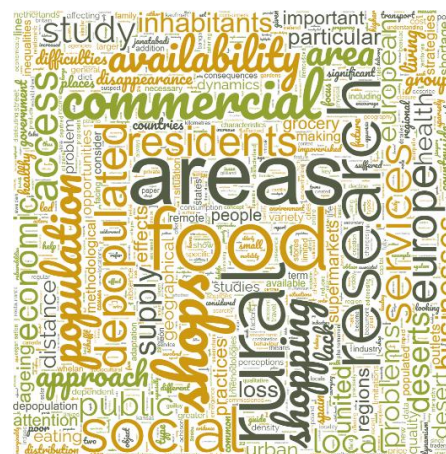


FROM FOOD DESERTS TO FOOD ACCESS. METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESEARCH IN SPARSELY POPULATED RURAL EUROPEAN AREAS

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Abstract: The disappearance of food shops in small towns and villages is a common feature in many European areas. The food habits of rural inhabitants are affected by the limitations on their food supply, posing a challenge to how they organise their daily eating. Although this represents a major problem for the quality of life in rural areas, food access problems have been understudied in Europe. This paper presents some research notes to encourage the study of the effects of the shortfall in food businesses in depopulated rural areas of Europe as a guide for research on this phenomenon. The paper reviews the international literature, drawing attention to the theoretical problems and methodological limitations involved in this type of study. A series of recommendations are given with the aim of enabling future research to record the food situation of the inhabitants of impoverished and depopulated territories with greater precision and depth.

Keywords: food deserts, food access, food availability, depopulated areas, rural retailing

Palabras claves: desiertos alimentarios, acceso alimentario, déficit comercial, áreas despobladas, alimentación rural

Highlights

- Limited choice of grocery businesses as a challenge for locals
- Depopulation, aging and marginalisation increase the likelihood of food desertification
- Needs of study, assessing what food-related vulnerabilities are present
- Combining theoretical approaches and social research methodologies

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1. Introduction

The environment is considered as factor that conditions what and how we eat (Sobal and Wansink, 2007). The availability of food services in a region and their characteristics affect access to food and how far its inhabitants follow a healthy diet.

During the 1990s, the term *food desert* emerged to refer to an area characterised by the absence of – or significant shortage of – food shops, making regular food shopping difficult and leading to substandard food consumption among the local population (Beaumont *et al.*, 1995; Acheson, 1998). The term has been useful to identify the health problems caused by the difficulty in accessing satisfactory food supplies in deprived urban areas of the UK, and have become an area of research and concern for academics and public agencies in a variety of countries. However, the weak causal relationship between food consumption patterns and commercial availability, which has since been demonstrated, led to significant pushback on the use of *food deserts* as a useful concept to explain the consequences of the loss of food outlets in particular locations (Wrigley *et al.*, 2003; Cummins *et al.*, 2005; Beaulac *et al.*, 2009). Looking beyond the commercial environment, research has investigated other causes affecting the public's eating behaviour such as individual and/or collective sourcing strategies, lifestyle, food habits, the life cycle of families, and household structure (McEntee, 2009; Shaw, 2012), or the social and individual perceptions of food availability (Christiaanse and Haartsen, 2017), as well as the meanings of grocery stores for residents (Haartsen and Gieling, 2021).

Despite this debate, a study of the loss of food services in a region continues to be a rich field for further research. The concentration of capital and population in certain areas and the consequent creation of 'peripheral' spaces with little or no economic productivity or dynamism (Guilluy, 2019) is a scenario that has been repeated in numerous geographical areas, including Europe's remote countryside (Bock, 2018; Ramos and Truninger, 2021). This paper presupposed that economic and territorial marginality is having a particular impact on sparsely populated or depopulated rural areas in Europe, affecting the ways in which people living in these areas feed themselves.

Although the problem has not been generally recognised, a range of studies has shown specific examples of the difficulties in shopping for food and the existence of particular dynamics in food distribution in rural areas of the European Union, including in Finland (Home, 2020), the Netherlands (De Vries *et al.*, 2009; Gieling *et al.*, 2019; Haartsen and Gieling, 2021), France (Gojard and Véron, 2018); Sweden (Amcoff, 2017; Nilson, 2022), Germany (Jürgens, 2018), Poland (Twardzik and Heffner, 2019), Spain (Ramos Truchero, 2020) and Slovakia (Hrivnák *et al.*, 2023; Trembošová *et al.*, 2023). All of these show how obtaining food in specific areas is a major challenge for the day-to-day food organisation of their inhabitants, a problem that is aggravated by the steady aging of the population in rural areas (Hine and Kamruzzaman, 2012; Galcanova and Stavenik, 2019; Vitale Brovarone, 2022).

The effects of food availability on rural residents is an interdisciplinary line of research (Jünger, 2018), whose object of study is very varied: decline of rural trade as a business (Paddison and Calderwood, 2007; Clarke and Banga, 2010) or rural services (Gielsing *et al.*, 2019), nutrition and public health (Sharkey, 2006; Schafft *et al.*, 2009), food insecurity (Smith *et al.*, 2018), social exclusion or food injustice (Walter *et al.*, 2010; Janatabadi *et al.*, 2024).

However, research on how the inhabitants of a remote or depopulated area resolve the daily purchase of food and meal preparation in the face of a shortage of commercial supply has been secondary. Especially in the European rural context, as opposed to the Anglo-American context. It is precisely these two evidences that have led us to consider this line of research.

This paper aims to offer a series of research recommendations to focus on the study of the food practices of residents in sparsely populated or depopulated rural areas in Europe, as a consequence of situations of scarcity/absence of nearby food services. By food services, we mean those businesses that offer any type of commercial food offering, that is, local shops, supermarkets, street vendors, restaurants, taverns or catering companies. This article refers to European rural areas that have suffered clear processes of depopulation or with a reduced population, in addition to being located in impoverished regions with an ageing population (Paniagua, 2013).

This work contributes to raising the issue of food and social practices as an object of study as a central point for future studies focused on European rural areas with reduced populations. Explicitly, it seeks to be a research guide. On the one hand, it claims the need to investigate food strategies from a social or sociocultural perspective within this type of space. On the other, it encourages a more specific study of the social food dynamics (of adaptation or resistance) generated by the process of change that affects the scarcity of nearby food services in these places. In this sense, we suspect this is a common situation in many depopulated rural areas of Europe, where the prevalence of a particularly vulnerable population is increasing due to their low mobility ability of older residents, lack of transport opportunities, low income or the distance from their relatives. These research notes are intended to be used in any type of remote, uninhabited or depopulated territory in rural Europe facing problems of commercial food availability.

This involves, first, a review of what have been identified as the two main approaches taken by researchers into the disappearance of food shops: food deserts and food access (Ramos Truchero, 2015), focusing on how these have been employed in the study of rural areas. In doing so, it considers the difficulties of applying the approach traditionally associated with food deserts, due to the methodological rigidities involved in incorporating the complexity of factors surrounding food consumption. Finally, it offers proposals for research based on the complementary use of approaches and methodologies in order to gain a more detailed understanding of people's practices in the face of the loss of physical food services that often affects depopulated areas in Europe.

2. Studying the loss of food businesses in rural areas

2.1 The regional approach to *food deserts* in rural and urban areas

Although the term *food desert* may seem a novel concept, associated with the United States, it has a long history. It originated in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, attributed to a fortuitous contribution by a resident of a public housing estate in a Scottish town who used the term to criticise the shortage of food shops (Cummins and Macintyre, 2002; Wrigley *et al.*, 2002). The media traction that the term acquired led British politicians at the time to focus attention on the problems of food retail in deprived neighbourhoods and they commissioned the creation of expert groups to study the causes and the effects on the population. Since then, *food desert* has been used to describe an area characterised by the absence of – or significant shortage of – food shops, thereby making it difficult for the local population to obtain food on a regular basis and thus influencing their eating habits.

The first written references appear in two policy reports that addressed the relationship between low income and health problems arising from inadequate nutrition in a particular area. The first report, produced by John Major's Conservative government, indicated that the malnutrition suffered by some residents of Britain's inner cities was a direct consequence of the limited opportunities for residents to access healthy food, due to the closure and disappearance of food shops (Beaumont *et al.*, 1995). The second report, commissioned by Tony Blair's Labour government, used the term again to refer to the link between social inequalities and health (Acheson, 1998). The authors suggested that some neighbourhoods had suffered from heavy public and private disinvestment in services for decades, resulting in a decline in the availability of healthy and affordable food, affecting the local residents' diet and health. This established a link between commercial availability and public health, associated with situations of poverty and social exclusion.

Great Britain food desert research was entirely urban focused. One of the general causes responsible for the disappearance of food shops is the restructuring of commercial distribution that took place decades ago. On the one hand, this transformation led to the closure of small shops, giving way to the emergence of a strong retail industry made up of large commercial outlets. On the other hand, the building of larger establishments required space more readily available in new suburbs, which also had greater economic dynamism, as higher-income families had started to live there (Larsen and Gilliland, 2008; Miller *et al.*, 2015). At the same time, large shopping centres were created on the outskirts of cities, away from the majority of inhabitants, leaving only smaller shops in city centres and neighbourhoods, making it difficult for them to compete with the variety and price of supermarkets and shopping centres. Therefore,

operational changes in the retail industry and the very geography of resources cause an uneven distribution of the food trade (Bedore, 2012).

2.1.1 Identifying food deserts

Identifying an area as a *food desert* usually depends on the use of geographical indicators that relate what is available commercially in the area to food consumption. One of the first indicators used was the geographical distance of households from supermarkets². Thus, to consider an area a food desert, a distance of between 500 and 1,000 metres or a 10-to-15-minute walk to reach a food shop was established. The use of public transport was also added, using the combination of a 10-minute trip and a 50-metre walk (Larsen and Gilliland, 2008).

Another indicator used has been the density of food shops in an area. A threshold of three food businesses within a 1,000-metre radius and a certain variety of supermarkets have been used as criteria to identify a food-deprived area (Cummins and Macintyre, 1999; Pearce, J. *et al.*, 2006; Apparicio *et al.*, 2007). Comparison of 'shopping baskets' by area has also been used, looking at price differentials and the diversity of food available within and outside the study area (Furey *et al.*, 2001; Beaulac *et al.*, 2009).

In general, these studies use Geographic Information System (GIS) software to measure the distances, density, and variety of food shops in the areas studied. It uses secondary commercial data sources and creates interactive maps that illustrate the commercial density of an area according to the characteristics of the population (Walker *et al.*, 2010).

It is important to note that these methodologies were used in the 2000s in the United Kingdom to establish numerous supermarkets in the neighbourhoods of major cities as a key measure in urban regeneration plans aimed at combating social exclusion (Cummins and Macintyre, 1999; Wrigley, 2002; Whelan *et al.*, 2002). In parallel, other countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, adopted similar measures to mitigate situations of urban poverty (Smoyer-Tomic *et al.*, 2006; Turrell *et al.*, 2004; Lee *et al.*, 2002). Indeed, the United States is the country where the scarcity of food facilities in disadvantaged areas has been most evident and where, as a result, this shortage has been specifically addressed as a public health problem (Adams *et al.*, 2010). This research links higher obesity rates in poor areas to reduced availability of shops offering a variety of healthy foods (Schafft *et al.*, 2009). It was precisely this concern that prompted the Federal Government to develop the *Food Access Research Atlas* in 2011, an interactive mapping tool that geographically identifies the presence of food deserts by combining a number of indicators (USDA, 2019)³.

2.1.2 Looking at rural areas through the lens of food deserts

Rural areas offer ample opportunities to study the effects of the lack of availability of food facilities. In general terms, *food desertification* is considered to be more probable than in urban areas, as the concentration of poverty and the social vulnerability of those living in the countryside is considered to be higher (Smoyer-Tomic, 2006; Schafft *et al.*, 2009). Despite this, the effects of the disappearance of food outlets in rural areas have received less attention. It is commonly thought that rural areas are connected to agricultural activity and that the whole population has sources of self-sufficiency, such as vegetable gardens or livestock for domestic use. However, it is forgotten that those living in rural areas

² It is worth noting that early research regarded supermarkets as the only sources capable of providing consumers with a varied, healthy, and affordable diet, ignoring what was on offer at small and medium-sized shops.

³ *The Food Access Research Atlas* locates a *food-desert* area by census tract, designated according to community characteristics (African American, low-income, or low-vehicle-access population). It is a tool developed by the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The latest data is from 2019 and allows comparison of years since 2015. It is available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas> (accessed 19 April 2024). Complementing this, *The Food Environment Atlas*, a much more comprehensive tool, was created in 2020, providing county-level information on 280 indicators grouped into three broad categories of factors involved in the food environment: community access to and acquisition of healthy and affordable food, community success in maintaining healthy diets, and community characteristics that could influence the food environment. More information on the latter can be found at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas/>.

also depend on commercial retail and the local food supply system. The first referenced studies addressing the phenomenon in rural areas were also developed in the United Kingdom (Clark, 1990) and the United States (Morris *et al.*, 1992, Olson *et al.*, 1997; Kaufman, 1999).

The commercial dynamics of rural areas closely resemble those of cities. The same restructuring of the food distribution industry has created the same geography of commercial inequality in rural areas (Bedore, 2012): small shops close and are replaced by supermarkets, which set up in larger rural municipalities, securing a certain market share (Pinkerton *et al.*, 1995; Walker *et al.*, 2010). Also contributing to this are the characteristics of many rural areas, such as a small number of inhabitants, limited economic resources, an aging population, and a lack of access infrastructure, making them economically unattractive areas to provide private commercial service and leading to the emergence of food deserts (Miller *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, in recent years, many rural environments have been classified as 'peripheral' areas as a consequence of the globalised dynamics of the concentration of economic capital (Bock, 2016). These are regions that have gradually become economically weaker, i.e., with little or no productive dynamism, with few possibilities for job creation, an absence of young people (who leave in search of educational and employment opportunities), and areas with more retired people than active workers (Guilluy, 2019).

Against this backdrop, a common feature of many of these territories is the loss of basic food services. In the United States, Wright Morton *et al.* (2005) found that, between 1976 and 2000, rural communities had lost more than 56% of their food shops. During the 2000s, the trend was seen in most rural counties in such midwestern states as Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, as well as Montana and Maine, and in the southeast, including in Texas, Alabama and Oklahoma (Blanchard and Lyson, 2006), in the case of Kansas, for instance, especially in municipalities of less than 2,000 inhabitants (Rissler, 2014). In Europe, occasional studies report similar situations in Ireland (Stockdale, 1993), Finland (Home, 2002), the Netherlands (de Vries *et al.*, 2016), Spain (Ramos Truchero *et al.*, 2013), Poland (Twardzik and Heffner, 2019) and, recently, Slovakia (Hrivnák, Moritz and Jarábková, 2023; Trembošová *et al.*, 2023).

One of the consequences is the increase in the cost of the food that is available. There is evidence of an increase of up to 30% in the cost of the average shopping basket, due to the lack of competition in the food supply, necessary to guarantee the viability of small businesses (Morris *et al.*, 1992; Kaufman, 1999; LeClair and Aksan, 2014). Low demand also means less varied and poorer quality food. For example, perishable, fresh, and protein-rich foods such as fish or meat are less widely available (Wakeman, 2002; Dawson *et al.*, 2008). In short, the food available in rural areas is reported to be less healthy and more expensive (Skarkey, 2006).

This means that those living in the countryside are forced to travel if they want to obtain a variety of foodstuffs at a better price. The means of transport used are almost always private. Another effect is that the distance that rural residents have to travel to reach a supermarket has increased considerably. In the United States, for example, the average distance to a grocery shop that meets basic needs is between 21 and 57 kilometres (McEntee and Agyeman, 2010; Rissler, 2014).

In Europe, even in densely populated and urbanised countries such as the Netherlands, the distance also increased from 2.11 kilometers in 2008 to 4.7 kilometers in 2014 (de Vries *et al.*, 2016). In Spanish regions, such as Castilla y León, this distance can be as far as 50 kilometers in some depopulated areas (Junta de Castilla y León, 2017), or in Sweden, Nilson (2022) showed the increase in distance to the nearest food stores in rural Swedish areas between 2000–2013.

3. Food access: a sociocultural research approach

The difficulties involved in finding conclusive evidence to relate people's eating behaviour and diet to the commercial food supply in a locality has given rise to another research approach in the UK (Cummins and Macintyre, 1999; Wrigley *et al.*, 2003; Cummins *et al.*, 2005), the US (Adams *et al.*, 2010; Donald, 2013), and Canada (Smoyer-Tomic *et al.*, 2006; Apparicio *et al.*, 2007; Larsen and Gilliland, 2008).

The term *food access* is used by researchers to describe a more precise concept of commercial food availability in urban and rural areas and the effects of food scarcity (McEntee, 2009; Shaw, 2012). This new approach considers food shopping as an object of analysis subject to numerous variables (Adams *et al.*, 2010). It therefore introduces factors such as the profile of consumers, taking into account their age, perception of food shopping, family characteristics, vehicle availability and food shopping strategies (Whelan *et al.*, 2002). In addition, consumer mobility is assumed to be a normal feature of food shopping, and is no longer considered a particular problem for the residents of a given locality (Clarke and Banga, 2010). These are all factors that, despite their obvious importance, had not been considered within the concept of the *food desert*.⁴

From a methodological point of view, this approach criticises the previous reliance on an excessively statistical methodology that does not fully reflect inequalities between individuals within the same food environment. It proposes a combination of different social research techniques. Research on provisioning strategies and actors' perceptions of a food environment requires the use of qualitative instruments such as interviews, focus groups, or participant observation (Whelan *et al.*, 2002; Shaw, 2006). It is also important to avoid methodological reliance on commercial databases, which are not always up to date or may contain errors (Donald, 2013). They caution that it is common for the implementation of public and private initiatives to transform commercial environments rapidly (Twardzik and Heffner, 2019). Therefore, they consider it necessary to complement the study of food availability with observations and field visits to help locate stores and observe the types of food offered in a location, as well as to confirm information provided by commercial censuses or other secondary data sources (Schafft *et al.*, 2009; Miller, 2012).

This approach observes how, in rural areas in European and North America, travel is seen as a matter of course by the locals. Improved access to cities and their services has made rural people less dependent on local facilities (Gielsing *et al.*, 2019; Haartsen and Gielsing, 2021; Escribano Pizarro, 2012). Rural consumers tend to seek out outlets where there is more choice and variety of food (Bereton *et al.*, 2011) so that grocery shopping is characterised by a combination of staple purchases in local shops, while other shopping is done in larger stores with a greater range of products in more distant locations, which rural residents visit frequently (Sharkey, 2006; Broadbridge and Calderwood, 2002).

These studies also capture rural residents' social perceptions of local businesses and the significance of small food shops in the social life or symbolic meanings of towns and villages. In both North America and Europe, people show a significant attachment to local shops (Christiaanse and Haartsen, 2017), despite the fact that many consider that food prices are higher and there is less variety of food (Marshall *et al.*, 2017); or that residents declare that they did not buy food in local stores before they have closed (Haartsen and Gielsing, 2021). Indeed, it has been shown that these businesses are valued more highly by people with fewer opportunities to travel, either because of lack of financial resources or age (Scarpello *et al.*, 2009, de Vries *et al.*, 2016; Jüngers, 2018) or because of the cost of travel (Amanor-Boadu, 2009).

4. Guide for future research agenda into food practices in remote and depopulated rural Europe

The loss of food services in depopulated rural areas is an issue that needs to be addressed in Europe today. Compared to the disappearance of other types of rural services (Escribano Pizarro, 2012; Christiaanse and Haartsen, 2017), little is known about the consequences this loss may be having on the food practices and quality of life of Europe's rural population.

Rural Europe is undergoing important socio-demographic and socio-economic changes that determine the quality of life in rural societies. These include the aging of the rural population, accompanied by a destructuring of family and informal care networks (Arlottili, 2024), the depopulation of remote rural areas in many countries (Eurostat, 2022; Nilson, 2023), the economic marginalisation of these regions

⁴ These oversights in the food desert thesis led some writers to describe the concept itself as 'factoids' or 'imagined facts' (Cummins and Macintyre 2002), among both journalists and politicians. It was even described as not being a genuinely empirical reality and merely an idea that was theoretical and accidental (Wrigley, 2002).

(Bock, 2018; Ramos and Trunninger, 2021), difficulties with mobility for many rural residents (Vitale Brovarone, 2022). Although there are specific national or regional characteristics, the circumstances created by these phenomena make it important to take a closer look at the food situation in these places and assess whether, as we suspect, the inhabitants of villages and small towns in impoverished regions in Europe could be left facing food vulnerabilities. It is also important to see what forms of resistance or adaptation to this situation may develop.

In the hope that the food practices of rural populations would be supported by online grocery provision, several studies in the UK show that there is reduced access to online grocery stores (Janatabadi et al., 2024) and a limited choice of online retailers delivering to more remote rural areas (Newing et al., 2022).

Various studies have shown that one of the groups most affected by the lack of commercial food outlets is dependent elderly people with limited economic resources, whether because of mobility difficulties, their shopping habits, or the structure of their families (Scarpello *et al.*, 2009; Marshall *et al.*, 2017; Christiaanse and Haartsen, 2017; Ramos Truchero, 2020). Particular attention needs to be paid to older people, as they are vulnerable when it comes to unhealthy lifestyles, and in particular with regard to food (Purdam *et al.*, 2019). They are also more exposed than others to physical problems, such as poor oral health, as well as loneliness and isolation, which can lead to the consumption of unhealthy food products in a poor food environment (Pilgrim *et al.*, 2015; Walls and Steele, 2004).

Researchers carrying out studies with these objectives need to bear in mind the limitations of using only the *food desert* approach to investigate the decline in food businesses in a particular area (Twardzik and Heffner, 2019; Hrivnák *et al.*, 2023). As explained above, this approach makes it possible to assess the presence of food services in rural areas quantitatively, identifying those with a poor level of supply and visualising inequalities in businesses between areas. However, it is necessary to see how the geographical data affects the eating behaviour of an area's inhabitants and to take into account the influence of social, economic, and cultural, as well as geographical factors (Jüngers, 2018). Therefore, we recommend combining the traditional geographical approach to *food deserts* with the *food access* approach, making it possible to include more of the factors involved in eating behaviour.

Similarly, it is important to incorporate a qualitative methodology at the empirical level, to explore food practices in remote rural areas more deeply and to understand what access to food supply is like from the point of view of those affected. Interviews and/or focus groups with locals, traders, public officials, and/or other actors would deepen our understanding of the impact that the decline in food services is having on different groups of people living in the countryside. It would also make it possible to find out whether the effects include food destructuring/restructuring in these places, analysing how the local food culture operates, or identifying the groups most and least affected by the lack of food businesses, as well as to show what forms of resistance and adaptation arise in response to this lack of food availability.

It is also important to pay attention to the role that alternative food supply sources play for residents of these areas. This is the case of online food provisions and exploring what presence, it has in the food strategies of rural residents, confirming or not the limited scope it has had in Great Britain (Newing et al., 2022; Janatabadi et al., 2024). In addition, the role played by alternative sources of food supply in food organisation is also taken into account, such as home-grown food ('prosuming') (Veen et al., 2021)) on gardens and animal husbandry (Autor, 2020), family and neighbourhood shopping networks, street vending, the home delivery that many traders offer to serve outlying areas (Paddison and Calderwood, 2007), or social economic bodies linked to preparing or distributing food (Olmedo *et al.*, 2023; Olmedo *et al.*, 2024).

5. Conclusions

This paper addresses the question of food availability in remote rural areas – characterised by the dynamics of depopulation, aging population, and economic and regional marginality – to justify further research on the topic in the European Union. We argue that certain areas in Europe are experiencing food supply problems that have not yet been made fully apparent, either among social scientists or within the government, but which will pose a challenge for public social policies in the future.

The problems derive from a loss of basic services in these places, one of which is local food shops. The scarcity of food shops in certain places – and concentration in others – limits food access for certain groups and profiles of people living in rural areas. Ensuring that rural food supplies continue to be available is a key issue for rural citizens, not only because it means maintaining a basic social service, but also because it impacts the region's public health.

Attention to this line of research could help European government departments and agencies to draw up proposals to support the presence of food shops as an additional public service or to encourage the creation of social economic bodies linked to preparing or distributing food. In this context, there are examples seen in rural areas of Ireland (Olmedo *et al.*, 2023; Olmedo *et al.*, 2024), and in Spain, where some individual areas in northern Spain (Castilla y León) are launching initiatives to address the food situation of elderly people in depopulated regions with food supply difficulties. These cases involve a social enterprise providing a service of street food or a women's cooperative that has set up a catering company that prepares meals for home delivery to elderly people who are effectively housebound. Also in Spain, there was a recent attempt to include bars, restaurants, and food shops formally under the Social Economy Law, recognising them as social services in rural areas⁵. This proposal did not, however, address aspects of the food issue such as how protecting these services might also seek to redress food inequalities in some depopulated rural regions.

Carrying out studies addressing this line of research across different European countries will raise the visibility of the widely ignored food situation in today's rural Europe and of its increasingly ageing and dependent citizens. In conclusion, the transition towards sustainable and inclusive regional development means taking account of food issues as an essential aspect of the quality of life in the countryside.

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⁵ This was proposed as Law 5/2011 on Social Economy, as a parliamentary initiative of the political party *Teruel Existe*, which in the end was not approved. More information can be found at: https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/BOCG/B/BOCG-14-B-312-1.PDF

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