conducted other analyses with the entire sample[2].

In addition to comparing the means of trust in trade unions between temporary and permanent workers during periods of prosperity and crisis, a multivariable analysis has been designed. Specifically, a linear regression analysis has been employed. Through multivariable regression analysis, it is possible to isolate the effects of key variables (being temporary or permanent), while considering other control variables such as ideology, gender, educational attainment, age, social class and sector of activity.

The dependent variable is derived from the following question: "I would like you to tell me the level of trust you have in a series of institutions, using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you have no trust in it at all and 10 means you have a lot of trust in it." Among these institutions, respondents are specifically asked about trade unions. Therefore, the dependent variable is a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 10.

The key independent variable is employment status, which consists of two categories: salary earners with permanent contracts and salary earners with temporary contracts. Additionally, the following control variables have been included, which are recodings of the original variables, to construct these categories:

· Ideology: left, centre-left, centre, centre-right, right and no response.

· Gender: male.

· Age: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–64, 65 or older.

· Educational attainment: primary or less, initial secondary, vocational training, upper secondary, university.

· Social class: social class is based on the EGP scheme (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarrero, 1979). Categories have been constructed based on occupation

at 3 digits: high-service class (I), low-service class (II), non-manual workers in routine tasks (III), skilled manual workers and supervisors (V+VI), semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and agricultural labourers (VIIa + VIIb). Categories V and VI, and VIIa and VIIb, have been grouped due to the scarcity of cases in some of them.

· Sector of activity, based on Singleman (1978), with a specific category for the construction sector, significant in Spain: primary sector, industry, construction, distribution and commerce, business services, public administration (except social services), social services, consumer services.

· Crisis: this variable indicates if the survey was conducted during a boom period (the first two surveys, years 2005 and 2006) or during a period of economic and institutional crisis (the last two surveys, years 2013 and 2014).

To examine differences in trust in trade unions between temporary and permanent workers, firstly, the means of both groups have been compared during periods of prosperity and crisis. Subsequently, a series of linear regressions have been conducted, detailed in the following section.

5. Results

Before delving into the results concerning trust in trade unions between temporary and permanent workers, it is prudent to outline the overall trend of trust across all Spaniards, not just salary earners, over the analysed historical period. Figure 1 illustrates the two available series from CIS surveys. The first one plots five points representing trust in trade unions using a scale from 0 to 10 points. The trend is evident (see the right axis): in 2005, the first year available, trust stood at 4.5 points, gradually declining to 2.4 in 2013 and 2.6 in 2015, the last year with comparable data in this series. Although not depicted in the figure, the evolution of trust in those years has also been computed solely for salary earners, the subsample used in the multivariable analysis and mean comparison. The trend is nearly identical.

The CIS dataset also features another indicator gauging trust in trade unions, using an ordinal scale with categories of high, some, low or no trust. The latest available data for this series is from 2017, dating back to 1996. In 1996, 38% of Spaniards had high or some trust in trade unions, while 54% reported low or no trust. The data exhibits significant stability until 2008; between that year and 2010, trust witnessed a steep decline. Those with high or fair trust dropped from 38% to 21%, while those with low or no trust surged from 55% to 72%. In 2017, the proportions remained remarkably similar to those of 2010.

Figure 1
Degree of trust in trade unions
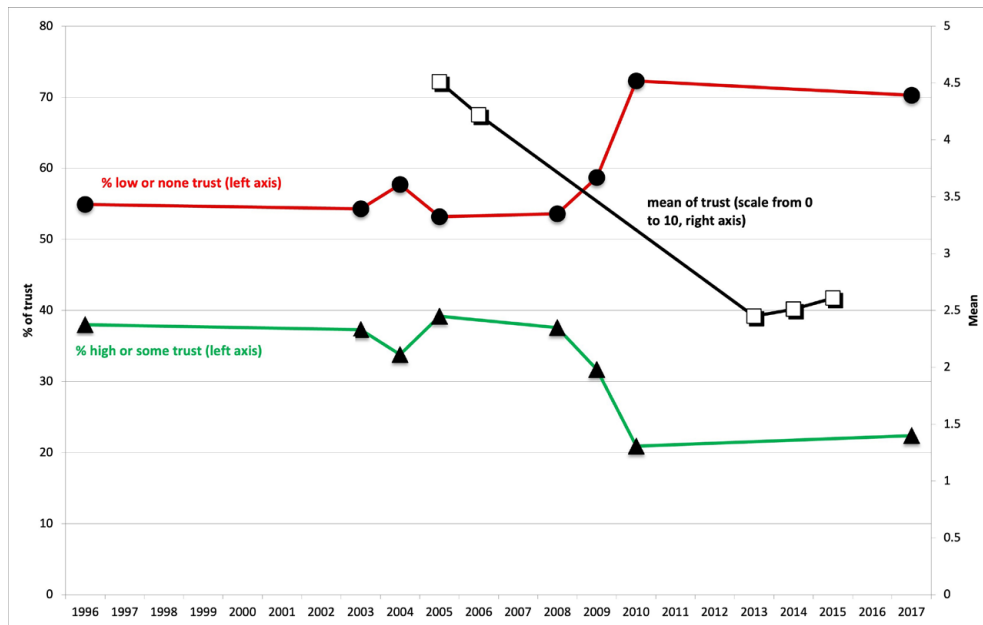
Source: own research based on CIS databank series.

Thus, an initial analysis of the data suggests that the Great Recession markedly impacted trust in trade unions, both among the general population and salary earners. However, it is crucial to underscore that the erosion of trust was not exclusive to trade unions. As illustrated in Table 2, it affected all of Spain's major institutions, suggesting that the crisis that commenced in the final quarter of 2007 transcended the economic sphere to become an institutional crisis. Distrust towards institutions during crises in Spain mirrors what occurred in the United States during the seventies crisis. Lipset and Scheiner (1987) identified a robust correlation between economic conditions and institutional trust. Their findings could potentially elucidate the events in Spain during the Great Recession: "Bad news implicitly or explicitly criticises the country's leaders and institutions. It's not just about things going awry, but also about attributing blame: the president, big business, the press, the military, Congress, or oil companies." In Spain, the most criticised institutions were those most deeply entrenched in politics. Trade unions, as institutionally acknowledged social entities historically linked to political parties, were not immune to this phenomenon.

Table 2

Means of trust in institutions (scale from 0, no trust, to 10, high trust)

	2003	2005	2006	2014
Constitutional Court			5.01	3.35
Parliament	5.35			2.63
Monarchy			5.19	3.72
Autonomous Parliament		4.90		3.07
Political Parties		3.67		1.89
Business Organisations		4.47		2.94
Catholic Church			3.84	3.39
Trade Unions		4.51		2.51

Source: own research based on the trust in institutions series by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research.

After examining the general landscape of trust in trade unions and other institutions, the following lines are dedicated to analysing the differences between temporary and permanent workers. Table 3 presents the means of trust in trade unions for these two groups during the last major economic growth phase and the latest Great Recession, along with a comparison of whether the differences are statistically significant. As observed, during the boom period (data for the years 2005 and 2006), temporary workers had slightly higher trust in trade unions than permanent ones. The mean trust for the former was 4.6, while for the latter it was 4.4. However, the level of significance (sig = 0.133) indicates that the difference in trust is not statistically significant. During the boom period, permanent workers had slightly more trust in trade unions, although not to a statistically significant extent. However, during the crisis period, there were no differences in the mean trust between both groups. The mean trust in trade unions for permanent workers was 2.60, and for temporary workers, it was 2.63.

From this initial analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, during the boom period, there were no significant differences between temporary and permanent workers regarding trust in trade unions. Secondly, the Great Recession did not widen any gap between permanent and temporary workers. The effect of the crisis was evident: trust in trade unions decreased for both groups in a proportion precise enough to prevent any distance between them. In summary, this initial investigation indicates that neither labour flexibility nor the Great Recession had a differential effect on temporary or permanent workers significant enough to open a gap between them regarding their trust in trade unions. The data does not support any of the four hypotheses proposed.

Table 3

Means of trust in trade unions for workers with permanent contracts and temporary contracts during both the boom period and the Great Recession

	Mean		Standard deviation				
	Permanent	Temporary	Permanent	Temporary	Difference in means	t value	Sig. (bilateral)
Boom	4.43	4.61	2.32	2.32	-0.178	-1.50	0.133
Crisis	2.60	2.63	2.36	2.45	-0.024	-0.16	0.869

Source: own research based on microdata from CIS surveys 2588, 2657, 2984 and 3021. For the boom period, the first two surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006 have been grouped, while for the crisis period, the last two surveys carried out in 2013 and 2014 have been grouped.

To assess whether this effect persists while considering other variables such as ideology, gender, age, educational attainment, social class and sector of activity, a multivariable analysis has been conducted. This analysis will determine the net effect of these variables and whether the equality between permanent and temporary workers regarding trust in trade unions hides a compositional effect.

Table 4 contains four columns. The first column reflects the coefficients of the linear regression analysis applied to the four surveys conducted between 2005 and 2014, without distinguishing between periods. The second column displays the results for the boom period (years 2005 and 2006); the third, for the Great Recession period (2013 and 2014) and the fourth, the coefficients related to the interaction between all variables and the "crisis" variable. This fourth column indicates whether the differences between the coefficients obtained in the boom and Great Recession periods are statistically significant.

The multivariable analysis reveals that there are no significant differences between permanent and temporary workers even when considering the other variables in the model. *Ceteris paribus*, temporary workers do not differ from permanent ones either during prosperity or during the Great Recession. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data does not support any of the hypotheses proposed in the theoretical section. Temporary workers do not trust trade unions any more or less than permanent ones, and the Great Recession did not have a differential effect on them.

Regarding the control variables, several aspects are noteworthy. Firstly, the devastating effect of the Great Recession on trust in trade unions, aligning with what occurred with other institutions. In the first column, it is evident that, holding other variables constant, the Great Recession decreased trust in trade unions by 1.82 points. To illustrate, across the four analysed surveys, right-wing individuals trust trade unions 0.73 points less than left-wing individuals. Therefore, the crisis had a similar effect on trust in trade unions to what would have occurred with a social change in which all salary earners had become more than twice as right-wing.

The effects on the other variables are notable due to their lack of significance, except for ideology—which is quite predictable, as right-wing individuals trust trade unions less than left-wing individuals. On the other hand, the analysis reveals that younger individuals tend to place more trust in trade unions (0.31 points higher than the reference category, 30–39 years old). Moreover, among education levels, those with vocational training (VT) are the only group showing significant differentiation from those with upper secondary education (0.21 points higher, a difference similar to that between women and men, with women exhibiting greater trust in trade unions). Lastly, individuals in the high-service class, who are better positioned within the occupational structure, display the lowest level of trust in trade unions among salary earners (0.30 points lower than those in the low-service class, the second-best positioned in the class structure).

Finally, the interaction model confirms that the Great Recession did not create any gap between temporary and permanent workers. Indeed, the sole significant effect of the crisis was a shift in the stance among salary earners identifying as centrist (see the interaction column). Keeping other variables constant, during the boom period, there were no statistically significant differences in trust in trade unions between centrist, left-leaning and centre-left salary earners. However, the Great Recession widened a gap between centrists and left-leaning salary earners: during the crisis, centrists placed significantly less trust in trade unions than left-leaning individuals.

Table 4

Linear regressions on the likelihood of trusting a union (0—10 trust)

	2005—2014		Boom		Great Recession		Interact.	
Ideological scale								
Left (ref.)								
C. left	0.10		0.25		-0.11		-0.36	
Centre	-0.31	**	-0.04		-0.68	**	-0.64	**
C. right	-0.46	**	-0.42	*	-0.51	*	-0.08	
Right	-0.73	**	-0.70	**	-0.76	**	-0.05	
No contesta	-0.84	**	-0.73	**	-0.98	**	-0.25	
Gender								
Female	0.20	*	0.34	**	0.05		-0.29	
Age								
30–39 (ref.)								
18–29	0.31	**	0.34	*	0.27		-0.07	
40–49	-0.16		-0.06		-0.25		-0.18	
50–64	-0.12		-0.23		-0.05		0.18	
Educational attainment								
Lower secondary (ref.)								
Primary	0.16		0.24		0.11		-0.13	
VT	0.21	+	0.25		0.17		-0.09	
Upper secondary	0.10		0.08		0.13		0.05	
University	0.07		0.19		-0.07		-0.26	

	2005—2014		Boom		Great Recession		Interact.	
Employment status								
Permanent (ref.)								
Temporary	0.02		0.01		0.01		0.00	
Social class								
Low service (II) (ref.)								
High service (I)	-0.30	+	-0.17		-0.37		-0.20	
Routine non-manual workers (III)	-0.01		0.16		-0.10		-0.25	
Supervisors and skilled manual workers (V and VI)	0.14		0.31		0.01		-0.30	
Semi-skilled manual workers and agricultural labourers (VIIa and VIIb)	-0.07		0.07		-0.18		-0.25	
No response	0.00		0.31		-0.57		-0.88	
Sector of activity								
Industry (ref.)								
Primary	0.17		-0.03		0.45		0.48	
Construction	0.25		0.42	+	-0.17		-0.59	
Distribution	-0.03		0.00		-0.05		-0.05	
Business services	0.10		-0.05		0.22		0.27	
Public administration (except education and health)	0.06		-0.15		0.32		0.47	
Social services	0.14		0.20		0.11		-0.09	
Personal services	0.06		0.13		-0.03		-0.15	
No response	0.26		0.00		0.66		0.66	
Crisis	-1.82	**					-1.11	**
Constant	4.50	**	4.15	**	3.04	**	4.15	**
R-squared	0.16		0.04		0.04		0.17	

Source: own research based on microdata from CIS surveys 2588, 2657, 2984 and 3021.

6. Conclusions

Neither labour market flexibilisation nor the Great Recession created a gap between temporary and permanent workers in terms of trust in trade unions. Regarding the impact of flexibility, two arguments foresaw increased distrust among temporary workers. The first argument pertained to the shift in labour identity emerging in the post-industrial society and with the advent of flexibilisation. Given the loss of a collectivist identity centred on work among workers most affected by flexibility (temporary workers), it was expected that they would have less trust in trade unions compared to permanent workers. The other argument predicting the same effect was related to the conflict of interests between temporary and permanent workers and the unequal attention they have received from trade unions. According to this argument, trade unions would have focused on defending permanent workers, leading temporary workers to trust them less. However, the data do not confirm either of these hypotheses, as seen by the lack of significant differences between temporary and permanent workers regarding their trust in trade unions: both groups trust them equally. The data also does not confirm the opposing hypothesis, which predicted greater trust among temporary workers. This hypothesis was

based on the idea that in the era of flexibilisation, it was conceivable that temporary workers, who are most affected by flexibility, would have a more negative attitude towards companies and a more positive attitude towards the collective defence of worker interests.

Conversely, the impact of the Great Recession was evident: trade unions were caught in the downturn of trust experienced by Spain's major institutions. Furthermore, this decline was comparable for both temporary and permanent workers. If there wasn't a significant disparity between them concerning their trust in trade unions during the period of economic prosperity, the same held true during the Great Recession.

These findings bring mixed implications for trade unions. The positive aspect is that labour flexibility has not fractured workers' trust in them. Despite indications that temporary workers engage less in union activities and feel less connected to trade unions compared to permanent workers, this has not resulted in diminished trust in trade unions compared to those with permanent contracts, neither during times of economic prosperity nor during the crisis. Based on the findings, it cannot be concluded that the union strategy in collective bargaining resulted in a division among salary earners, at least in terms of trust in trade unions. If, as argued by some authors, unions prioritised the interests of permanent workers over temporary ones, this did not impact the trust of temporary workers in trade unions compared to that of permanent workers.

The concerning aspect is that the Great Recession led to such a significant decrease in trust in trade unions, plummeting to 2.6 points on a scale of 0 to 10, a collapse akin to that experienced by other institutions. It seems that the Great Recession did not exacerbate differences among salary earners, as all displayed low trust in trade unions. From this data, can it be inferred that a society with little trust in trade unions deems them unnecessary? Regarding this, and in the absence of data in Spain, it is useful to refer to other international studies that compared some indicators related to workers' attitudes towards trade unions. Lipset and Scheiner (1987) found low trust in trade unions among American citizens in the 1970s, but upon analysing other indicators, they concluded that Americans had ambivalent feelings: they approved of the function of trade unions but condemned their behaviour. According to the data they analysed, Americans believed that trade unions were necessary to protect workers from arbitrary corporate actions and that without them, workers would earn less and have worse working conditions. At the same time, trade unions were perceived as too powerful and as institutions that only worked for their own benefit. On the other hand, Panagopoulos and Francia (2008), when analysing surveys on opinion towards trade unions in the United States, concluded that despite the lack of trust in them and their leaders, citizens maintained strong support for the work of these organisations, as the majority believed them to be essential for defending workers' rights.

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Notes

1   All the data in this paragraph has been computed by the author relying on the Spanish labour force survey (EPA).

2   No significant variations in outcomes emerge when employing the complete sample.

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RESEARCH NOTE
NOTA DE INVESTIGACIÓN

RESEARCH NOTE/NOTA DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Cyberhate Victimisation among Young People: a Gender and Generational Perspective

La victimización por ciberodio entre la juventud: una perspectiva de género y generacional

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ABSTRACT

Hate speech-related behaviours on the Internet among adolescents and young people are causing concern all over the world. The victim and gender perspective is most commonly studied in recent scientific research given the overlap between hate crimes and hate speech. This paper presents the results of a representative survey conducted by telephone in which 600 young people shared their experiences as victims of unpleasant comments on social media for a variety of reasons. The results are analysed descriptively by gender and age group, as well as by the motive for receiving these offensive or hateful comments. A total of 44.5% of the respondents stated that they had been victims of offensive or hate speech. The most frequent reasons were because of socio-political opinions, followed by their views on feminism. Differences were found to be associated with gender—specifically in the case of those attacked for their opinions on feminism—and with age, nationality or origin and opinions on feminism. One of the main factors for being a victim of offensive or hateful comments is one's stance on feminism and gender, with women being more affected than men, and adolescents more affected than young people.

KEYWORDS: cyberhate; young people; gender; social media; victimisation.

The Spanish (original) version can be read at https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.54

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RESUMEN

Los comportamientos relacionados con el discurso del odio en Internet entre adolescentes y jóvenes están causando preocupación en la comunidad internacional. La perspectiva de víctima y de género está presente en las investigaciones científicas más recientes debido a la naturaleza interseccional de los delitos de odio y del discurso de odio. Este trabajo recoge los resultados de una encuesta representativa administrada telefónicamente a 600 jóvenes sobre la experiencia de ser víctima de comentarios desagradables en las redes sociales por diferentes motivos. Los resultados se analizan descriptivamente por sexo y grupos de edad, según el motivo de haber recibido estos comentarios ofensivos o de odio. Un 44,5% de los encuestados declararon haber sido víctimas de comentarios ofensivos o de odio. Los motivos más frecuentes fueron las opiniones sociopolíticas, seguidas de las opiniones sobre el feminismo. Se encontraron diferencias asociadas, por un lado, al género solo para las opiniones sobre el feminismo y, por otro, a la edad, la nacionalidad o el origen y las opiniones sobre el feminismo. Las principales causas de ser víctima de comentarios ofensivos o de odio están relacionadas con las opiniones sobre el feminismo y el género, más entre las mujeres que entre los hombres, y más entre los adolescentes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ciberodio; jóvenes; género; redes sociales; victimización.

1. Introduction

This paper examines part of the results of the research project titled "Digital citizenship among Andalusian youth: keys to cyberactivism and social cybermovements in Andalusia" (2019 PRY109/19 COLECTIVO). This project centred around investigating the use of new technologies by young people from a positive viewpoint, analysing the Internet as a tool for youth social participation. In addition, the digital presence of third-sector entities in Andalusia was investigated.

A multitude of analyses have attempted to explain why cyberhate occurs, and the issue of "online anonymity" is a variable that can be found throughout. However, there are fewer studies concerned with how sexism intersects with the hatred displayed on social media.

To examine this issue from a gender perspective, we have based our work on the findings of previous research projects focused on online and offline sexual harassment (Cuenca-Piqueras *et al.*, 2020) and on fear in the streets (González and Cuenca, 2022). In these studies, some of the differences in online gender-related violence suffered by young men and women came to the fore.

Therefore, our aim with this work is to shed light on the extent of the violent comments made on the Internet and social media among Andalusian young people and delve into their content. As such, by adding the gender perspective to this analysis, we will gain deeper understanding of how this phenomenon affects women and men differently, and we hope to offer an explanation for these inequalities.

2. Defining cyberhate

Cyberhate has become a central and highly relevant scientific and social issue in recent years. Growing polarisation and radicalisation in many societies has turned cyberhate into an increasingly present and visible phenomenon (Wachs *et al.*, 2022). Cyberhate is an expression of hatred against "others", "strangers" or "enemies", and is conveyed as offensive, insulting or threatening texts, speeches, images and videos that aim to belittle or harm people because of certain characteristics of the group to which they belong (Wachs and Wright, 2019).

Behaviours related to hate speech on the Internet among adolescents and young people are arousing interest and concern in the international community given that this is the most common harmful content to which this group are exposed (Smahel *et al.*, 2020; Wachs, 2022). Exposure to cyberhate is mostly unintentional. Therefore, it is difficult to protect adolescents from cyberhate without restricting their rights to privacy and free access to the Internet (Reichelmann *et al.*, 2020).

Social media has become rife with hate speech that preaches extreme violence and discrimination, with this discourse being used to project certain socio-political beliefs and discriminate against marginalised groups (Banaji and Bhat, 2021). Hate speech on the Internet comes in different forms, whether harassment, abuse or violence, and it is a digital reflection of real-world power relations and domination, but with the specific advantage of anonymity and impunity thanks to the use of avatars and troll accounts on social media (Poland, 2016).

Victim and gender perspectives are present in the latest scientific research, the result of the overlap between the different lines of cyberhate discourse (Zempi and Smith, 2021). The most recent literature contains works investigating the interrelationship between online culture and misogyny in the form of anti-feminism and cyberbullying women on social media (Ging and Siapera, 2018; 2019; Golbeck, 2020; Richardson-Self, 2021). Cyberbullying is especially relevant among younger women, who are exposed to it more intensely and frequently (Cuenca-Piqueras *et al.*, 2020). The success of certain feminist cyber movements, such as #MeToo and other similar campaigns, such as #BlackLivesMatter, has provoked a counterreaction from anti-feminist cyber movements (Bailey, 2021; Bonet-Martí, 2021; Jackson *et al.*, 2020) rooted in 21st-century far-right extremism (Hermansson *et al.*, 2020; Lavin, 2021), thus turning social media platforms into increasingly polarised and violent spaces.

An additional line of research within gender studies has recently begun delving into the use of new technologies and the dissemination of the feminist movement. In this regard, when Internet usage started to become more widespread, the feminist movement was optimistic about the possibilities for change it entailed; ICTs offered it new opportunities for dissent. As was the case with the consciousness-raising groups of the seventies, public and private spaces converged, but this time on the Internet. Social media provided this group, which had traditionally been relegated to the private sphere, with an opportunity to seize control of the public sphere (Hanash, 2020).

When we speak of the fourth wave of feminism, we immediately think of women, many of them millennials, who use social media and the Internet to voice the inequalities they suffer. The feminism movement has been able to leverage the immediacy, visibility and room for growth that social media offers. Moreover, some analyses of cyberactivism argue that in this form of participation, activity is not merely shifted to the virtual space, but it also fosters innovation and new forms of action (Fernández-Prados and Lozano-Díaz, 2022). Embracing technology, however, has brought repercussions; feminists have become the target of misogynistic reactions, insults and online threats (González and Cuenca, 2022). Author Laura Bates' website "Everyday Sexism Project", which collects experiences of inequality and misogyny towards women, even resulting in the publication of a book, exemplifies how social media can be a powerful tool for disseminating feminist messages. Other similar initiatives launched in 2017 and 2018, namely the #MeToo and #Time'sUp movements, respectively, while Spain witnessed the rise of the #Cuéntalo initiative. This phenomenon, which became known as hashtag activism, entailed breaking the silence by allowing all women to share their stories. These initiatives offer women a platform to makes their voices heard, allowing them to participate in the creation of a collective memory that previously did not exist, exposing hidden realities in the process. The #MeToo movement took off on a global scale, culminating in *Time* magazine choosing "the Silence Breakers" as its Person of the Year in 2017.

However, all of this progress meant that some women would pay a high price, falling victim to *trolling* (posts containing hate messages), *doxxing* (making personal data and photos public to incite intimidation and harassment), revenge porn, and even rape and death threats (González and Cuenca, 2022). In fact, studies that analyse anti-feminist countermovements already contain sections dedicated to online attacks. With this in mind, Bonet-Martí (2021) claims that the anti-feminist response has prompted the creation of androcentric websites and forums that have given rise to a manosphere—a series of forums, websites and other online spaces that promote hostility towards women and opposition to feminism—where misogynistic discourses are shared, cyberbullying against feminists is incited, threats are made, images are digitally modified to sexualise the subjects, and all other types of violence are promoted.

3. Objectives

The main objective of this work is to perform an initial study of the issue of hate speech on social media and the different reasons for it from the perspective of the young Andalusian victims.

In addition, in our look at cyber hate speech, we hope to describe the most common sociodemographic sex-gender and age-generation variables and detect any significant links that may exist between them.

4. Methodology

This work collects the results of a representative survey conducted by telephone to 600 young people in the autonomous community of Andalusia in which they were asked about different aspects of their relationship with the Internet, such as access, use, skills and digital participation (see Table 1).

Table 1

Technical details of the survey of young Andalusians

Town or city	Resident of Andalusia between 16 and 30 years old (1,395,109 as of 1 January 2020)
Sample size	600 interviews, divided into two subsamples of 300 young people aged between 16 and 23, and between 24 and 30
Sample error	For the sample as a whole, a margin of error of ± 4 is estimated for a 95% confidence interval
Sample selection	Random and proportional to provinces, gender and age
Interview type	Telephone
Topic	Internet and youth (access, use, skills and digital participation)
Fieldwork	1–21 July 2021, conducted by CELESTE-TEL
Final questionnaire	21 questions (data matrix composed of 86 variables)

Source: own research.

The question that we have analysed from the questionnaire on cyber hate speech received by respondents is as follows: "Have you ever received unpleasant or offensive comments in a conversation on social media, forums or other online platforms?" (see Table 2). The questionnaire comprises multi-part yes or no questions on six reasons why respondents have been victims of attacks or unpleasant or offensive comments on social media: gender, sexual orientation, nationality or origin, aesthetics or personal appearance, views on feminism and views on some other political or social cause.

Table 2

Question from the questionnaire on cyber hate speech

Q.15 Have you ever received unpleasant or offensive comments in a conversation on social media, forums or other online platforms?
If yes, the comments attacked you because of...
1. Yes
2. No
    A. My gender
    B. My sexual orientation
    C. My nationality, origin or related characteristics (religion, language, skin colour, etc.)
    D. My aesthetics, my personal appearance
    E. My views or comments on feminism and/or gender relations
    F. My views or comments on some other social or political cause

Source: own research.

A gender-based descriptive analysis has been carried out on the experiences of those who, for any of the reasons indicated, have been the victim of unpleasant or offensive comments on social media, calculating the chi-square statistic (χ^2) to detect significance. Likewise, the respondents have been grouped into two subsamples according to an approximation of two generations of young people: Generation Z (16–23 years old) and Generation Y (24–30 years old) (Fernández-Prados and Cuenca-Piqueras, 2023). This allows us to perform a descriptive and comparative analysis of the reasons for cyberhate and highlight those that are most statistically significant.

5. Results

Of the young Andalusians studied, 43.4% have been the victim of one or more of the six types of hate speech indicated on social media. The most frequent reasons are for having posted comments on the Internet regarding a social or political cause (32.7%), followed by their views on feminism (29.4%) and their aesthetics and personal appearance (27.3%).

In general, young women (45.8%) receive more unpleasant comments on social media for any of the six reasons detailed above than their male peers (41.0%). Although the greatest differences between genders are found in the three most frequently reported motives, standing at around five percentage points, the only significant disparity according to the chi-square (χ^2) statistic is for "my views or comments on feminism and/or gender relations" (see Table 3).

Table 3
Reasons for receiving cyberhate by gender (%)

	M	F	TOTAL
My gender	15.4	14.5	15.0
My sexual orientation	12.6	12.0	12.3
My nationality, origin...	15.4	15.8	15.6
My aesthetics, my personal appearance	25.1	29.6	27.3
My views on feminism	26.2	32.8	29.4*
My views on socio-political issues	30.4	35.2	32.7
Any of the six causes of cyberhate	41.0	45.8	43.4

M = male; F = female; * $p < 0.5$; ** $p < 0.01$.
Source: own research.

In our analysis, we split the subjects into two age groups based on their generation: Generation Z, those between 16 and 23 years old; and Generation Y, those between 24 and 30 years old.

The majority of women in Generation Z report having received unpleasant or offensive comments on social media, while this figure was much lower for males in the same age range (40.1% of men compared to 52.4% of women). While in Generation Z females receive more cyber hate speech or comments than their male peers, in Generation Y the opposite is true (see Table 4). In addition, in this older group of young people, the only significant difference between genders is for hate speech based on sexual orientation (18.0% of men compared to just 8.9% of women). On the other hand, in Generation Z, the younger group of the two, the differences between women and men are significant for four of the six reasons (sexual orientation, nationality, views on feminism and views on socio-political causes), with women reporting the higher number in all cases. It is worth pointing out the high significance of gender difference in Generation Z for offensive comments made on social media as a result of views on feminism (25.3% of men compared to 41.4% of women).

Table 4

Reasons for receiving cyberhate by gender and generation (%)

	16–23			24–30		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
My gender	9.2	15.2	12.1	21.7	13.8	17.8
My sexual orientation	7.2	15.2	11.1*	18.0	8.9	13.5*
My nationality, origin…	8.7	17.2	12.9*	22.1	14.4	18.3
My aesthetics, my personal appearance	25.8	35.2	30.4	24.3	24.0	24.2
My views on feminism	25.3	41.4	33.2**	27.0	24.1	25.6
My views on socio-political issues	27.8	39.3	33.4*	32.9	31.0	32.0
Any of the six causes of cyberhate	40.1	52.4	46.2*	41.8	39.2	40.5

M = male; F = female; * $p < 0.5$; ** $p < 0.01$.
Source: own research.

6. Discussion

After analysing and presenting the results of the study, we can see that almost half of the young Andalusians interviewed have been targeted by at least one of the six types of hate speech on social media. As other authors point out, hate speech on social media has increased in recent years, becoming an epidemic that continues to beleaguer platforms (Bustos Martínez *et al.*, 2019; Ramírez-García, González-Molina and Moyano-Pacheco, 2022). Social and political issues top the list in terms of motives for receiving online hate, followed by views on feminism and aesthetics and personal appearance. Hate speech has developed into a problem in both the social and political realms, spurred on by the social media platforms

themselves, which foster polarisation and social conflict (Kim *et al.*, 2022; Ojeda–Copa *et al.*, 2021). Hate posts regarding feminism—constructed around stereotypes or preformed notions—abound on social media and contain high levels of verbal violence (Gonçalves and Willem, 2021). As our results show, young women generally receive more unpleasant comments on social media for one of these six reasons, but mostly because of gender issues.

Likewise, in Generation Z, those aged between 16 and 23, a much greater proportion of women report having received unpleasant or offensive comments on social media than their male counterparts. As other authors have pointed out, it is typical for members of Generation Z to have a social media account on which they and their peers comment and opine on all topics, seemingly with no filter, which often results in comments that can be considered offensive (Álvarez *et al .*, 2019). However, with regard to cyberhate comments and speech, that women in this age group receive more cyberhate comments than their male counterparts may come down to the fact that women are more likely to post feminist content than men are, and this triggers a response in the form of cyberhate comments (Martín, 2018). However, in Generation Y, older male youngsters receive more hate speech on the basis of their sexual orientation than women (Zunino *et al.*, 2020).

In Generation Z (the younger of the two generations studied), on the other hand, the differences between women and men are significant for four of the six reasons (sexual orientation, nationality, views on feminism and views on socio–political issues), with the women most affected in all cases. It is worth pointing out the high significance of gender difference in Generation Z when it comes to offensive comments on social media regarding one's stance on feminism. The latter may boil down to the fact that younger women and members of Generation Z in general are more likely to participate in cyberactivism (Fernández-Prados and Cuenca-Piqueras, 2022); remember that the last social cybermovements of the 2010s were spearheaded by adolescent girls (Fernández Prados *et al.*, 2021; Lozano-Díaz and Fernández Prados, 2021).

Another issue to consider is the social context. Since 2017 we have been witnessing a shift within feminism, resulting in what is referred to as the "fourth wave" of feminism. The turning point in Spain was the mobilisation that followed the sentencing of the perpetrators of the La Manada gang rape case and the global demonstrations on 8 March. Technology has played a pivotal role in this fourth wave, facilitating the mobilisation, organisation and dissemination of the fight against inequality and the eradication of violence against women. However, at the same time, a counter-movement has reared its head in Spain, represented by groups including the Foro Español de la Familia (Spanish Forum for the Family) and HazteOír (Make Yourself Heard) social change groups and ultra-right party Vox. Moreover, studies concerning the Spanish manosphere have started being published, analysing the impact of different online spaces such as Forocoches, Hispachan and prostitution websites, specifically Spalumi.com and Follatemallorca.com (García-Mingo and Díaz-Fernández, 2022).

7. Conclusions, study limitations and future lines of research

Given that this work focuses on just one specific aspect of a larger research project, we are aware of the numerous study limitations. Many of these issues emanate from the fact that cyberhate shown towards feminism is a very complex social phenomenon and, therefore, a more detailed analysis is required in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the topic.

In the question we pose, not only do we ask directly about unpleasant or offensive comments received regarding one's opinion of the feminist movement, but we also try to include issues directly related to misogyny, inquiring about offensive comments received based on gender, as well as other issues more loosely related to beauty stereotypes and canons by asking about aesthetics or appearance. Many issues are left out while others are vague.

Further investigation is required in this line of work in order to better define the aspects that we are inquiring about. Intersectional analyses would also be appropriate to examine how two or more variables interact with one another, as online hate is perhaps different in the hypothetical case of a cisgender, white woman with a body that meets traditional beauty standards than when the hatred is directed at a trans woman, or someone in a sexual, ethnic or functionally diverse minority, for example.

Although initial studies are under way on the extent of the online violence suffered by activists, most proposals take a qualitative approach that employs ethnographic techniques, studying online spaces in order to analyse human relations, communities and digital culture (Hanash, 2020). Therefore, we are beginning to familiarise ourselves with some of the main issues of the phenomenon, but defining the scope and ascertaining to what extent cyberhate towards feminism affects Internet users is still a complex task.

In this analysis, we have focused on unpleasant and offensive comments, with our findings indicating that around half of young Andalusians are subject to them on social media, as they reported in the survey. In particular, young women from Generation Z are the ones who suffer the most from such offences. In fact, online hate speech has shifted from targeting Generation Y males to being mostly aimed at Generation Z females.

Our results confirm another trend regarding the reasons why someone may become a victim of cyberhate. Younger women are especially likely to suffer violence given that holding views on feminism is a leading cause of cyberhate, and herein lies the greatest difference between them and their male peers.

In short, the youngest members of this group, women and views on feminism are the most prominent sociodemographic variables and motives for receiving online hate speech or cyberhate, with this becoming increasingly significant and evident.

This first approach provides plenty of food for though, and a number of research questions have arisen. One would be concerned with finding out how many more displays of violence are committed online by anti-feminists. Some studies indicate that threats of physical or sexual violence, posting intimate images without consent—some even digitally manipulated—or publishing personal data, such as telephone numbers or addresses, on the Internet are all common occurrences. There are potentially many acts that take place outside of this relationship, such as identity theft and massive attacks on websites, and these are only growing in number as technology advances.

Another important aspect to analyse is the frequency of violence and reverberations it has on the lives of those who have suffered it. The study carried out by Amnesty International (2017) brings some of these issues to light, underlining that 55% of women who suffered cyberbullying experienced stress, anxiety or panic attacks. Likewise, two out of three women reported feeling powerless in the face of this violence.

It would also be interesting to explore how this form of violence can end up achieving what it seeks: self-censorship by those who post feminist content online. According to the Amnesty International report (2017), in the sample of eight countries that was analysed, 76% of women who claimed to have been subject to harassment or threats on social media had changed the way they use these platforms due to the violence they suffered. For this reason, we believe that it would be interesting not only to analyse the violence suffered on social media, but also consider the feminist comments and content that are no longer shared online for fear of repercussions.

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REVIEWS/
RESEÑAS

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E. Lamo de Espinosa. *Entre águilas y dragones. El declive de Occidente*. Madrid: Espasa, 2021 (Premio Espasa 2021 y Premio Know Square 2022)

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Este libro recoge la experiencia de Emilio Lamo de Espinosa durante varios años en el Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos; tiempo durante el cual, según indica el autor en el prólogo, cambió su «sombrero de académico universitario "de torre de marfil" por el de *thintankero* comprometido» (p. 15). Pues bien, me temo que debo comenzar esta reseña expresando mi desacuerdo. Lamo de Espinosa no reemplazó un sombrero por otro al redactar este texto. A lo largo de toda su carrera intelectual ha sabido ir combinando, sin abandonarlos nunca por completo, hasta «tres sombreros»: el de académico universitario, el de político y el de *thintankero* comprometido. Atendamos a cada uno de ellos.

Primero, el sombrero de académico universitario. Quizá el más seductor de los tres sombreros. Ahora bien, este sombrero presenta el riesgo cierto de orientar a su portador hacia una de las muchas «torres de marfil» que podemos encontrarnos en el mundo académico. Un riesgo que, dicho sea de paso, este estudioso ha sabido sortear con gran éxito a lo largo de toda su carrera intelectual. Con este sombrero puesto, Lamo de Espinosa publica sus trabajos sobre la obra de Julián Besteiro, Derecho y «desviación social», epistemología de las ciencias sociales, los límites disciplinarios de la sociología, su personal forma de comprender esta ciencia, parentesco, teoría sociológica, sociología del conocimiento, sociedad del conocimiento, sociedad reflexiva, o el diferente papel que juegan los *think tanks* y las universidades en las actuales sociedades del conocimiento y reflexivas; sin olvidar, por supuesto, su labor como coordinador, junto a Salvador Giner y Cristóbal Torres, de las dos ediciones del *Diccionario de Sociología*.

Segundo, el sombrero de político. Es importante señalar aquí que nos valemos de la palabra «político» en su sentido más noble, en aquel que (ciertamente basado en una cierta idealización de la Grecia clásica, de la república romana y/o del mundo anglosajón) parece aproximar el campo semántico de lo político al de lo cívico. Quizá el más

ingrato de los tres sombreros. Con este sombrero puesto, Lamo de Espinosa publica sus textos sobre política universitaria (no debemos perder de vista que ocupa durante varios años puestos de responsabilidad política en la esfera de la gestión universitaria), el sistema político democrático, la corrupción política, la actual estructura autonómica que presenta el Estado español o los procesos de transición política.

Tercero, el sombrero de *thintankero* comprometido. Un sombrero que, en el caso concreto de nuestro autor, él mismo ha sabido ir tejiéndose a lo largo de los años y que se caracteriza por estar compuesto, entre otras cosas, de retales procedentes de los dos primeros sombreros. Quizá el más iconoclasta de los tres sombreros. Con este sombrero puesto, Lamo de Espinosa lleva a cabo sus investigaciones sobre la «marca España», fronteras culturales, sus reflexiones geopolíticas generales, el declive (o no) de Occidente o el papel que juegan Europa, América Latina, Estados Unidos, la India y España en el mundo.

Pues bien, el texto que aquí presentamos (que, como se señala en sendas notas a pie de página, recopila, actualiza y completa investigaciones previas de nuestro autor) se constituye, precisamente, como uno de los mejores ejemplos, junto con *Bajo puertas de fuego: el nuevo desorden internacional*, de obras redactadas por Lamo de Espinosa con el sombrero de *thintankero* comprometido puesto (combinándolo, eso sí, con los otros dos sombreros).

Este libro presenta un prólogo, una introducción, siete capítulos, un epílogo y un *post scriptum*.

En el Prólogo, Lamo de Espinosa señala que hace más de tres mil años, y en los dos extremos de Eurasia, emergieron dos grandes civilizaciones: Occidente y Oriente; dos civilizaciones que durante un largo periodo de tiempo apenas mantuvieron contacto. Ahora bien, más allá de la eventual tensión que puede haber existido entre el «águila» occidental y los «dragones» asiáticos, a lo que asistimos en la actualidad, y por primera vez en la historia de nuestra especie, es a la emergencia de una sola civilización mundial con una única historia. En este escenario, y como no podía ser de otra manera, el futuro de España se sitúa fuera de España.

En la introducción, titulada «Europa después de Europa», Lamo de Espinosa nos recuerda que tanto Stefan Zweig como Jan Patočka aseguraban que Europa se había «suicidado» en dos guerras mundiales. Ahora bien, según señalaba el segundo, este suicidio iba acompañado de una mundialización de las instituciones europeas. Tras el suicidio de Europa, pasamos, en la esfera geopolítica mundial, de la bipolaridad propia de la guerra fría a la unipolaridad de la hegemonía americana. ¿Y ahora? Ahora no se sabe muy bien hacia dónde transitamos. Lo único claro es que se está produciendo un desplazamiento del centro de gravedad del mundo hacia Asia, y que esto supone una marginación de Europa. Lo más preocupante es que, en este escenario, la Unión Europea (UE) se muestra incapaz de definir su propio papel. Así, o la UE se articula como una unidad para asumir un papel protagonista en el nuevo mundo globalizado o quedará relegada a desempeñar un papel cada vez más dependiente y secundario.

En el capítulo 1, «1989: El año que cambió el mundo», Lamo de Espinosa nos recuerda que Europa, desde la Segunda Guerra Mundial y hasta ese mismo año, estaba do-

blemente colonizada: desde el oeste, y bajo el protectorado de los Estados Unidos, a través de la OTAN; desde el este, y bajo el protectorado de la Unión Soviética, a través del Pacto de Varsovia. La caída en 1989 del bloque del Este en Europa, por un lado, finiquita el proyecto radical revolucionario soviético y certifica el triunfo de una visión ilustrada y moderna de los asuntos humanos (constituye el triunfo de la democracia liberal y de la economía de mercado); pero, por otro, sienta las bases para que Europa sea desplazada del centro del escenario global. Al generalizarse el crecimiento económico, otros países, como es lógico, reclaman su puesto en el mundo.

En el capítulo 2, «La europeización del mundo», Lamo de Espinosa hace un repaso del papel histórico que ha jugado Europa en el mundo. Comienza atendiendo a la historia de la europeización del mundo; es decir, a la globalización. Según el autor, «si indagamos cuáles fueron las instituciones dominantes en el mundo moderno, encontraremos tres, una política [el Estado democrático (y liberal)], otra económica [la economía de mercado] y una tercera cultural [la ciencia]» (pp. 81-82). De este modo, la globalización fue posible gracias, en primer lugar, a la tecnociencia; y, en segundo lugar, a su consecuencia histórica: la revolución industrial. Ambas se constituyeron como el verdadero origen de la «Gran Divergencia» entre el este y el oeste. Tras el suicidio de Europa, esta se parte en dos. Sin embargo, ahora, Europa se ha reconquistado a sí misma gracias al establecimiento de un nuevo instrumento político: la UE. Este objeto político no identificado (OPNI) presenta dos características. Por un lado, se articula, bien es cierto que de espaldas a la ciudadanía, a través de la suma de soberanías (no de su enfrentamiento). Por otro, presenta un gran «poder blando» basado en su carácter modélico. Ahora bien, a la UE se le presentan cuatro retos fundamentales: definir su extensión (¿hasta dónde?) y su profundidad (¿qué es?), hacer frente a su estructura socioeconómica (es decir, responder a los retos que supone disponer de una población decreciente y envejecida); y, finalmente, concretar su papel como actor en el escenario global (la UE carece de una política exterior común basada en una cultura estratégica común).

En el capítulo 3, «El mundo emergente», Lamo de Espinosa se centra en dar cuenta de la actual «Gran Transformación del Mundo». Un proceso multicausal, pero que, fundamentalmente, obedece a dos motivos: por una parte, a una divergencia demográfica; y, por otra, a una convergencia tecnológica, ambas entre el este y el oeste. La primera alude al hecho de que en las próximas décadas el viejo Occidente sumará poco más del 20% de la población mundial, una tercera parte que Asia. La segunda, al hecho de que copiar siempre resulta menos costoso que inventar, de tal modo que hoy asistimos a una difusión mundial de tecnologías de todo tipo. En este escenario, si:

> [...] el PIB de un país es resultado de la productividad per cápita multiplicado por el número de sus trabajadores. Y si la productividad del trabajador que recibe esas innovaciones crece y tiende a homogeneizarse con el trabajador más productivo, la riqueza global de un país pasa (tendencialmente) a depender del volumen de la población (p. 115).

En resumen, frente a la «Gran Divergencia» entre el este y el oeste que emerge con la revolución industrial, parece que actualmente asistimos a una «Gran Convergencia» mundial. No obstante, la cosa no termina aquí, «pues las potencias económicas

pronto devienen potencias políticas» (p. 117), y «el último salto, inevitable también, es pasar a ser potencias militares» (p. 118). Una convergencia mundial que, por otra parte, y paradójicamente, ha resultado tanto en una decreciente desigualdad económica entre países como en una creciente desigualdad económica dentro de cada país.

En el capítulo 4, «Grandes actores del desgobierno global», Lamo de Espinosa comienza haciendo un repaso a cuatro potencias políticas actuales: Estados Unidos, actual potencia hegemónica a la que se le presentan nuevos retos globales; China (una civilización disfrazada de Estado), que se constituye como la gran potencia estratégica emergente; Rusia, una potencia sobrevalorada; y la India, una potencia infravalorada. A continuación, atiende a ciertas potencias regionales, para, inmediatamente después, pasar a exponer las once cuestiones que, a su modo de ver, se presentan ante la agenda emergente del desgobierno mundial. Concluye haciendo referencia a cómo la incierta gobernanza actual del mundo deriva del hecho de que la ONU tiene legitimidad, pero no fuerza; mientras que EE. UU. tiene fuerza, pero no legitimidad. En este escenario, lo que se necesita es una alianza mundial de democracias cuyo núcleo duro remita a una UE ampliada.

En el capítulo 5, «La globalización cultural: ¿crisol, ensalada o gazpacho?», Lamo de Espinosa, al analizar el tema de las fronteras culturales, comienza contraponiendo el modelo del *melting pot* (que supone una fusión homogeneizadora) al modelo del *salad bowl* (que implica una separación heterogeneizadora). Tras el innegable triunfo del segundo (del multiculturalismo), en la actualidad asistimos a la emergencia de un «gazpacho»: la convivencia de culturas separadas (*salad bowl*) ha dado lugar a una fertilización cruzada, siempre *in fieri*. Ahora bien, este gazpacho de la cultura mundial parece presentar tres dinámicas: de un lado (y en la línea del modelo del *melting pot*), una dinámica dominante y homogeneizadora derivada de la racionalización/modernización del mundo; de otro (y en la línea del modelo del *salad bowl*), por una parte, una creciente afirmación de las grandes culturas históricas (islamismo, hinduismo y confucionismo), y, por otra, una fragmentación interna de la cultura occidental (p. ej., el nacionalismo).

En el capítulo 6, «La occidentalización de América», Lamo de Espinosa afirma que América Latina es la región del mundo donde el «gazpacho» civilizatorio manifiesta con mayor visibilidad el choque de Occidente con el mundo. España y Portugal romanizaron e incorporaron a la cultura occidental dicho hemisferio hace quinientos años, del mismo modo que Roma lo había hecho con ellos mil quinientos años antes. A lo que asistimos en la actualidad es a la mezcla de las dos grandes culturas americanas (dos ramas de la civilización occidental): la hispana y la anglo: «hay algo nuevo, anglo-español, emergiendo en América, tanto en el norte como en el sur» (p. 277).

En el capítulo 7, «¿Concentración o difusión? La ambivalencia del poder en el siglo XXI», Lamo de Espinosa, partiendo de la definición clásica de poder que establece Weber, diferencia cuatro formas: a) poder como coacción o fuerza («poder duro» o poder militar), b) poder como autoridad (poder político), c) poder como influencia («poder blando» o poder ideológico), y d) poder estructural («poder sin sujeto», poder de los órdenes institucionales económicos, políticos o culturales). A lo que añade tres observaciones: a) el poder es siempre relacional (y, por ello, se constituye como

un juego de suma cero), b) estas formas de poder se presentan juntas en casi todas las relaciones sociales (pero de modo asimétrico), y c) los poderosos buscan siempre la servidumbre voluntaria (la aquiescencia rutinaria y dada por supuesta por parte de aquellos sobre los que se ejerce dicho poder). A continuación, y partiendo de la definición clásica de Estado que establece Weber, afirma la total estatalización del mundo basada en el monopolio efectivo de la violencia física legítima del que actualmente disfrutan los Estados en sus correspondientes territorios. En este escenario, hoy asistimos a una doble dinámica: por una parte, a una fuerte concentración de poder en las burocracias de los Estados, que, sin embargo, pierden poder hacia dentro debido a la globalización (que erosiona su soberanía); por otra, a una gran concentración del poder global en muy pocos Estados–imperios (EE. UU., por supuesto, y quizá China).

En el «Epílogo para españoles», Lamo de Espinosa defiende que el problema de España es el típico de los países medianos: no puede jugar a no molestar (como los países pequeños), pero tampoco a liderar (como los países grandes). España debe jugar, no puede no jugar. Pero debe saber que va a perder frecuentemente. Así, la mejor opción para España consiste en jugar formando parte de una sólida alianza multilateral de democracias.

En el «Post scriptum. Afganistán: civilización o barbarie», Lamo de Espinosa pone de manifiesto la enorme derrota estratégica (y consecuente falta de credibilidad) que supuso para EE. UU. y la OTAN la huida de ese país a mediados de agosto de 2021 y se plantea si no estamos transitando del sueño de una paz liberal bajo hegemonía occidental hacia una realidad basada en la confrontación global de grandes potencias.

En definitiva, el público culto está de enhorabuena. Cualquier lector ilustrado que se sienta legítimamente concernido por el actual estado del mundo (y que, además, pretenda comprenderlo) hará muy bien en adquirir este texto y leerlo con detenimiento. Su principal virtud radica en el hecho de que logra presentar con el debido rigor intelectual (además de sencillez estilística) el actual debate geopolítico mundial.

REVIEWS/RESEÑAS

Simona De Iulio and Susan Kovacs (Eds.). *Food Information, Communication and Education. Eating knowledge*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022

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The website Eat Move (*Manger Bouger*), one of the main public communication tools of the French Ministry of Health, highlights its goal on a central banner: to propose "recipes, activity ideas and tips for eating better and moving more". Notions such as "eat well" and "eat better" are repeatedly used by public policies that promote nutritional recommendations to prevent certain diseases and health problems through individual food choices. But can "better eating" be the same for all individuals, independently of determinants like social class, level of education, cooking skills, and cultural background? Furthermore, to these recommendations have been recently added economic, environmental, and social issues. The result is a confusing melody, with a great number of notes, and that are adapted and diffused in different media by actors as diverse as non profit organisations, agribusiness companies, health professionals and regular citizens. And that, in an even more intensive rhythm since the expansion of the internet.

In this complex and unstable context, it seems fundamental to understand the proliferation of actors and discourses relating to food, and more specifically the circulation and reception of knowledge. That is precisely the objective of *Food Information, Communication and Education. Eating knowledge.* The book aims to analyse how eating knowledge is disseminated and configured over time in different Western European contexts, through the action of a number of actors and media. It also considers the ways in which such knowledge has been interpreted and appropriated by different publics. Eating knowledge is here perceived as "a communication process by which theories, norms and beliefs about food and food practices circulate in different spheres" (2022: 1). In this sense, the collective work encompasses a number of social environments and media contexts, such as medical books, school classrooms and canteens, elderly nutrition, businesses, diabetics' patients, dietary consultations, and food advertising. It is also concerned with the ways in which communication arte-

facts transport, configure and transform knowledge about food.

The book is edited by the duo Susan Kovacs and Simona De Iulio, who have been developing research projects, publications, conferences and even an university diploma on the subject of food information, communication and education, alongside a pluridisciplinary team from the University of Lille and beyond. In this new project they gather 18 authors, most pursuing researches in France, in information and communication science. But since food and eating is a complex theme that could not be completely understood without a pluridisciplinary and comparative approach, different chapters include a historical perspective, there are contributions in sociology, education sciences, history, cultural anthropology, literature, and history of ideas, as well as researches based in Spain, Italy and Belgium.

The thirteen chapters are divided in two parts. The first focuses on the role of media (visual, oral, printed and electronic) in the circulation of knowledge within different social spaces, and on the actions of artefacts and humans who have taken on the role of mediators. It examines how media and mediators have tried to impose a normalized vision of food practices through the dissemination of knowledge since the seventeenth century. The second part of the book analyses the reception and the use of food knowledge by actors situated in different contexts and spheres, and how the active appropriation of knowledge by them has contributed to the creation of renewed food information and communication practices and alternative food pedagogies. As the chapters clarify, knowledge appropriation is a dynamic process in which individuals and institutions interpret and reorganize information, and may end up by reformulating and co-creating knowledge. In this sense, a number of actors has developed countermeasures to governmental, medical and corporate prescribed eating practices, such as food blogging and community culinary activism.

1. First part. Construction and circulation of "eating knowledge": Mediators and mediations

In the first chapter, the Italian anthropologist Elisabetta Moro uses the case of olive oil in the context of the Mediterranean diet to illustrate how current dietary guidelines tend to relegate the cultural elements of food in favour of nutritional aspects. She introduces a historical perpective on practical and symbolic knowledge about olive oil since the ancient Greek civilization, illustrating how this product has been praised for its political, religious and dietary value. Nonetheless, educational models such as the "traffic light diet" present a simplified formula that encourages the public to stop consuming foods for their high calorie content. In a defence of olive oil, Moro calls attention to such models that may penalize foods with a long gastronomic and cultural tradition.

The second chapter, written by the specialist in French literature and history of ideas Justine Le Floc'h, focuses on books of the medical genre "health regimens", printed in seventeenth-century France to promote dietetic knowledge and good

health practices among a wide-ranging audience (practitioners, apothecaries, non-professional readers, etc.). In a moment when the domain of disease prevention was still emerging, authors aimed to promote the legitimacy of physicians as the only professionals qualified to produce reliable knowledge about food choices. Through a discourse analysis approach, Le Floc'h examines the conception of dietetics promoted by authors, the image that they gave of themselves as experts, and the communication strategies employed to make the reading experience engaging and accessible.

The third chapter, by historian Didier Nourrisson, investigates a pedagogical tool introduced in French schools in the mid-twentieth century: educational filmstrips. As a complement to traditional methods, they allowed teachers to personalize their explanatory discourse while projecting successive images in various formats. Nourrisson shows how the vision of different disciplines such as civic education (table manners) and home economics was significantly modified by this medium. Furthermore, the corpus analysed aims to moralize pupils, by teaching them how to eat and drink with good manners, and offers food industries and private companies the possibility to influence pupils in their food choices.

Chapter four, by sociologist Laura Guérin, examines the scientific construction of undernutrition amongst the elderly as a public problem in France. Based on a study of eating and dietary practices in care homes for older people, and on medical literature from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century, Guérin analyses how the definitions of the dietary needs of older people, along with the health policies supporting these definitions, have changed over the years. She observes a progressive medicalization of diets and dietary guidelines, as well as an increasing importance given to undernutrition after the 1940s.

In chapter five, communication scholars Thomas Heller and Élodie Sevin explore the concern for workers' well-being and "productivity" in corporate world. If new professions (nutritionist, taste educator, etc.), new philosophies of food and diet behaviours have emerged in the context of late capitalism, historic research shows that questions about food at the workplace have been a major economic and political consideration since the second half of the nineteenth century. In this chapter, the authors point out the similarities and distinctions between the issues and types of knowledge in both periods, highlighting the importance of a historical analysis to the understanding of contemporary practices.

In the last chapter of the first part, the specialist in strategic and digital communication François Allard-Huver also uses a historical and communicational perspective, but in this case to examine the dissemination of knowledge during food-related scandals that took place in the European Union. He explores four aspects of these phenomena: the info-documentary dimension of knowledge, the contribution to the creation of a specific discourse in the public sphere, the emergence of new mediators, and the extent to which these events have transformed the way food exists as a commodity. According to Allard-Huver, although traditional food information mediators try to control narratives, citizens seem to turn to other actors who manage to exploit the potential of digital media and new modes of publicization, leading a reconfigu-

ration of food knowledge.

2. Second part. Uses and appropriations of "eating knowledge" in everyday practices

Sociologist Vincent Schlegel initiates the second part of the book with his work on the evolutions of prescriptions for diabetes mellitus, of medical practices and of patients' involvement in their own care in twentieth-century France. Based on an historic overview, on an ethnographic study of "therapeutic patient education" programmes and on interviews, he reveals how dietary restrictions imposed by medical staff gave place to self restraint through patient training. Although patients are offered knowledge, know-how and life skills, there are relevant class-based discrepancies in the reception of nutritional recommendations: working-class patients must make supplementary efforts to comply with prescriptions, which reduces the capacity of such programs to promote change.

Chapter eight, written by information-communication science scholar Viviane Clavier, explores the process of food knowledge mediation through the work of dieticians. Based on an online survey, the research reveals wide disparities in information-seeking among professionals, namely in terms of frequency and types of sources favoured. Although dieticians' knowledge has become highly specialized, their expertise is often called into question, and they end up being considered more as information mediators than as nutrition consultants. In this context, Clavier observes that to a great number of professionals it is necessary to propose personalized care and adapted advices, focusing on how and when to convey information, instead of adopting a top-down prescriptive model.

In the following chapter, sociologist Virginie Córdoba-Wolff analyses the information practices of people who do not eat gluten for health reasons, based in interviews, participant observations, a quantitative survey, and the analysis of blogs and websites. Córdoba-Wolff shows that information practices are multiple and complementary, and include practical and theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, with the ascension of the Internet, search patterns have become more selective according to individual skills necessary to understand information, and to access to sources and to the internet.

In chapter 10, information-communication science scholars Simona De Iulio, Laurence Depezay, and Susan Kovacs, alongside education scholars Christian Orange and Denise Orange-Ravachol, focus on the mediatization of discoveries related to vitamins in the second half of the twentieth century, through school biology textbooks and commercial advertising. The authors analyse the ways in which knowledge about vitamins is presented in accordance with school curricula, and as part of promotional discourse about food and food products for children. There are significant distinctions, but in both cases vitamins and foods that contain them are seen in a metonymic relationship: vitamins are represented as properties of such foods, mediating representations of food and eating in the social imaginary.

The last three chapters of the book focus uniquely on the school environment, whose importance in food education has been intensified by the end of the twentieth century. Chapter 11, by information-communication science scholar Marie Berthoud, explores how knowledge related to food is constructed by French public authorities and the way information circulates and is mediated by actors in public schools. Although knowledge is institutionalized through school activities, times and places, new knowledge emerges through practices of appropriation by professionals and children. Berthoud refers therefore to "forms of knowledge", in the plural – a mix of expert, institutional and lay concepts and precepts.

Chapter 12, by education scholars Christian Orange and Denise Orange-Ravachol, examines some of the conditions that allow approaches to food education through scientifically reasoned knowledge. Authors argue that classroom activities should surpass conventional modes of thinking, such as normative discourses, storytelling and object-based reasoning, and include functional argumentation, systemic reasoning, and discussions on the foundations of nutritional science. Furthermore, it would be fundamental for pupils to avoid basing their choices on appeals to authority: instead, they should understand recommendations and decide for themselves.

At last, sociologists Philippe Cardon and María Dolores Martín-Lagos López present an ethnographic research on parent-run school canteens in Granada, Spain. This "reform movement from below" aims to educate children on eating practices in line with dietary orthodoxy, as well as on environmental issues related to food and on citizen involvement. Such initiatives criticize not only the preeminent educational model, but the quality of the meals prepared by outsourced catering companies. An important aspect is that conformity to such nutritional and environmental model is characteristic of the upper-middle classes, to which belong most parents involved in the canteens. Nonetheless, they integrate different strata of this social group and have diverse visions of the future, which signals a potential need for more detailed studies on such political dimensions.

3. Final remarks

Susan Kovacs and Simona De Iulio have composed a flavorful book, pleasant to read, with a rich diversity of contexts, objects and approaches. It may therefore be of interest to researchers from any area who are sympathetic to human and social sciences. Chapters are complementary and help us understand how complex can be food information, communication and education practices. Through specific examples, they question the larger social and historical contexts in which food knowledge emerges, circulates, and is transformed during this process.

A relevant aspect of the project is the focus on the processes of transforming, rewriting, mediating and reusing concepts and beliefs derived from academic and lay sources. In this sense, it proposes new critical perspectives on how knowledge sources are disseminated, revived and shared; how they are used to support advice and behavioural guidelines; and how they are interpreted. According to the editors, "when media and mediators communicate theories, beliefs and experiences about food and

eating, they inevitably transform them. Such processes of knowledge circulation in the field of food and eating remain largely unexplored" (2022: 5).

Finally, it is important to mention at least four points that permeate different chapters, and unveil their importance to the global theme of food information, communication and education. The first is not a surprise: the recent medicalisation of food, with a focus on nutritional terms and elements such as vitamins and calories, often accompanied by reductionist explanations. Another point is the search for information and the reception by the public: we can observe relevant class-based discrepancies, but also related to the access to technology and to the development of new skills. This highlights the importance of understanding how information is adapted and diffused to different publics, but also how they react to it. The third point is connected to this: how is knowledge transmitted? As we can read in the book, different models coexist, varying from a top-down prescription of practices, to personalized, adapted advices and training. The former is adopted by most nutritional policies that do not focus on the contextual phenomena that shape citizens' choices. This leads us to the last point, that is how some mediators' authority has been called into question and gave place to new actors, including citizens themselves, who may appropriate information and co-construct knowledge. The book offers relevant, but non-exhaustive insights on these points, stimulating thought and inciting collaborations between disciplines to investigate more appropriate ways to promote "better eating" with all and for all.

L. M. Rondón García. *Loneliness in Older Adults. Effects, Prevention, and Treatment*. London: Elsevier, 2022

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Es cada vez más común observar una tendencia en la sociedad actual: la soledad. El individualismo creciente en buena parte del mundo está potenciando que las culturas cada vez más individualistas estén acrecentando el aislamiento prematuro mientras las tradicionales sociedades colectivistas copian el modelo de las más desarrolladas. Es un hecho que las personas abandonan las estructuras sociales y familiares condicionadas en muchos casos por la forma en la que la vida se desarrolla en nuestro mundo, mientras que en otros casos quedan marginadas por su contexto social y económico. Las personas mayores, en este caso, han sufrido un proceso de aislamiento social: desde ser el centro de la vida comunitaria en las culturas más arcaicas hasta el abandono en las residencias de mayores. No podemos afirmar que sea una característica propia de las personas mayores, pero bien es cierto que es donde más lo observamos, y donde es más difícil actuar y prevenir. Existen toda una serie de factores que conllevan a la soledad, y sus consecuencias son nefastas para la salud física y mental de la persona. Por ello, es de vital importancia que existan trabajos como el que se presenta.

Este libro que aquí analizamos aborda en ocho capítulos este gran problema de la sociedad actual que es la soledad. Analizar dicho fenómeno es complejo, pues, como decíamos, son muchos los factores que hay que manejar para poder elaborar un concepto con el que poder trabajar. En este sentido, el autor hace un estudio multidisciplinar, pues aborda puntos de vista de la neurociencia, la psicología, la medicina y la sociología, todo ello enfocado en ofrecer una perspectiva más amplia de un grupo concreto: las personas mayores. Si bien es cierto que la soledad no es un algo no solo achacable al grupo etario de los mayores, sí que son los que la sufren con mayor frecuencia y durante más tiempo.

Antes de adentrarse en los modelos que estudian la soledad, se realiza una aproximación al concepto, algo que siempre resulta de utilidad para conocer el tema en

cuestión. Tal y como se detalla y como apuntábamos antes, definir la soledad implica matices. El autor no se queda sencillamente en la definición que se ofrece de la soledad desde el área del cuidado, sino que amplía el concepto desde la dimensión social y psicológica. La necesidad de humanizar el concepto es vital para volver a colocar a la persona en el centro del estudio, además de que así podemos observar aún más el carácter multiforme de la soledad, teniendo diferentes realidades dependiendo de la persona. A todo ello hay que sumar la idiosincrasia de cada cultura, la cual da a la soledad características propias. El autor apunta que, por ejemplo, en algunos países la soledad es lógica y un logro, mientras que en otras es vista como algo negativo. Todo ello invita a un análisis profundo para eliminar los prejuicios que se han achacado a la soledad, pudiendo así ofrecer una realidad más adecuada sobre este fenómeno.

Pero no es solo la soledad el concepto que se define en el primer capítulo. Envejecer es otra de las condiciones que son definidas en base a estereotipos, y eso las limita. El autor realiza una laboriosa tarea para eliminar los estigmas aparejados al concepto de envejecimiento, analizando otros estudios desde múltiples dimensiones para así poder ofrecer un resultado que permita utilizar el concepto para hacer frente a los cambios que supone la soledad en los mayores. Y no solo esto, sino que desarrolla aquellos aspectos fundamentales para poder comprender la soledad en todas sus dimensiones, que serían los aspectos situacionales, cognitivos, emocionales y sociales. Es fundamental todo este estudio previo que realiza el autor para poder entender que estar solo no es estar en soledad, que existen matices que conllevan a que la persona mayor en situación de soledad vea mermada su salud física y psíquica. Es ese tipo de soledad negativa la que debe ser tratada y estudiada en este caso, atendiendo a las teorías existentes sobre qué le sucede a la persona al sufrir soledad, en base a las circunstancias psicológicas, sociales y culturales específicas.

¿Cómo podemos enfrentarnos a un tema tan complejo? El autor comienza, tras el extenso repaso a la base conceptual y teórica, con la neurociencia. Este aspecto es realmente importante, pues ofrece el aspecto biológico de las repercusiones que tiene la soledad en la persona, desde depresión hasta demencia. La soledad es como cualquier otro proceso biológico, que tiene repercusiones tanto en lo físico como en lo mental, una situación que puede mejorar si existen recursos que palian la soledad, o empeorar, cuando se está durante un largo periodo en esta situación. El autor hace énfasis en esta idea debido a las consecuencias que la pasada pandemia de COVID-19 tuvo para la salud mental de la población al tener que establecerse unas medidas que impedían el contacto personal y el aislamiento. Es cierto que la producción científica que trata la soledad ha sido abundante, pero tras el año 2021 se ha disparado para comprender los efectos que ha tenido la soledad en la sociedad. Se ha puesto de manifiesto lo importante que es la salud mental para llevar una vida saludable y plena, sobre todo en las personas mayores, los principales afectados por la pandemia. Es un hecho que las personas mayores que vivían solas han empeorado su salud mental y física por este motivo. No por ello es menos complejo el estudio de la soledad, y no se debe generalizar en cuanto a sus consecuencias, por supuesto. El autor remarca que definir la soledad como una característica de las personas mayores es un error, pues todo el mundo es propenso a sufrirla, y, de hecho, son cada vez más los jóvenes que sufren de soledad. Es por todo esto que la neurociencia se ha preocupado cada vez

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https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.77

más por cómo la soledad afecta a nuestro cerebro, tratando de identificar qué situaciones, predisposición genética, contexto y sensibilidad causan el estado mental al que llamamos soledad. Son muchos los avances en este campo, lo que, sumado a lo ofrecido por otras disciplinas, nos ayuda a comprender, definir y tratar el estado de soledad.

El objetivo final de todos estos estudios es claro: mejorar la vida de las personas. En este sentido, el dicho de *más vale prevenir que curar* podríamos aplicarlo a múltiples esferas de la vida, y la soledad es una de ellas. La promoción de la salud pasa por la prevención de la enfermedad y las situaciones de riesgo, y para evitar la situación de soledad, centrándose en las personas mayores como hace el autor, se especifican algunos aspectos, tales como estar activo, sentirse útil y participar en la sociedad activamente. Son muchos los autores que como Fernández-Ballesteros (2005) afirman que estar activos es sinónimo de tener una mejor calidad de vida. Las situaciones sociales que promueven la soledad deben ser enfrentadas desde la participación de los mayores en el entramado social. Se ha tendido a apartar a los mayores y recluirlos, pero se debe hacer todo lo contrario para que su calidad de vida aumente. Las premisas mencionadas representan un desafío significativo en el abordaje de la soledad entre científicos, expertos y organizaciones sociales, algo que por fortuna está cambiando con perspectivas más positivas sobre la vejez. Esto debe materializarse en que la sociedad cuente con políticas públicas que se enfoquen en diversas áreas de la vida, como la familia, el bienestar material, la atención médica, el entorno físico, la comunidad y el ámbito laboral. Además, el autor plantea que los gobiernos deben trabajar para facilitar entornos amigables y ciudades inclusivas que promuevan y respalden actividades colectivas y espacios de encuentro destinados a este grupo etario. Para todo esto es esencial evaluar las habilidades y limitaciones individuales de las personas mayores en cada situación, fomentando su desarrollo personal y autonomía al generar nuevos intereses que impulsen su crecimiento físico y mental. De esta manera, asegura el autor, se puede procurar que nuestros ancianos disfruten de la mejor calidad de vida posible.

Como centro de toda la investigación hay un elemento clave aparte de lo mencionado anteriormente, las relaciones sociales. Muchos autores han destacado el papel de las relaciones sociales y la familia como elemento clave en el bienestar de las personas mayores (Bazo, 1991). Siguiendo esta idea, el autor explica que vivimos rodeados de personas y aun así en muchas ocasiones no nos sentimos acompañados. Esa compañía es vital, siendo en muchas ocasiones lo que le da sentido a la vida. Esto conduce a un problema, ya que, al estar acompañados durante gran parte de nuestras vidas, no podemos estar con nosotros mismos posteriormente, resultando en situaciones de soledad al estar incompletos. Por ello, hay que aprender a gestionar la soledad, ya que en algunas dosis cumple funciones beneficiosas. Es importante destacar que la sensación de soledad no se limita únicamente a las interacciones con otras personas, sino que también está fuertemente influenciada por los entornos, las actividades y los aspectos personales de cada individuo. Por todo ello, y sumado a las consecuencias que trajo la pandemia de COVID-19, podemos concluir que la soledad está estrechamente ligada a la pérdida de vínculos con las personas importantes en la vida de alguien, con quienes interactúa de manera regular. Específicamente, en el caso de las

personas mayores, cuando se produce la pérdida de un ser querido, se elimina a al-guien que solía desempeñar un papel fundamental en nuestra rutina diaria. Esto nos deja con una sensación única de soledad y vacío, que a menudo se traduce en tristeza y desesperanza. Nos sentimos desorientados y carecemos de las referencias que so-líamos tener para enfrentar la vida. Podemos afirmar, en base al extenso recorrido que se realiza en el capítulo, que las relaciones con los demás son fundamentales para nuestro desarrollo personal. Satisfacen nuestras necesidades y refuerzan la au-toestima. Es comprensible que muchas personas, tal y como dice el texto, busquen la soledad, pero deben entender las limitaciones que ello conlleva.

Continuando con las ideas reflejadas en el libro, y siguiendo con la idea de la soledad desde un punto de vista holístico, el autor trata un tema complejo y poco estudiado, que es comprender la soledad desde la perspectiva de los ancianos inmigrantes, de las mujeres, de los dependientes y del colectivo LGTBI. El porqué de la necesidad de centrarse en estos grupos es la invisibilización que sufren, caracterizados por este-reotipos que no son reales. La diversidad suele interponerse como una barrera en la sociedad, creando una doble discriminación que ocasiona y perpetúa la situación de soledad. El autor hace hincapié en que las personas mayores son heterogéneas, por lo que generalizar en conclusiones cuando no se tienen en cuenta ciertos colectivos conlleva deducciones no muy claras. Por ello, se pone de manifiesto la necesidad de la normalización y el estudio de las personas mayores desde una perspectiva más amplia.

Acercándonos al final, el séptimo y el octavo capítulo marcan una parte importante del libro, ya que una vez entendido todo el marco teórico se elabora un diseño de intervención para la prevención de la soledad en mayores. Se destaca aquí, y es algo que podemos observar al hacer una revisión de los programas de intervención que se han aplicado en los últimos años, que la prevención de la soledad es quizás el más popular y efectivo programa. Esta intervención se basa en, como hemos comentado con anterioridad, la importancia de las relaciones sociales y cómo estas se van per-diendo con el paso del tiempo, llegando al punto de estar solos en la vejez. Prevenir la soledad ayuda a mejorar la calidad de vida de la persona, insertándola en la sociedad, ofreciéndole herramientas para interactuar con el entorno y evitar el aislamiento.

Para poder prevenir la soledad hay que medirla. Y para ello el autor hace un estudio sobre las herramientas existentes para cuantificarla. Como hemos podido observar, la soledad es una experiencia individual y subjetiva que puede ocurrir en cualquier etapa de la vida, pero es más común y tiene características específicas en las perso-nas mayores. En la sociedad contemporánea, los cambios sociales han llevado a un aumento significativo en la soledad, y varios factores influyen en su desarrollo. Por lo tanto, es crucial comprender los factores de riesgo asociados con la soledad en las personas mayores para abordarla y prevenirla de manera efectiva. La literatura existente identifica factores psicológicos y sociales comunes para explicar la soledad. Para comprender la prevalencia de esta y sus características en diferentes contex-tos, es necesario utilizar instrumentos validados que permitan un enfoque científico en su estudio, diagnóstico y evaluación, y por ello, las escalas de medición son las herramientas más útiles para determinar con precisión si alguien experimenta sole-

dad de acuerdo con las teorías discutidas en los capítulos anteriores. *Grosso modo* el capítulo final resume las dos escalas más importantes para medir la soledad de una persona, así como las dos herramientas más utilizadas para llevarla a cabo, como son las entrevistas semiestructuradas y el análisis de caso. Para llevar a cabo una de estas intervenciones preventivas, el autor detalla seis fases en las que se selecciona el caso, se recolectan los datos, se analizan estos, después se muestran los cambios que esos datos conllevan y se publican las posibles soluciones, hasta llegar a una conclusión.

Queda de manifiesto que el impacto de la soledad es enorme en la vida de las personas. La obra, publicada en una editorial internacional, presenta todos los aspectos anteriormente descritos desde una perspectiva global, por lo que el libro es de enorme interés no solo para entender el concepto y la repercusión de esta, sino para comprender la soledad en el conjunto de la sociedad, así como estudiarla en base al proceso científico. Todo ello para ofrecer herramientas de cara a afrontar la soledad y combatirla. En este sentido, la sociología se puede nutrir por tanto de esta aportación tan relevante para el panorama actual, ya que está significativamente relacionada con las dinámicas humanas y los desafíos de la sociedad.

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Fidel Molina-Luque. *El nuevo contrato social entre generaciones. Elogio de la profiguración.* Madrid: Editorial Catarata, 2021

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Con una rueda no anda una carreta. Así clama el refranero español a lo largo del tiempo, instando a las amistades a compartir más charla, más momentos en compañía. Dos ruedas son la mínima infraestructura que necesita cualquier carreta para moverse con cierta estabilidad, ya que si tuviera una sola sería una carretilla. La diferencia sustancial entre estos dos medios de transporte es que, aunque ambos son utilizados para hacer desplazamientos, uno llega más lejos que otro. La carreta recorre kilómetros con mayor facilidad que la carretilla, llevando más carga y recorriendo terrenos ciertamente intransitables. A estas alturas quien lee habrá podido comprender que no estoy hablando realmente sobre carretas, ruedas, mercancías ni carretillas, sino de relaciones sociales y sociedades; de un paralelismo evidente con el recurrente proverbio africano: «Si quieres ir rápido ve solo, si quieres llegar lejos ve acompañado».

Las ruedas de nuestras sociedades son las generaciones y el eje que las comunica son los modos que estas tienen de relacionarse. Este podría ser un breve —y algo metafórico— resumen del libro *El nuevo contrato social entre generaciones*, del catedrático de Sociología de la Universidad de Lleida Fidel Molina-Luque. El uso intencional del refrán intenta imitar mínimamente parte del estilo depurado y preciso que hace el autor en su obra. En ella, además de aprender la importancia de las relaciones intergeneracionales, puede observarse el ejercicio sociológico que Molina-Luque hace de su propia experiencia, mostrando los diversos modos en los que se ha relacionado con otras generaciones y reflejando análisis universales a la hora de interpretar nuestros vínculos personales y familiares. Se destaca la necesidad de cuidarnos intergeneracionalmente a través de la socialización, la educación en el amor, la sostenibilidad y la convivencia, con un enfoque en la felicidad y un compromiso compartido hacia un futuro sostenible.

La idea central del libro es el neologismo acuñado por Molina-Luque *profiguración*, un concepto que consigue integrar las teorías antropológicas de Margaret Mead, la

visión sociológica de Georg Simmel y la interdependencia personal e histórica de Norbert Elias; sublimando todo ello al incorporar las diferentes nociones de Amor desarrolladas por Erich Fromm. A través de esta articulación teórica se nos presenta la profiguración como un constructo con varias aristas al permitir describir los procesos de socialización, creación de propuestas de intervención que mejoren la convivencia social e intergeneracional y, además, elaborando una propuesta ético-política. Es decir, mediante la profiguración se propone un nuevo contrato social, resaltando «el acuerdo y el reconocimiento necesario entre generaciones, destacando el valor de la imbricación y la implicación de las diferentes edades del ciclo vital» (p. 15).

La propuesta de Molina-Luque utiliza la idea de *nuevo contrato social* de una manera diferente a la usada por Rousseau y Hobbes, quienes asumen el contrato social como un acuerdo original y racionalista entre los miembros de la sociedad; más ligada a la creación de un relato que dé sentido histórico. No obstante, el autor escapa de esta concepción narrativa y del problema contractualista del *free rider* intrínseca en ella al enfocar que la cohesión intergeneracional no corresponde a criterios racionales, sino —como demuestra Durkheim— a la *solidaridad precontractual.* Es decir, la profiguración permite entender y promocionar la síntesis entre las generaciones atendiendo al principio de vulnerabilidad humana y necesidad de integración. Por lo que explica sociológicamente estos aspectos contenidos en el *ser social* que nos constituye, reconociéndose en la profiguración que «el ser humano es vulnerable e interdependiente y el amor da respuesta precisa a su existencia» (p. 53).

En lo que respecta al Amor, Molina-Luque lo utiliza como un concepto aglutinador, como esa fuente emocional de cohesión que surge de la interdependencia. Supera ese velo invisible que hay en la sociología a la hora de incorporar a los análisis aspectos popularizados como las emociones o el amor, arrojando argumentos sólidos para hacer una lectura de los entramados humanos y sociales. El enfoque de su ensayo recuerda a las tesis de Randall Collins: «[...] lo que está por debajo de la superficie es una fuerte emoción, el sentimiento de un grupo de personas que son similares y tienen una pertenencia en común» (2009, p. 41). Es en este argumento en el que, aunque hablando de generaciones, Molina-Luque no las interpela como entes ajenos, sino como actores de una misma sociedad. Apelar a este *todo social* es lo que permite a su concepto de profiguración generar un punto de encuentro, superando el conflicto intergeneracional inherente a ellas al superponer el amor fraterno como aglutinante. Aquí es donde su propuesta representa el espíritu humanista perdido y reivindicado en obras como las de Bauman, mostrando en su ética intergeneracional formas de resistencia a las dinámicas individualistas.

La profiguración, en tanto acción interdependiente e intergeneracional, es en sí misma una socialización ligada a un modelo ético concreto: el dialógico. El diálogo representa el medio por el que se comunican las generaciones y el vehículo principal para los procesos de socialización. Así, la profiguración es lo que permite la hibridación y recreación cultural, sintetizando los principios de *libertad, igualdad* y *fraternidad* al dejar «hablar» la fuerza de los argumentos, no los argumentos de la fuerza. En este sentido, Molina-Luque crea un paralelismo con la idea de Amor que tiene Simmel, reconociéndolo como una forma cultural y una forma de socialización, siendo difusa

la línea que diferencia ambos constructos. No obstante, se puede interpretar que la idea de amor que maneja Molina-Luque incorpora las de Simmel y añade la interdependencia entre generaciones, sirviendo así la profiguración como marco de intervención social, demostrado en su investigación en Rapa Nui (Molina-Luque, 2019).

En resumen, el libro aborda diversas temáticas cruciales para entender la interconexión entre las distintas edades en la sociedad contemporánea. Dividido en capítulos, el texto se sumerge en un análisis profundo del amor en sus diversas manifestaciones, explorando desde la amistad hasta la solidaridad, y destaca cómo estas dimensiones del amor contribuyen significativamente a la felicidad y al sentido de la vida. Propone enfoques amplios sobre la educación y su conexión intrínseca con la socialización a lo largo de toda la vida y la profiguración se presenta como un marco metodológico valioso para el éxito educativo. También se profundiza en la sostenibilidad, el conflicto y la convivencia al entender estos elementos intrínsecamente intergeneracionales. En última instancia, también se destacan las relaciones sociales, el amor y la construcción de significado en la vida; es así cómo la obra desafía la noción de que la felicidad es puramente individual, subrayando su naturaleza social.

Referencias

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