

# Motivational Aspects of Galician Shellfish Women Regarding their Participation in Associations

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**Abstract.** *The associationism of shellfish women in the Ría de Pontevedra can be influenced by different factors related to the gender perspective, due to the fact that it is a highly feminised group. These factors include the shellfish gatherers' personal expectations, institutional support and the working environment. A focus group was used as a means of collecting preliminary qualitative data and content analysis was used to organise the results. The main findings reveal the importance of associationism as an essential element to promote the active participation of this collective by providing them with the power of interlocution to dialogue and negotiate with institutions, other actors and other associations. Likewise, the results suggest that institutional support and the working environment are important and necessary for the promotion of associationism, for the participation of shellfish gatherers in decision-making and the definition of policies related to their activity.*

**Keywords.** Associationism, barriers, motivation, Galicia, participation, shellfish women

## 1 Introduction

The shellfish gatherers of Galicia are known for their traditional work of collecting shellfish and other seafood from the beaches and coasts of a region in northwestern Spain. These women have played a key role in the local economy, and their work has been recognised for its contribution to the culture and identity of Galicia. They have been involved in several struggles and protests in defence of their rights and their environment, becoming a symbol of resistance and struggle for social and environmental justice in Galicia.

The fishing sector is highly masculinised, and there are still differences between men and women in terms of the distribution of work according to gender, the degree of responsibility they assume and the level of participation in decision-making. The gender perspective is essential in the situation of shellfish gatherers in Galicia, as this is an activity that has historically been carried out by women and, therefore, undervalued in many areas. Moreover, it is a sector that has various mechanisms that perpetuate discrimination against women [1].

## 2 Background and Motivation

Since the beginning of the professionalization of the shellfish sector in the 1960s, shellfish gatherers in Galicia have organised themselves into associative movements to fight for their labour and environmental rights, as well as for the preservation of their way of life and traditions. Associations are a group of people who voluntarily relate to each other in order to carry out a collective activity, in a stable, democratically organised and non-profit-making way, and independent, at least formally, of the State, political parties and companies [2]. The aim is to transform reality through participation, and associationism is understood as a form of social participation that helps to highlight opportunities for the improvement of women shellfish gatherers in governance and to promote gender equality.

Since the mid-1990s, the foot fishing sector has undergone a major transformation from a purely extractive, individual activity to an organised one with complementary jobs such as seed transfer, cleaning of sandbanks on shellfish beds, cultivation activities to improve production, protection activities, control, monitoring and surveillance of shellfish beds. Although the physical tasks associated with fishing are still dominated by men, the roles played by women in the European fisheries and aquaculture sectors are changing, with women now playing an important role in the diversification and survival of the sector thanks, in part, to the associations that have played a key role [3]. Many regional, national, European and international fisheries policies have explicitly committed to improving women's participation in the sector, including their representation in governance and enhancing their role in decision-making [4]. An example at the national level is the Plan for Gender Equality in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector 2021-2027 [5], which aims to promote gender equality in the sector. At regional level, the Xunta de Galicia has implemented policies to support women shellfish gatherers in Galicia, encourage their association, protect their rights and environment, and promote the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [6] in the context of shell fishing. The relationship between SDG 5: Gender equality and SDG 14: Life under water, a goal directly related to fishing, has been pointed out in several studies [7], [8], [9].

The impact that associations are having on the recognition of women shellfish gatherers on foot makes it essential to investigate the initial motivational aspects of women of the sea in relation to participation in sector-specific and feminist associations, as well as the barriers they have to overcome. This justifies the need and relevance of carrying out this research, which also aims to contribute to broadening scientific knowledge in this field, filling some of the gaps in the scarce existing literature and serving as a basis for the future design of interventions and support that favour the presence of facilitating factors and reduce barrier factors.

### 3 Materials and methods

The methodology used was qualitative, based on the focus group technique, with an exploratory design on the reasons and difficulties of shellfish women to participate in associations in the Ría de Pontevedra in Galicia.

The objectives of the focus group were to obtain preliminary information on a topic that is little studied and to identify possible thematic areas to be investigated in depth, on the experiences and perceptions of shellfish gatherers with regard to their participation in associations in the sector in Galicia. It is intended to understand the reasons that drive or limit their involvement, as well as the benefits and challenges they face in the process.

Nine women shellfish gatherers were convened and eight participated, using purposive sampling, all with experience in the activity and in the associative movement in Galicia and in some cases in Spain. A diverse representation was sought in terms of years of professional seniority.

The focus group was held in October 2019 at the Cofradía de Raxó, a regional guild. The discussion was led following the prepared guide of semi-structured questions, encouraging the participation of all the shellfish gatherers present and ensuring that topics of interest were addressed. Questions focused on previous experiences in associations, reasons for participation, barriers and challenges, empowerment and proposals for improvement.

Two researchers, one acting as facilitator and the other as observer, collected information. Field notes were taken to ensure the accuracy of the information, and then the data was transcribed and analysed using the content analysis method to identify emerging categories and themes. Microsoft Office Excel 2007 was used to graphically represent the content.

The ethical principles that are in force in the Declaration of Helsinki were respected, including anonymity and the right to self-determination. The focus group was conducted for academic purposes and was kept confidential.

### 4 Results

The sample selected for the study has an average age of 49.2 years, with an age distribution ranging from 33 to 61 years. It should be noted that all participants belong to an association, as this was an inclusion criterion for the study. In terms of their work experience in shellfishing, the average length of service is 20.7 years, with 4 people with experience of less than 20 years and 4 with experience of between 26 and 32 years. The profile of the participants is shown in table 1.

**Table 1.** Profile of the participants:

Participants	Professional category	Sex	Age (years)	Professional seniority	Membership of an association	Seniority in The sector
P1	Shellfish gatherer	F	43	7	Yes	7
P2	Shellfish gatherer	F	54	26	Yes	26
P3	Shellfish gatherer	F	59	27	Yes	27
P4	Shellfish gatherer	F	56	30	Yes	30
P5	Shellfish gatherer	F	62	32	Yes	32
P6	Shellfish gatherer	F	33	16	Yes	16
P7	Shellfish gatherer	F	46	20	Yes	20
P8	Shellfish gatherer	F	42	8	Yes	8

F= female.

**The main findings of the focus group are presented below:**

Motivational aspects perceived by the shellfish gatherers to associate:

**Economic benefits:** they perceive that belonging to an association or cooperative can allow them to obtain better prices for their products, access new markets and obtain support for the marketing of their products.

**Solidarity and mutual support:** they expect to find the sense of community and solidarity that is expected from an association and may be one of the most important motivational factors for the shellfish gatherers. The possibility of sharing experiences and knowledge, as well as supporting each other in difficult times, can be an important source of motivation.

**Participation in decision-making:** they understand that the associations provide a space for them to actively participate in decision-making that affects their activity. This can be an important motivational factor for those who wish to be more involved in the management and development of their work.

**Access to resources and training:** Membership in an association provides access to resources and training that can enhance the quality of life and professional development of women shellfishers. This can range from access to equipment and tools, to training on technical, financial and legal issues.

**Representation and advocacy:** Associations can represent and advocate for the interests of women shellfishers to authorities and other organisations. This can be an important motivating factor for those who wish to have a stronger voice in the defence of their rights and in decision-making that affects their activity.

**The most common barriers:**

In terms of barriers, there are a number of difficulties that can prevent or limit the participation of women shellfishers in associations:

**Lack of information:** Many shellfish gatherers may not have sufficient information about the partnership or cooperative options available to them, which can hinder their ability to make informed decisions.

**Financial costs:** The cost of association can be a limiting factor for some shellfish gatherers, especially those with limited resources.

**Mistrust:** Some women shellfish gatherers may have mistrust or concerns about the effectiveness of associations or cooperatives, or the proper use of funds invested in them.

**Lack of time:** Shellfishers may find it difficult to devote time to participation in associations or cooperatives, especially if they have other work or family responsibilities.

**Cultural barriers:** Women shellfishers may face cultural barriers that prevent them from participating in associations or cooperatives, such as gender stereotypes or cultural norms that favour individuality.

**Lack of leadership:** Lack of leadership or effective management in associations or cooperatives can diminish the confidence and motivation of women shellfishers to join.

## 5 Discussion and conclusions

The focus group reveal that women shellfish collectors in Galicia face a number of challenges that affect to their work, health, and quality of life, including discrimination and labor exploitation by working double shifts, the paid work and unpaid work in the domestic sphere [3]. Other challenges that they usually face are water pollution due to industrial activity that has seriously affected shellfishing areas, poaching, climate change that has affected marine life on the Galician coast, unfair competition due to imported shellfish often at lower prices, the ability of shellfish gatherers to obtain fair prices for their work [4], [5]. Finally, the lack of socio-labor recognition, since sometimes their work is not fully recognized by the authorities as a professional activity, which makes it difficult to protect their rights and guarantee fair working conditions [8], [9].

The gender perspective is fundamental in the situation of women shellfish collectors, since they face discrimination in access to resources and opportunities [5], [9], as well as the low value of their work and their contribution to the economy and the society. Gender prejudices still rooted in a patriarchal society, the feminization of the profession and glass ceilings are other impediments for women to access positions of power and representation.

They often have to reconcile their work with household chores and family care, which implies a double working day and an overload of responsibilities, precarious salaries and working conditions that affect their well-being and that of their families, lack of access to training and professional development, and little participation in decision-making and leadership [1], [8].

It is important to bear in mind that motivational aspects may vary depending on the context and characteristics of each group of women shellfish workers. Therefore, it is advisable to carry out a detailed analysis of the factors that motivate or demotivate the participation in association in each particular case, in order to design appropriate strategies and actions to encourage the participation and commitment of the shellfish gatherers in the association.

Recognition of barriers is essential in order to overcome them, as association can offer a number of important benefits for shellfish gatherers, such as improved working conditions, defence of rights and representation in decision-making. To overcome these barriers, a series of strategies can be implemented such as training, education and awareness about the benefits of the association, the offer of training programs and advice to improve the management and leadership of the association, as well as strategies that contribute both to the design of programs and public policies aimed at promoting the participation of women in shellfishing and associationism, as well as to the design and strengthening of existing organizations.

As a limitation of this study, although the results of a focus group can provide valuable information on the motivations and difficulties of a particular group of people, they cannot be generalised to the population of shellfish gatherers as a whole without further research to validate these results and to go deeper into more specific aspects of this research.

Today, associationism has enabled shellfish gatherers to plan their work and control their exploitation with the support of the autonomous government through the biological, ecological, economic and social objectives of the management plans included in the General Plan for Shellfish Exploitation. Co-management, as a socio-political strategy of governance, is important as it allows the inclusion of women of the sea in these processes; however, improving the capacity of associations to deal with tasks related to co-management is a challenge to be overcome in the coming years.

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