



Collection of Good Practices



Erasmus+



The ESPRIT Partnership

The main objective of the project was to enable partner organizations from 5 European countries to learn about the practices and methods used by each of them. The goal was also to increase the participation of stakeholders in this type of project and to contribute to the implementation of the rural development policy.

With a diversified partnership, having a national and European dimension (Leader France Association, Spanish Network for Rural Development, Estonian Leader National Network, Hungarian National Rural Network, Romanian LAG: Tecuci Association), ESPRIT contribute to bring new approaches and innovative solutions in the field of services to the population in rural areas, through a better transmission of information in the territories, thanks to:

- Exchange workshops to support the appropriation of knowledge and encourage local actors to propose innovative multi-stakeholders' projects and spread the methodology
- Communication actions to inform identified collective initiatives and innovations
- Technical visits of innovative achievements



Picture of the ESPRIT team taken during the training in Estonia in February 2020

Introduction

Faced with the decline and remoteness of public services, rural populations are concerned about access to services and, more broadly, about the prevention of rural depopulation. Many town centers are faced with a wide range of challenges such as housing, shops, mobility, access to rights, etc. To maintain and improve services, local public initiatives need to reflect on the new territorial organizations, and the new lifestyles of the inhabitants. This also requires studying new forms of presence and pooling that could help to improve the quality and accessibility of services.

This is what the ESPRIT project proposes to develop skills exchanges and share good practices, by organizing trainings and meetings.

Definition of services to the population

It is the set of market and non-market services for the inhabitants considered by them as a necessity. They can be provided directly by the State or by local authorities. They can be managed by a public authority or by delegation to a private operator, a non-profit organization, or by a public/private partnership. Some are also managed directly by associations, companies, or citizens' collectives.

Services to the population can be considered in terms of *level of service* (Local, intermediate, central, metropolitan), *baskets of services* (baskets of everyday life services, baskets for parents, young people, seniors, etc.) or by *service families* (health, childhood and youth, education, culture, local shops, employment services, transport...).

Accessibility of services in rural areas: what are the challenges?

Services to the population are vital to the life of the territories (economic dynamics, social and cultural links, solidarity, attractiveness, maintaining the population or attracting newcomers). Their absence or decline, as well as difficult access to services increase territorial disparities.

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ESTONIA

Analysis

1. Situation in Estonia

The first relevant factor is population loss – by 2017, the Estonian population had decreased by almost 57,000 inhabitants (4.1%) compared to the turn of the century. Another factor is the movement of people within Estonia. This has led to population growth in and around the cities of Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu, while the remaining regions have lost people. The third factor is the change in the meaning of a rural lifestyle. According to Statistics Estonia, approximately as little as two thirds of the population in Estonia live in municipalities formally considered urban. Most of the municipalities formally considered rural around Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu are urban or suburban in terms of lifestyle. In the areas around the larger cities, where thirty years ago wealthy agricultural holdings dominated, the first choice for employment today is not agriculture. The need for employment in agriculture has also decreased due to the industrialization of the sector. In Estonia as a whole, only about 1 in 40 residents is employed in agriculture in the wider sense. Accordingly, people living in rural areas are engaged in something different from traditional practices forming agricultural landscapes.

Previous agricultural lands have been built on with residential housing, industrial buildings, and other similar infrastructures. In many places, suburban districts have merged with the city. Together with people, services have also moved. The urban sprawl adds to the pressure to replace agricultural lands with built-up areas.

As most jobs are in major urban centers, rural exodus has become commonplace, especially among the younger generation. It has thus become increasingly difficult to ensure equal availability of vital services throughout the country, as the need for services decreases due to the demographic decline and ageing in Estonian peripheries.

The needs and challenges vary somewhat depending on the region. For families living in rural areas, participating in the usual activities in society means almost always driving by car. At the same time, transport on demand and community ride-sharing services offer new alternatives to owning a private car and to a deficient public transport system. For example, in the Saaremaa municipality, a pilot project is planned for on-demand and social transport

solutions, in which people can provide information about the dates and times of their travel, which can form the basis on which timetables are prepared. Such models have been tested for short periods in Lääne-Virumaa and Setomaa.

2. Strengths of the Estonian territory

In 2015, 20% of employees in Estonia had worked remotely and the number of those who wished to work remotely increased to 34% (*Ministry of Social Affairs 2017*). In terms of flexible working hours and employee autonomy (30%), Estonia ranks ninth in the European Union. The increasing share of remote work has an impact on the mobility of the population and the use of space. It is therefore not necessary to reside in the vicinity of the workplace, as regular attendance is not expected. The distance between home and work may thus continue to increase. New technologies can further reduce the need to be present at the workplace and remote work will allow for a more flexible and efficient use of office spaces. Working – in terms of working hours, ways of working and working conditions – is becoming more in line with people's individual needs. Remote work opportunities and the following of talent may give Estonia's low-density remote areas a development advantage over large centers but gains for specific settlements and regions depend on the quality of the living environment they are able to provide (*Foresight Centre 2019*).

Changes that will reduce the use of cars are also appearing in Estonia. For example, several mobile applications have been developed for rental and ride-sharing services in urban regions that reduce the need to own a car. The change in modes of mobility is also driven by the development of home delivery services for goods and food. By offering convenience through alternative solutions, such trends make it easier to not own a car.

3. Difficulties of the Estonian territory

Currently, 69% of the population lives in urban and small-town settlements (*Statistics Estonia 2019*); 45% of the population is concentrated in Harjumaa, Tartumaa and Pärnumaa counties. In 1989, 71% of the population lived in urban areas. The economic restructuring, new residential and commuting patterns support a vicious cycle of population decline that also leads to the disappearance of essential public services, such as schools, further fuelling shrinkage.

While EU support has made unprecedented external funds available for policy measures in Estonia, their use has not led to a reduction of regional inequalities within the country. Because the cohesion aims were rather implemented centrally and in a spatially blind way after Estonia's accession to the EU in 2004.

Although public services are quite easily accessible online in Estonia without leaving home, social life, the education of children, hobbies and entertainment still require visiting larger towns or city centers. Surveys by the Estonian Road Administration on satisfaction with public transport show that people's satisfaction with the quality and accessibility of public transport within counties has decreased. Arrival times, routes and connections between routes are the greatest sources of dissatisfaction.

According to the 2014 survey '*Satisfaction of inhabitants with local public services*' by Saar Poll, satisfaction and competitiveness of public transport are higher in towns than in lower-density areas, such as peri-urban areas and remote areas far from urban centers. In low-density areas, especially in areas of low demand, public transport departures are infrequent, and it is difficult for people to time their movements, especially if journeys must be combined.

Intensifying car traffic reduces the number of travelers using public transport and this makes good services more expensive and difficult to provide in low-density areas. The decreasing quality and frequency of public transport in turn favors motorization. According to the *Estonian Road Administration*, the number of passengers on county routes nearly halved in 2003–2016; the decrease was especially rapid in 2003–2009. These years were a period of rapid increase in wealth and motorization that led to a shift in modes of mobility in favor of cars. The number of users of public transport has decreased even though the mileage of public transport vehicles has not decreased during the same period.

Innovations

1. Solutions implemented

The ID card plays a key role in almost every innovative e-service in Estonia. It can authenticate identity and provide a digital signature. The weight of the signature is backed by Estonian law making it legally-binding. To minimize risk, the system uses suitably hefty encryption, with only a minimum of private data kept on the ID card. Lost cards can be conveniently cancelled and in over a decade no breaches of security have been reported. Most state services are available online: voting, tax declarations, social benefits, creating companies, monitoring personal health data and educational data (including certificates), digital medical prescriptions, but also online banking, commerce, services that require identification like parking or public transport etc.

Some municipalities have introduced their own mobile apps to enhance communication between people and local government.

2. Example

Project Kupland

The project was led by the SA Põlvamaa Arenduskeskus (Põlva county development center) in a public-private partnership. Three counties, located in South-Eastern Estonia, were concerned by the project. South-Eastern Estonia is lagging in economic and social standards. Depopulation is a big problem. The area is known for beautiful nature and tourism, but tourism services tend to be very seasonal. So, the main target group is technologically savvy workers that need a change of routine and environment.

The main objective of the project was to create a perfect place for remote working. Kupland brings providers of remote working services in South-Eastern Estonia (Võru, Põlva and Valga Counties) together under a single umbrella brand.

Whether your remote workplace in Kupland is a lovely farmhouse or an office in a small town, you are always surrounded by fascinating nature. You can come alone, with your team or family. Well-designed spaces for work and accommodation fulfill all your needs. Generously sized desks with comfortable

seats are available at each location. High-speed internet, printing services and plenty of sockets are some of the services provided by these locations. Good lighting and comfortable room temperatures are taken in consideration in the management of these places. Coffee or tea can be purchased at all locations.

The companies that have joined the project (19 now) are very different: they are small country hotels, restaurants or B&Bs, coworking offices, some are creative spaces like art galleries or workshops.

This project is financed by:

- Ministry of Finance
- SA Põlvamaa Arenduskeskus
- SA Võrumaa Arenduskeskus
- SA Valgamaa Arenguagentuur

The concept of remote working has really evolved and changed during 2020, because of Covid-19. There is more trust in remote working, and it has become a new standard. But the lockdown limited the number of potential clients in 2020, but there was more than usual interest among local people in finding a peaceful remote working environment. Nonetheless, the project keeps growing in number of partners, and in spreading the word.

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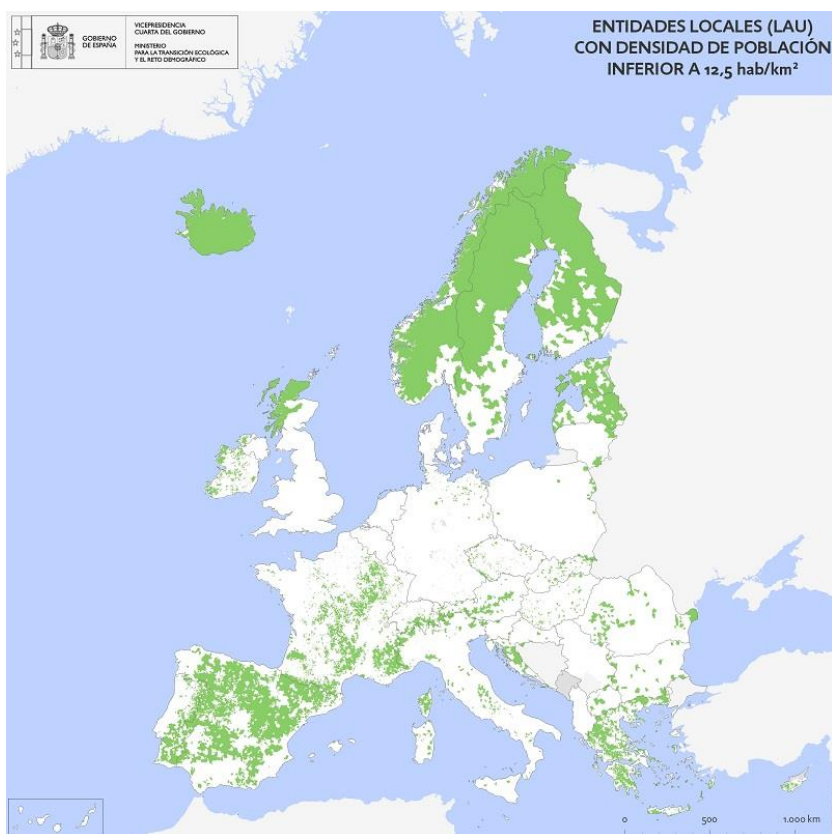
SPAIN

Analysis

1. Situation in Spain

Spain is one of the European countries that presents a wide surface of rural territory, with a low density of population and high level of territorial dispersion. Rural migration started in Spain in the 60s and, since then, cities are overpopulated **while 42% of municipalities are at risk of depopulation**. According to the *Bank of Spain*, only three more countries in Europe face a similar situation: Finland, Estonia, and Latvia.

Spain presents a wide range of ruralities, according to the geographical situation, natural resources and how it has been managed during the past decades. Thereby, we can find regions and municipalities with an economy more diversified than others or with a bigger offer of services.



Source: *MITECO* (2020)

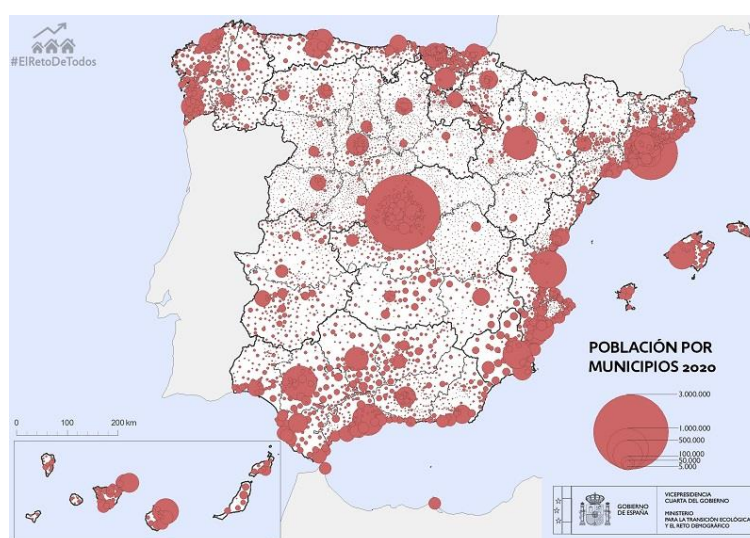
It is important to highlight that **6,780 municipalities out of 8,131 are in rural areas**. In total, **rural areas represents 84.1% of the Spanish territory**. Nevertheless, only

20% of the population are living there. Rural areas in Spain are facing nowadays three different threats: depopulation, territorial dispersion, and ageing.

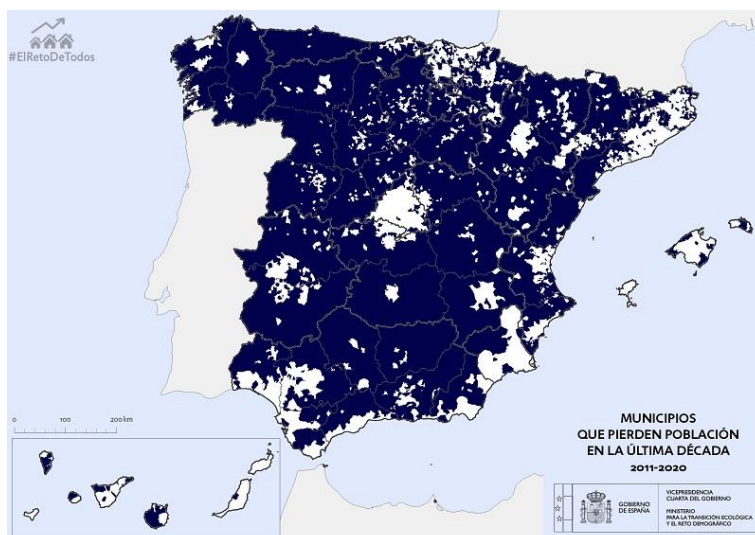
Depopulation constitutes a common threat all over Europe. In Spain, the tendance started in the 60s and it has increased during the past decades. According to the *Spanish General Secretariat for the Demographic Threat*, the Spanish population has risen by 0,6% between 2011 and 2020. Since 2001 the population has grown from 41.1 million to 47 million inhabitants. Nevertheless, **77% of municipalities has lost population** and 42% of rural municipalities are at risk of depopulation.

During this last decade, the depopulation trend has escalated and nowadays the migration to bigger cities is happening even in medium size cities, such as the regional capitals. We can find nowadays the biggest concentration of people in areas such as Madrid and Barcelona, the Mediterranean coast, the islands, some provinces of the Basque Country and Andalusia (*20 minutos*, 2021).

In the last ten years, **13 regional districts (provincias) have lost population**: Extremadura, Galicia, Castilla y León, Asturias, Aragón, Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha, Comunidad Valenciana and La Rioja. Also, in the same period, 6,232 municipalities out of 8,131 have lost population. This trend is more severe in territories under 5,000 inhabitants, where 8/10 have lost population over this decade (*Diario Rural*, 2020).

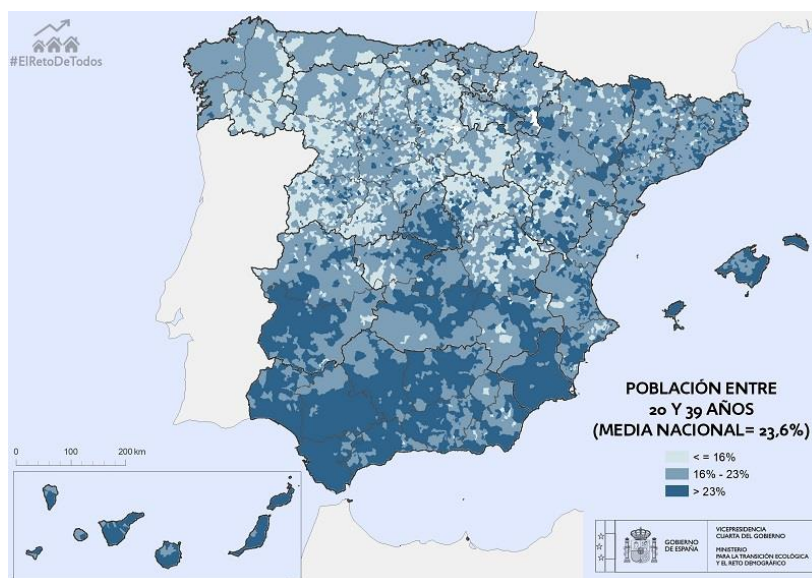


Source: [MITECO](#) (2020)



Source: [MITECO](#) (2020)

The issue of depopulation is even more severe regarding young people. Since 2011, 91.2% of municipalities (7,419) has lost young people between 20 and 39. **21% of young people between 20 and 30 are currently living in small municipalities** (47.4% women and 52.6% men).



Source: [MITECO](#) (2020)

Issues such as the lack of job opportunities or the difficulties in access to basic services are increasing the dislocation of rural population to bigger municipalities, with a bigger offer of employment, education, or cultural activities. Connectivity, better infrastructures, or a bigger offer of basic services are some of the reasons why so many people is migrating to urban areas. According to the REDR report, REDPOBLAR (2018), young people in rural areas are missing job opportunities, housing, and a better access to services.

The results of this report show that the priorities for them, in relation to the access to services are:

¿Qué servicios públicos echas de menos en tu zona?



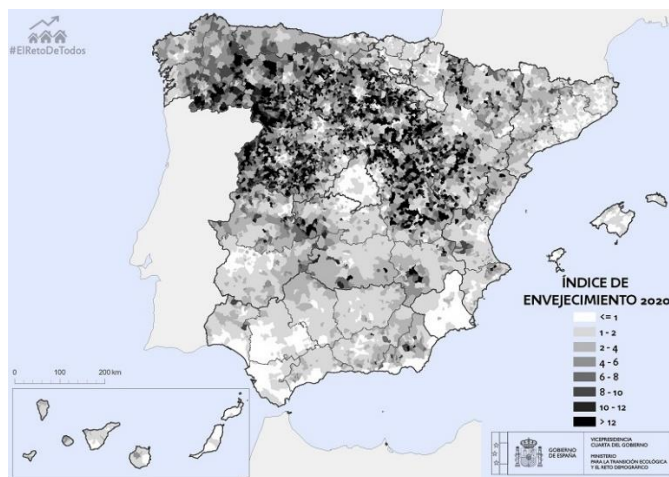
Source: [REDPOBLAR](#) (REDR, 2018)

*2,151 people answered to this survey

- Culture (cinema, theatre, etc.) 49.6%
- Training centers (languages, vocational training, etc.) 40.3
- Emergency response center 18.7%
- Other sanitary services 17.3%
- Secondary education centers 13.7%
- Health center 7.1%
- Primary Education center 5.8%

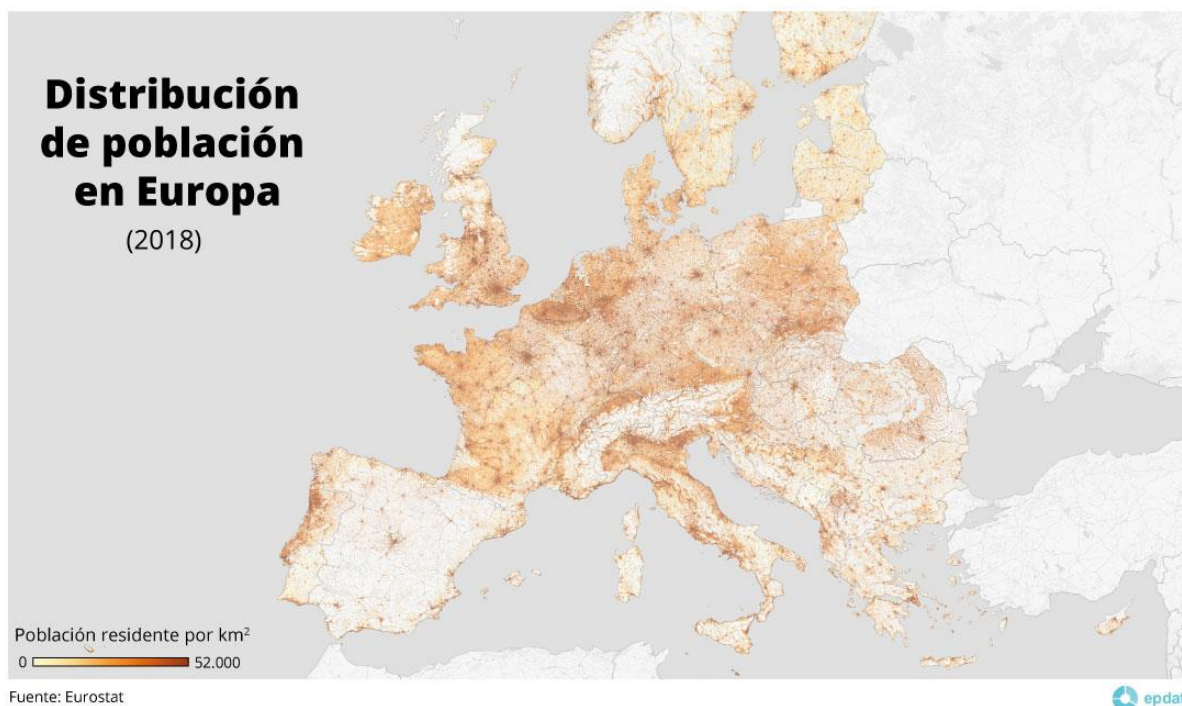
The migration of young people to urban areas is having a direct impact on the rural demography. Thus, ageing is one of the other challenges that Spain is facing nowadays.

The average age in Spain is 43.6 years but in small municipalities (less than 5,000) the average is 50. The search for better opportunities in big cities is affecting the demographic situation of small towns. Indeed, in Spain there are today **1,109 municipalities in which no child between 0 and 4 years old lives**, and 393 in most of its inhabitants are over 65 ([20 minutos](#), 2021).



Source: [MITECO](#) (2020)

Apart from the depopulation and ageing, territorial dispersion and the low density of population are causing higher challenges regarding the access to services. Nowadays, **the supply of services depends on the number of inhabitants living in the territory**, which is aggravating to rural population. The average density in Spain is 93 inhabitants/ km² but there are more than **3,920 municipalities which have a population under 12.5 inhabitants/ km²**.



Source: MITECO (2020)

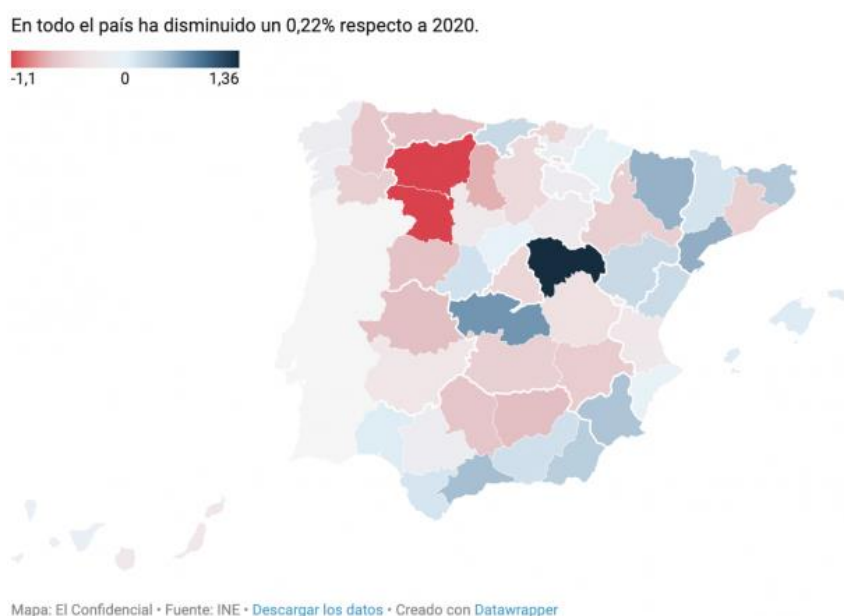
Future of rural areas in Spain

In the last decade (2001-2019), the loss of population in rural areas has affected 80% of municipalities of less than 5,000 inhabitants and 86% of municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants. The perspective for the future of rural areas in Spain does not seem especially optimistic. The trend indicates that, in 2050, the population that lives in urban areas could go from the 80% to the 88%. Indeed, the Long-Term Spanish Strategy for 2050 affirms that:

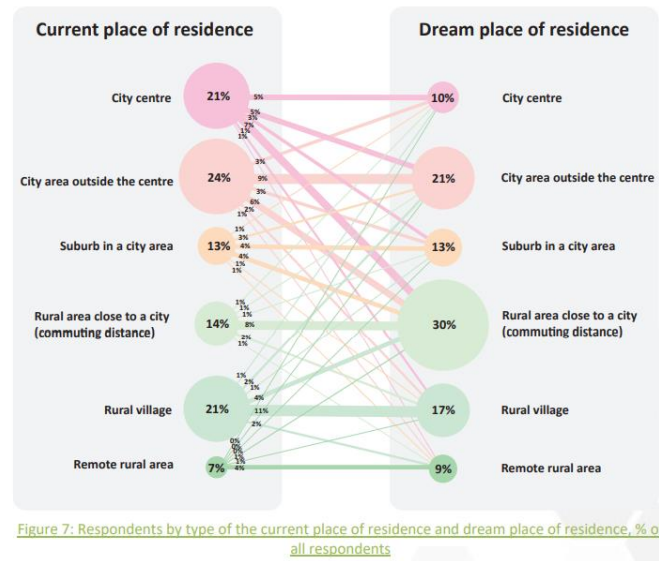
*“In certain cases, **the depopulation of rural Spain cannot be stopped**. But this does not mean that all towns will be emptied or that the opportunities and quality of life of the people who live in them will be reduced. Advances such as 5G, satellite Internet, or robotics will allow us to bring employment (teleworking) and services (health, education, and*

transportation) to places that they have not reached yet; the silver economy, tourism and organic farming will boost economic and social activity in many towns; and the energy transition will provide clean energy and new job opportunities even to the most remote parts of our geography. **In 2050, fewer people will live in rural Spain, but those who do, could live better than now.**”.

Nevertheless, Spanish society is now more open to the possibility of living in a rural area since they have seen during the pandemic crisis that **priorities should rather been related with health and nature**. Indeed, based on the last surveys, several municipalities and regions surrounding big cities has experimented an increase of population during the last year. Guadalajara and Toledo are the example of the transformation, since they have received more inhabitants during the past months, while Madrid has lost 0,5%.



According to the report of “Ruralization: the opening of rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms”, **30% of the sample of 2,000 young people who participated in the study have changed their future plans because of the COVID-19 pandemic**. Within these changes, there is an increase in the desire of youth (both urban and rural) to move to rural areas. The most interested profile is **young people between 25 and 30 years old with an “entrepreneurial profile”**.



Source: Ruralization (2020)

In order to change the current trend, the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge has created a *National Plan with 130 measures*, based on the following axes :

1. Boosting the ecological transition
2. Digital transition and full territorial connectivity
3. Development and innovation in the territory
4. Promotion of sustainable tourism
5. Equal rights and opportunities for women
6. Promotion of entrepreneurship and business activity
7. Strengthening public services and promoting decentralization
8. Social welfare and the economy of care
9. Promotion of culture
10. Regulatory and institutional reforms to address the demographic challenge

The main measure to achieve a bigger offer of services to the population is based on the decentralization of 22 national services depending on several Ministries, such as the Ministry of Interior (security corps), Ministry of Universities (online training), Ministry of Inclusion or Social Security and Migrations (data processing centers).

Apart from the measures approved by the National Government, regional governments are also working to improve the quality of life in rural areas all along with Local Action Groups.

2. Strengths of the Spanish territory

National diversity

The main strength of Spain is the diversity of territories, landscapes, and natural resources, since we can find very different realities in the country (mountain, lowland, sea, inlands...). This can offer a wide variety of natural resources and ways of boosting the economy through diversification. Thanks to that, Spain has been able to revitalize multiple territories thanks to the encouragement of economic activities related to it, like the tourism on renewable energies.

Touristic activity

Tourism is the economic activity which has been promoted in Spain since several decades, which has allowed the increase of the national wealth and has boosted the growth of other economic sector, such as the catering industry or promotion of the endogenous resources in order to attract tourists.

Climate

Another strength of Spain is the climate of the country. On the one hand, it allows the pursuit of a national multisectoral strategy which includes the traditional beach destinations and inland tourism. On the other hand, it enables Spain to occupy one of the main places of touristic destination in the world.

3. Difficulties of the Spanish territory

Depopulation

Depopulation is the main threat in our current society. Since the economic profitability has traditionally defined public policies and any other strategy of development, rural areas have never been the priority for the installation of infrastructures and services because of the low density of population and territorial dispersion.

The inequalities that we can appreciate today between rural and urban areas caused by the logic of short-term profit have been the reason why thousands of people decided to migrate to bigger cities during the last decades. The lack of services and investments in small municipalities is provoking the continuous expulsion of young people and families from rural areas, as well as the slowdown of the economic activity and entrepreneurship.

Lack of capacity facing an increase of population in rural areas

The pandemic crisis has tackled again the issue of the opportunities for rural areas of teleworking. This has contributed to the transformation of the popular imagination, which has started to see small towns as the chance to increase the quality of life without leaving behind their current jobs. This has promoted a certain growth of people moving to the countryside, especially to the rural regions next to big cities.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that Spain cannot nowadays face the potential migration to the countryside because of its low network of connectivity. It is essential nowadays to expand the optic fiber network to be able to face the potential migration. Even if teleworking does not constitute the solution to the endogenous problems related with depopulation, it obviously constitutes an opportunity to revitalize the areas.

High dependence of touristic activity

One of the main weaknesses of Spain is directly related to one of its greatest strengths: tourism. Since it has been during years the milestone of several development strategies, it has created a big dependence on its activity (hotels, catering...). This increases the vulnerability of Spanish economy and reduces its capacity of adaptation to changes or unexpected events. As we have seen with the irruption of COVID-19 crisis, the economy has been especially affected because of the touristic restrictions.

Innovations

1. Solutions implemented

The solutions that exist in Spain go through the decentralization of competences and the strong commitment of national and regional governments with LEADER and the sustainable dynamization of rural areas.

Decentralization allows the design and implantation of policies adapted to each territory. It encourages the dialogue and participation between the local agents and the regional administration. Since rural development is managed by regional public authorities, rural regional networks were created to facilitate connections between LAGs and the government. They represent their interests and propose their demands. They also work to make visible their work and encourage the cooperation inside the region. This has also a negative side, related to the connection between the different regions and their possibilities of cooperation. Since these competences (measure 19.3) are managed by regional authorities, it is very complicated to combine the calls and present interregional projects of cooperation.

The strong commitment of the National and regional governments with rural development has been proven since the origin of LEADER methodology. The economic contribution that they offer to this measure (19.2) overcomes, in several cases, the compulsory 5% established by the European Commission for LEADER.

CCAA	% PDR SOBRE TOTAL FEADER	% LEADER SOBRE FEADER PDR
ANDALUCÍA	23,02	10,00
ARAGÓN	5,63	13,19
ASTURIAS	3,92	25,10
BALEARES	0,74	7,93
CANARIAS	1,90	5,14
CANTABRIA	1,19	5,10
CASTILLA LA MANCHA	13,83	10,56
CASTILLA Y LEON	11,68	10,73
CATALUÑA	4,20	7,63
EXTREMADURA	10,74	9,34
GALICIA	10,72	7,08

MADRID	0,92	18,66
MURCIA	2,64	5,42
NAVARRA	1,64	8,85
PAIS VASCO	1,05	13,43
RIOJA	0,84	7,46
VALENCIA	2,46	5,69

Regional governments have thereby competences to develop regional legislation and autonomic policies to promote the countryside. Also, depending on the region, it changes the number of activities hold by the Local Action Group and Managing Authorities. There isn't any model that can be applied to all regions, since single combination is adapted to the local reality and contributes to a better management of LEADER and rural development.

SISTEMAS DE GESTIÓN. TRAMITACIÓN DE LAS AYUDAS					
	Elabora y publica las Bases Regulatorias	Elaboración de Convocatoria de ayudas	Aprobación de las convocatorias	Publicación de Convocatoria de ayudas	Elabora la Resolución de Ayudas
Andalucía	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión
Aragón	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión
Asturias	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión
Cantabria	Autoridad de Gestión	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL
Castilla La Mancha	GAL	GAL	Autoridad de Gestión	GAL	GAL
Castilla y León	Autoridad de Gestión	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL
Cataluña	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión
Extremadura	Autoridad de Gestión	GAL	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	GAL
Galicia	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión
La Rioja	Autoridad de Gestión	GAL	GAL	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión
Madrid	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL
Murcia	Autoridad de Gestión	GAL	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión
Navarra	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL
País Vasco	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión
C. Valenciana	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión	Autoridad de Gestión

2. Examples

Law of Measures against the Depopulation of Castilla-La Mancha

The new Law, approved on May 6, 2021 in the Cortes of Castilla-La Mancha, is a shared, pioneering, and transversal regulation, which includes, for the first time in our country, fiscal policy to curb depopulation.

Thus, in the section of personal income tax assigned to the autonomous communities, a deduction of up to 25% of the regional tax is proposed for people who have an effective stay in rural areas; as well as the deduction of up to 15% for the acquisition or rehabilitation of a home for those who live or want to live in rural areas.

In addition, the text incorporates incentives of up to 40% for companies that want to settle in areas affected by depopulation. Another novelty in this Law is a deduction of 500 euros in the full share of the autonomous section of personal income tax for the transfer of habitual residence for work reasons to sparsely populated areas. This deduction operates the year of the transfer and the following year.

This regulation, structured in seven titles and 77 articles, guarantees access to public services and equal opportunities for the inhabitants of rural areas, in addition to promoting the economic and social development of our rural areas to achieve social and territorial cohesion. (*Castilla- La Mancha*, 2021)

Decree that will regulate the direct sale of agri-food products in Castilla-La Mancha

The direct sales decree support and promote food supply chains managed by farmers and ranchers, such as cheese or honey, to establish a direct relationship with consumers. "By reducing the number of intermediaries, producers will be able to obtain a more equitable distribution of the final sale price," explained the deputy minister of Rural Environment, Agapito Portillo.

Thus, direct sales "will suppose a complementary income channel" to those already existing for the holders of agricultural holdings, which will result in greater profitability, in the opinion of the vice-minister, who has assured that it will allow them to diversify their sources of income and earn in visibility, while it will contribute to energize the rural environment.

As Portillo points out, the decree will allow consumers access to "high quality local products and will value the agri-food sector and the rural world", contributing to the development of an environmentally and socially sustainable economy. In turn, they will receive information on the origin, real cost, production systems and sustainability conditions, which are "aspects that are of greater interest to citizens every day," he says." (*Castilla- La Mancha*, 2020)

Rural Agenda of Catalonia

The Rural Agenda of Catalonia has as a frame of reference the initiative of the European Parliament to draft a European Rural Agenda that promotes socio-economic development, economic growth and diversification, social welfare, nature protection, cooperation and interconnection with urban areas.

The Interdepartmental Commission on Rural Depopulation has commissioned the elaboration of the Rural Agenda of Catalonia so that, through a space for debate, the challenges of the rural world can be analyzed, and actions can be identified. With a Rural Agenda of Catalonia shared with the actors involved in rural and sustainable development, the aim is to prioritize policies and actions for rurality within the framework of the new European programming period.

Nowadays the elaboration of the agenda is on its third phase (social consultation). After this, the final document will be published. (ARCA, 2021)

Draft of the new Rural Development Law of the Basque Country

The Basque Government has approved the project for the Rural Development Law of the Basque Country whose challenge is to sustain and attract population to rural areas so that rural development "advances on an equal footing" with urban development and creates a boost to economic activities in the agricultural, livestock and forestry sectors. The rule does not state that the pandemic has caused a "striking increase" population in those areas.

The document provides for the creation of the Basque Rural Development Network, a new body made up of institutional representatives and technical teams from the Basque Government, Provincial Councils, EUDEL, ACOA-AKE (Association of Councils of Álava), Cuadrillas, Hazi (Lurralde), Rural Development Association, Local Action Group and in general, other types of territorial and sectoral organizations of reference and agents involved in the deployment of the Regional Rural Development Programs. (REDR, 2021)

ROMANIA

Analysis

1. Situation in Romania

More than 45% of Romania's population lives in the rural environment, in localities known as "communes". A commune is made up of several small villages, but there are also communes that consist of a single larger village. The rural area in Romania is constituted of 2,685 rural communes in the country. The past communist regime left an unfortunate inheritance in the rural area with mono-agricultural areas, dilapidated infrastructures and with villages deprived of elementary conditions for a decent living (e.g., potable water, electricity etc.).

Rural-urban disparities remain significant. Positive labor market developments are not benefitting all regions and population groups equally. The at-risk-of-poverty rate in rural areas is almost five times higher than in cities. Large regional disparities are detrimental to long-term sustainable growth. Regions with significant shares of the workforce concentrated in low-productivity sectors are characterized by relatively low salaries and high poverty rates, which have a negative impact on social cohesion.

Overall, although Romania has achieved progress in improving its health system, poverty and social exclusion remain among the highest in the EU, with major inequalities in healthcare coverage, the vulnerable population being the most affected. Improving access to healthcare services for the rural population in general, and especially in poor and under-served communities, remains a challenge. The ongoing healthcare reforms in Romania have so far delivered very little. However, the latest health reform measures are promising.

The key problems for the rural services to population in rural areas in Romania include the following:

- Long-term unemployment, low incomes, and lack of economic opportunity
- Rising incidence of poverty, social dislocation in rural areas
- High levels of hidden unemployment - and under-employment
- Levels of human capital, in terms of education and skills, are often significantly lower than in urban areas
- Health and other social services are not adequate
- A whole range of infrastructures components including roads, telecommunications, water, and waste management are in need of upgrading

- A lack of access to suitable rural finance and micro-small to medium sized enterprise (MSME) credit facilities
- Little support for business in the form of information and mutual organization

There are widening disparities in economic opportunity and poverty, across regions and between urban and rural areas. While Bucharest has exceeded the EU average income per capita, many secondary cities are becoming hubs of prosperity and innovation. But Romania remains one of the least urbanized countries in the EU.

Access to public services remains constrained for many citizens, particularly in rural areas, and there is a large infrastructure gap. Although Romania is the largest economy in the Balkans, it is also the second-poorest EU country with over a third of Romania's population affected by poverty or social exclusion, particularly in rural areas, where almost half of its population live.

Romania has the second highest urban-rural gap in mean equalized net income in the European Union. In practice, access to basic services, such as water and sanitation, housing, health, and education, is not guaranteed equally throughout the country, affecting particularly women and girls living in rural areas, especially the Roma minority, which represents around 8% of the population.

A high number of Romanians have emigrated, and a significant number of children in the country have one or both parents living abroad.

In order to achieve the process of real convergence and sustainable development, the development of the rural areas in Romania is necessary, considering that these have a substantial potential of economic development and a vital social role.

At present, rural economy is characterized by a low degree of diversification and by a dependence on agricultural activities that determines the maintenance of low-income levels.

The issue of labor occupancy is directly linked to that of ensuring incomes and to the issue of life quality at individual and social levels. In rural areas, because of the low density of population (45.1 inhabitants per km²), there is low interest in investors. A proper infrastructure and quality services could contribute to the development of jobs and better living conditions for the rural population.

The diversification of rural economy also depends on the **level of education, knowledge, and professional skills**. Though infrastructure is an important element in the social and economic development of the rural area, professional training and primary education are the main instruments of good development through the conversion of the agricultural labor force into non-agricultural labor force.

2. Strengths of the Romanian territory

Romania covers an area of 238 000 km², which 87% is rural. Agricultural land covers 57 % of the global area and forestland 30 %. The unemployment rate is 7% (2012). The total population is nearly 20 millions – which 45% lives in rural areas. The share of agriculture in the Romanian economy (at 6.6% of Gross Value Added) still remains one of the highest in the EU (more than three times the EU average of 1.7% of GVA). Approximately one third of all farms in the EU are found in Romania, with some 3.9 millions farm holdings.

On the back of positive economic developments, labor market conditions remain tight. Since 2017, there has been a general pick-up in employment, with an increase of 0.2% in 2018, to a record employment rate of 70.8% in Q3-2019. This trend is expected to continue with employment growing further in 2019 and 2020. The unemployment rate fell to 3.9% in 2019, its lowest level since 1997.

The natural resources are generally in good state of preservation:

- Romania's landforms are mountains, hills, plains
- Biodiversity valuable
- Variety of the traditional landscapes
- Rich hydrographic network
- High percentage of the population living in rural areas (45%)
- Significant agricultural and forest area (61.3%, respectively 28.3% of the country) and favorable pedo-climatic conditions for the crop diversification
- Large share of agricultural and forest lands generating eco-systems services characterized by a great biological diversity
- Rich rural heritage (large natural, material, and immaterial cultural heritage)
- Keeping the traditions and the customs alive
- Overall low level of greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture

The strengths of Romania's rural areas emphasize its potential regarding the natural resources, the variety of relief forms and traditional landscapes, the

richness in hydrographical net and the biodiversity. Also, regarding the social aspect, Romania is a peculiar case of the EU-28 as about 45 % of its population is living in the rural areas, where agriculture represent the main income source.

3. Difficulties of the Romanian territory

Romania's population has decreased over recent decades and is projected to shrink further. It has fallen by 3.8 millions since 1990 and is projected to fall to 15 millions by 2070, from the current level of 19.4 millions, driven by demographic change, including emigration. Therefore, the old-age dependency ratio, the ratio of people aged 65+ relative to people of working-age (15-64), is projected to double from 26.3% in 2016 to 52.8% in 2070. This implies that the number of working aged people for every person aged over 65 would fall from almost four to just two. Population ageing has a negative impact on the adequacy of pensions and on future spending on healthcare and the long-term sustainability of public finances.

High economic growth has translated into improved social conditions. However, poverty and social exclusion, as well as in-work poverty, remain very high while income inequalities have increased. Social transfers have a limited impact on poverty reduction. Inequalities persist, in particular for people in rural and disadvantaged areas. The inactivity rate for women and early school leaving are also very high. The decentralization of social services has not been accompanied by the provision of proper financial allocations, thus hampering the sustainability of service delivery. The coverage of public services remains low.

Basic infrastructures and access to services in the rural areas continue to be of poor quality and insufficiently developed. 40% of the rural population is at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The healthcare system is not effective in improving neither accessibility nor the health of the population. Unmet medical needs have increased, with high urban-rural gaps and low coverage for low-income groups and the elderly. Preventive, outpatient, and community-based care remain under-financed and not covered by sufficiently targeted public policy measures. The health status of the population remains below the EU average. Total healthcare spending is low and focused on inpatient care. Population ageing and migration are putting increasing pressure on the sustainability of the healthcare system.

Regional disparities in Romania are amongst the highest in the EU. Significant gaps across regions persist in investment, productivity, competitiveness, and employment. Addressing them and prioritizing investment at a regional level would help increase the country's competitiveness and support long term growth, development, and modernization.

Romania's weak research and innovation performance hampers the transition towards a knowledge-based economy. The country continues to have one of the lowest levels of public and private expenditure on research and development in the EU, negatively affecting scientific quality and the diffusion of technology amongst firms. Increasing R&D investment and quality and supporting innovative firms remain important challenges.

The equity, inclusiveness and quality of education remain important challenges. Education spending is amongst the lowest in the EU. Early school leaving is very high, in particular for pupils in rural areas, Roma children and children with disabilities. The acquisition of digital skills is low, putting up challenges for the future labor market integration of graduates. The labor market relevance of vocational education and training and higher education remains low, harming graduates' job perspectives.

Innovations

1. Solutions implemented

One of the most important solutions, for the main challenges that Romania is facing in rural areas is based on the idea of ESPRIT projects, which underlines the need of improving the access to services for the rural population. We have identified some of the main processes and tools, in order to contribute to this goal, such as:

- Favorable natural conditions for the development of agritourism, hunting, fishing and activities which generates alternative income
- Infrastructure development (roads, potable water supply and sanitation) may generate the emergence of investors
- Access to basic training programs and lifelong learning, for entrepreneurship development
- European Union support regarding risk management instruments and tools in agriculture (crop insurance, animals, and plants insurance, setting up mutual funds, income stabilization)
- Financial support through community funds for the development of the seals local network and short food chains
- The importance of the mountain areas for the production of quality food is increasing due to the effects of climate changes
- Preservation and promotion of the local resources (agriculture, forestry, cultural heritage, natural heritage)
- Capitalization of a range of renewable energy sources from agriculture and forestry (crop residues, energy crops, wood)
- The absorption capacity of the common market for the agri-food products niche
- Local brands promotion

Financing Tools

Romania is one of the countries benefiting the most from EU support. The financial allocation from the EU Cohesion policy funds¹ for Romania amounts to €26.8 billions in the current Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020), which is equivalent to around 2% of the GDP annually. By the end of 2019, some €28.5 billions (more than the total amount planned) was allocated to specific projects and €7.2 billion was reported as spent by the selected projects²,

¹ European Regional Development Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Social Fund, Youth Employment Initiative

² <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/countries/RO>

showing a level of implementation well below the EU average. While bringing about a more harmonious development through reducing economic, social, and territorial disparities, EU Cohesion policy funding already significantly supports structural challenges in Romania. The Cohesion policy programs for Romania have allocated EU funding of €2.7 billions for smart growth, €13 billions for sustainable growth and sustainable transport and €6.2 billions for inclusive growth. In 2019, following a performance review³, €888 million have been made available for Romania within performing priorities.

The Rural Development Program (RDP) for Romania was formally adopted by the European Commission on 26 May 2015 and was last modified on 28 April 2020, outlining Romania's priorities for using the nearly € 9.5 billions of public money that is available for the 7-year period 2014-2020 (€ 8.1 billions from the EU budget, including € 112.3 millions transferred from the CAP direct payments, and € 1.34 billion of national co-funding). The RDP for Romania focuses mainly on 3 priority areas:

- promoting competitiveness and restructuring in Romania's large agricultural sector
- environmental protection & climate change
- stimulating economic development, job creation and better quality of life in Romanian villages, where it remains major disparities with EU and between national levels

Under the first of these priorities, the RDP will help modernize nearly 3 400 farms and cooperatives, support the development of more than 30 000 small farms, and the setting up of more than 12 000 young farmers. Under the priority 'Restoring, preserving, and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry', more than 1 million ha (over 9%) of agricultural land and more than 900 000 ha (14%) of forests will benefit from payments to support biodiversity and promote environmentally-friendly land management practices. A further 4.7 millions ha will receive support in order to prevent land abandonment and soil erosion. Skills in the agricultural sector will be reinforced by the training of some 96 000 persons, under the above two priorities.

Under the priority 'Social inclusion and local development in rural areas', almost 27000 jobs will be created in rural areas and the setting up and development of 3 000 non-agricultural businesses will be supported. Nearly 27% of the rural population should benefit from investments to improve rural infrastructures.

³ The performance review is regulated by art 22 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

The RDP also aims to promote diversification of the rural economy and creation of new job opportunities to help surplus labor from agricultural sector and increase rural incomes. Nearly 3 000 projects will be supported for setting-up/developing non-agricultural businesses in rural areas and almost 27 000 jobs will be created, of which more than 2 000 will be created under LEADER.

Management and local governance tools

120 LEADER Local Action Groups will implement local development strategies, covering 100% of the eligible rural territory. Almost 800 projects will be supported to improve small-scale rural infrastructures, improving living conditions for some 27% of the rural population. They will include investments in local roads, waste water/water supply facilities, crèches, kindergartens, after schools, and agricultural high schools.

Nearly 400 local cultural patrimony buildings will be restored and preserved. Access to credits for implementing private investments under the RDP will be facilitated by the use of financial instruments, starting with a Credit Fund. Romania has also chosen to implement a separate thematic sub-program (with indicative financial allocation of € 320 millions EAFRD funds) aimed to increase the competitiveness and enable restructuring of the fruit growing sector, a sector where Romania has climatic advantages and traditional strengths, but which has suffered from under-investment. Support is given for the setting-up of new orchards, reconversion of the old ones, fruit processing, cooperation projects, and the setting-up of producer groups within the sector.

The four biggest RDP measures in budgetary terms (total public funding) are:

- € 2.5 billions allocated to Measure 4 (Investments in physical assets)
- € 1.5 billion allocated to Measure 13 (Payments to areas facing natural or other specific constraints)
- € 1.3 billion allocated to Measure 7 (Basic services and village renewal in rural areas)
- € 1 billion allocated to Measure 6 (Farm and business development)

2. Example

The Youth Social Entrepreneurship HUB

The Youth Social Entrepreneurship HUB is an Erasmus+ project, that aims to strengthen competences for social entrepreneurship of the youth workers and young people by developing learning materials and involving them in learning activities.

The learning materials are innovative and propose to develop the knowledge and skills of young people to start-up and manage a social enterprise by involving them in the creation and management of a virtual social enterprise. The project proposes to develop the competences of youth workers to promote the social entrepreneurship among young people. Through all the learning materials developed in the project, the youth workers will be able to facilitate the social entrepreneurship education among young people and, consequently, will improve the quality of their work.

The platform developed in the project will allow young people to create business plans with financial reports and to track economic records. The “Virtual learning social enterprise platform” is an interactive method aimed at developing entrepreneurship by applying interdisciplinary knowledge integration and ensuring conditions for deepening the practical skills acquired by the youths in training.

The project brings together several partners, such as the Romanian Center for European Policies, the DIESIS COOP, the Consorzio Nazionale Meuccio Ruini and the Center for Nonprofit Legislation.

FRANCE

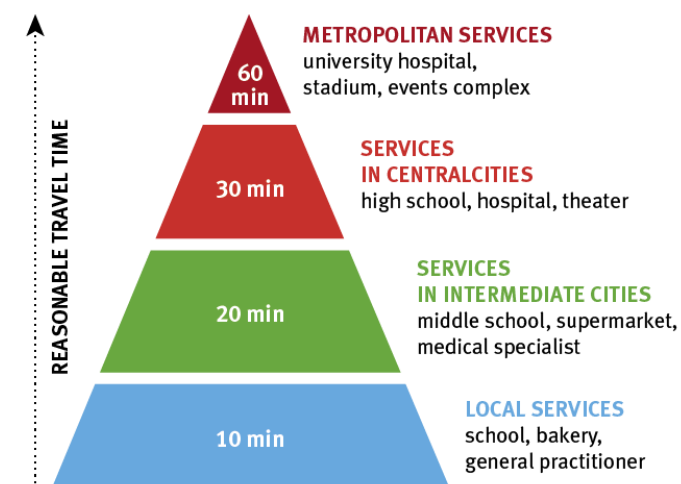
Analysis

1. Situation in France

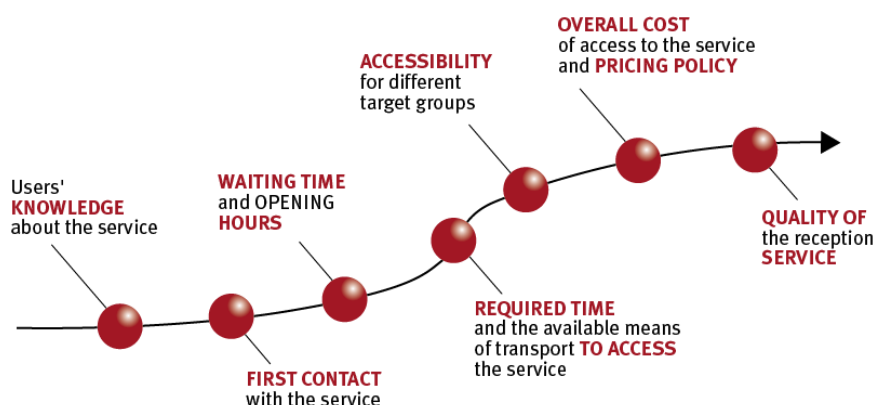
By services to population, we mean all market and non-market services that are perceived as a necessity for the inhabitants. They are vectors of social and territorial cohesion and are essential to the life of the territories. In France, these services are provided by the State, the local authorities, private actors, or associations.

The supply of public services has been declining for several years in rural areas, with some users still having problems getting access to everyday services. There are many reasons for this, which are interdependent: changes in how public services work (closure of windows, single-window services, performance, and efficiency requirements for public spending, etc.), closure of uneconomic services (especially market services such as shops or cultural activities managed by private operators), mobility constraints (caused in part by the reduction of public transport facilities), devitalization of rural areas, digital divide, etc.

It is important to understand the concept of accessibility in order to address these challenges: accessibility starts with physical access to equipment (time and means to access it). In fact, the presence or maintenance of a service in a rural area will depend on the frequency of its use (daily, one-off, exceptional, etc.). Within this logic, rural areas still rely on the urban centers where most services are concentrated. Mobility becomes therefore a major concern. Services can also be accessible online, but access to digital technology is not always easy, both in terms of use and equipment. Physical and digital accessibility must therefore be considered as complementary rather than substitutable.



Furthermore, as the *Association for Networking Services and Territorial Development* points out, we must not forget the "upstream" aspects of accessibility (visibility of the service, first contact with it, adapted opening hours and service availability), as well as the "downstream" aspects (accessibility of different target publics, pricing policy, quality of the service provided). This global accessibility chain raises different challenges for different services, but also for different territories and publics concerned.



Innovations

1. Solutions implemented

We have listed and studied over 200 projects. Among them, we have identified several levers that allow us to maintain or develop services in rural areas and to facilitate their accessibility.

LEVER 1

Pooling and public/private partnership

Bringing together several types of services in the same place makes it possible to respond to the need of proximity of the rural population (and so relieves congestion in the cities), increases the number of visitors and the range of services available to users (easier access, wider range of services). Relocating services and bringing them together under the same roof also means sharing material and human resources (costs of investment, works, equipment, job sharing, etc.).

It should be noted that many multiservice sites have been set up thanks to a public/private partnership: the local authority provides the means (land or premises for example), and the private operator offers its expertise and resources. The local authority can also provide human resources and technical know-how. The municipality' role in this approach is of prime importance and cannot be ignored.

Examples of multi-service sites: multidisciplinary healthcare centers, France Service Centers, multi-service shops, shared distance education for island schools in Brittany, community bars with the Espace de Vie Sociale label, etc.

LEVER 2

Itinerant and mobile services

According to an INSEE study, 31% of rural households are in a fragile situation due to forced journeys (one-third of which is for work needs and two-thirds for the consumption of goods and services and leisure activities). There are several levers for solving the problem of mobility in rural areas: restructure transport facilities, promote soft mobility, land use management, revitalize town centers, bring living and working areas closer together, and encourage greater conviviality.

To counter social and territorial disparities, itinerant shops and services provide innovative solutions that bring new life to the countryside and guarantee a

local, high-quality offer for everyone. These itinerant alternatives can indeed improve access to public services, facilitate the purchase of everyday goods and services, and even provide cultural activities. According to an INSEE study, in 2016 France had 116,000 itinerant shops (74% of them were non-food).

The outreach approach ("going towards the users"), particularly in the medical and social fields, also facilitates physical access for vulnerable and isolated populations to health and prevention as well as legal and social services. Local contacts (at home or on the places of living) must be backed up by remote duty offices, with opening hours adapted to the constraints of the population. Reinforcing links and trust thus allows a return to common law and promotes access to essential services.

Examples of itinerant services: itinerant libraries, music schools or cinemas, itinerant public services (France Service buses), home health care, itinerant grocery stores, home basket delivery, itinerant Mother and Child centers, digital mediation, health mediation, solidarity transport services, etc.

LEVER 3

Cooperation and solidarity

Today it is essential to bring new life to rural areas through citizen participation, the involvement of the local associations and through initiatives in the social and solidarity economy (sharing economy). Many services are created and managed on a participatory basis, involving all the actors (population, administration, local elected representatives, chambers of commerce, the private sector...). Networking also helps to ensure the sustainability of a service by reducing the costs of certain services, improving its quality, or facilitating its accessibility. A circular economy contributes to the development of an entire village.

Examples of concerted and cooperative approaches: platform of local producers, CUMA (cooperative for the use of agricultural equipment), third-places, co-working areas, youth services cooperative, car sharing, cooperative or intergenerational housing, participatory and concerted approaches led by the villages, cooperative commercial land in the town centers, municipal mutual insurance, student sponsorship, Zero Unemployment Territories in rural areas, etc.

LEVER 4**Digitalization**

The physical proximity of services remains undeniable, though paperless services can be a real asset for rural areas. Digitization can offer new services or complement and improve existing ones (in particular administrative and health care services). They promote knowledge and access to training; strengthen links between inhabitants and their communities (consultation platform), between consumers and producers or between tourists and territories; they facilitate the collaborative economy (car-sharing, co-working, fablab platform, etc.). Digital technology is an important lever for the development of territories and for the improvement of accessibility to services.

But digital technology requires facilities and infrastructures (fiber optic or 4G deployment to eliminate white zones, modernization of equipment) and support for users (digital mediation, training, etc.) to avoid territorial or social divisions.

Examples: Third places and areas dedicated to digital technology, RuraConnect, French Tech labelled territories, digital platform for local food networks, telemedicine, Smart Village approach, car-sharing applications, connected Campus, the Estonian model for e-services...

2. Examples**Leader initiative**

Leader means "Links Between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy". It is a European program that supports rural territories in carrying out innovative and partnership-based development projects. Leader is a measure of the EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) designed to act as an incentive and to enable public and private actors of the territory to launch collective and high-quality projects through a bottom-up method. The LEADER initiative is carried out on a local level by a group called the Local Action Group (LAG) and is backed by a common local strategy, a partnership of public/private players and a multi-sectoral approach based on exchange, cooperation, and innovation. (<http://leaderfrance.fr/>)

« Smart village » initiative

Smart Villages are communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, capitalizing on local assets and opportunities. They use a participatory approach to develop their strategy to improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions. The Smart Village is a connected territory

and a place of participatory, inclusive, and sustainable democracy, which reinforces the skills and powers of its citizens, and promotes the well-being and equity of its inhabitants. As example we can name the following villages: Lavoncourt (70), Bras-sur-Meuse (55), Moncontour (22), Arvieu (12), Ayen (19) and Ottmarsheim (68). More information on the ENRD and RuraliTic websites.

Departmental schemes for accessibility to public services (SDASSP)

These schemes result from Art 98 of the NOTRe law and help to network various actors (Public inter-municipal cooperation establishment, State, regional councilors) in order to improve the accessibility of both physical and digital services. It is a modern, changing tool adapted to the reality of territories. Thus, the aim of the departmental schemes is to propose a common vision of the territory's expectations.

France Service Centers

France Service Centers combine physical reception and digital support, offering in a one-stop window the services of at least 9 national partners (Family allocation fund, Ministries of Interior, Justice and Public Finance, the health and retirement insurance funds, the Mutual Agricultural Fund, National employment service and the Post). These core services can be supplemented by services provided by local authorities and other partners, depending on the local needs (cultural, economic, or educational services). There are two employees to welcome and assist customers (individuals or companies). For example, France Services Centers can be attached to medical and social centers, tourist offices, media libraries or co-working spaces.

Rural third places

Co-working areas, fablabs, repair cafés, research factories, cultural fallow areas, all these third places bring together several activities, contribute to the economic development of a territory and animate local community of people who work and live on the territory. These places offer opportunities for action and innovation by encouraging contacts, cooperation, and collective projects, by promoting learning and creativity, and by providing space for social interactions. This phenomenon began in urban areas and spread to the countryside, small and medium-sized towns, and suburban neighborhoods. There are already 1,800 third places in France, 800 of them are outside urban areas.

RuraConnect: Third place booking platform in rural municipalities, set up in 2019 by the AMRF (Association of French Rural Mayors) to facilitate the remote work of many professionals and reduce commute time, and as a result revive the countryside.

Social living space (EVS)

The social living space is a local association that works with all groups of the population, including families, children, and young people as a minimum target group. It prioritizes collective actions to strengthen social and family ties as well as local solidarity, and coordinates initiatives to promote community life. The Family Allowances Fund (CAF) gives authorization and provides support to the EVS association (social engineering, occasional social missions financing).

The Rural Families association has a large number of EVS on its territory, as well as the social centers, for example.

TAg BZH, a driving force for collective entrepreneurship

TAg BZH is a tool that encourages the emergence of collective and innovative local companies in response to the needs of the territory. In Brittany, the TAg invents a method of collective imagination based on 3 interconnected functions: the #Revealer (identify societal needs and turn them into a collective enterprise project), the #Ideator (transform an idea into a concrete business project) and the #Incubator (propel a collective business creation).

Youth Service Cooperative (YSC)

The concept was born 30 years ago in Quebec and was brought back to France after an international forum on the Social and Solidarity Economy. The first three French YSCs were created in Brittany in 2013 before spreading to the rest of France. The idea is that young people between 16 and 18 years old set up their own work cooperative to offer services in their territory during the summer. This temporary cooperative satisfies needs on the territory without any competition with local businesses (secretarial work, car cleaning, gardening...). YSCs are much more than just a summer job, they are SSE education tools: managing clients, working on organization, time management, profit sharing, etc.

Connected Campus

These are individual and collective workspaces where young people can follow distance learning courses in higher education near their homes and benefit from close support. These structures promote collective dynamics and

mutual aid and help young people to get access to higher education which otherwise would not have been possible for them. In 2019, thirteen places situated in cities far from major university centers received the Connected Campus label.

The Factories of the Rural World

The Factories of the Rural World created by the MRJC (Movement Rural de Jeunesse Chrétienne - Rural Christian Youth Movement) aim to build innovative and structuring places for rural territories, providing new forms of local solidarity. As any MRJC project, it offers young people from the rural world the means to participate in the development and animation of their territory, and thus contribute to their own socio-economic integration. In practical terms, a rural world factory is:

- A place of local and rural animation in the heart of the territory
- A place managed and animated by young people and local inhabitants
- A space for meetings, experiments, culture, economic activity, and services, etc.

The town center revival process

Traditionally town centers were known for their density and variety of local services. Today, faced with the urban sprawl and the social, environmental and economic consequences of the decline of town centers, a sustainable development model for villages must be found in order to attract new inhabitants and new activities (shops, services, businesses). The objective is to make them the center of life in the municipality. To do so, it is necessary to focus on the issues of accessibility, mobility, performance, visibility, comfort for working people and visitors...

Several calls for projects back the global approaches of shop modernization, renovation, and ecological transition: "Action cœur de ville" (Heart of town action) and "Petites Villes de demain" (Small Cities of Tomorrow) programs, regional call for applications "Rural towns dynamism", call for expression of interest (AMI) to promote the dynamics of third places in the territories, etc.

<http://www.centres-bourgs.logement.gouv.fr/>

Living Villages is a rural solidarity-based land company. In order to revive rural areas, co-operative company of collective interest *Living Villages* buys and restores premises for activities with a strong social impact and thus creates places where inhabitants can **benefit from local services and social ties**. Thanks to the solidarity of citizens, businesses and institutions, *Living Villages* can support project leaders and local authorities in their efforts to revive rural areas.

<https://villagesvivants.com>

County Counter offers a new model of multi-service franchised shops in village centers. Based on modern marketing and communication tools, the counters operate in networks on the same territory (in order to pool resources, bulk purchases, optimize costs) and build partnerships with local structures or professionals to offer a wide and varied range of services: sale of local products in short chains, local public services (Post Office, administrative and legal offices), shoe-repair, dry cleaning, gas supply, news-stand, concierge services, small restaurants... ... <https://comptoirdecampagne.fr/>

Solidarity-based transport services

Many solidarity-based transport initiatives have been launched to tackle transport deficiencies. Volunteers of the Rural Families association created this kind of service for people with no access to transport, the elderly, or people with disabilities in many regions (Eure-et-Loir, Hautes-Pyrénées, Maine-et-Loire, Manche, Morbihan, Seine-et-Marne, Somme, Tarn-et-Garonne, Vendée, etc.). Other initiatives, such as Covoit'Santé in the Puy de Dôme, are designed for people in precarious situations who need medical monitoring. And some initiatives supported by the municipalities (such as Atchoum or Transistop, for example) target a wider public: young people, working and retired people, and so on.

The Long-Term Zero Unemployment Territory scheme

The concept is to funnel the costs of unemployment to finance permanent jobs that meet uncovered local needs, while ensuring dignified working conditions.

Started in 2016 this experiment demonstrated how to solve the problem of long-term unemployment on a regional scale, without additional cost to the community, by developing new services for residents, businesses, or institutions (solidarity garage, recycling center, social relocation, transport assistance, green spaces, etc.). After having been tested in 10 experimental territories, this system will soon be extended.

Shared or cooperative accommodations

Participatory housing offers an opportunity to design, create and manage housing collectively, combining private and common spaces in order to better respond to the needs of residents, in accordance with their means and aspirations.

The association *Habitats des possibles* offers retired people a unique shared and inclusive housing solution in the center of the villages. Each house is small enough to accommodate 5 to 10 people and is suitable for the elderly. The houses are affordable for people with modest incomes, and they are all different because they are all co-designed by local inhabitants and the municipality.

HUNGARY

Analysis

1. Situation in Hungary

Factsheet on Rural Development Program for Hungary

The Rural Development Program (RDP) for Hungary was formally adopted by the European Commission on 10 August 2015, outlining the Hungarian priorities for using the EUR 4.2 billions of public money that is available for the 7-year period 2014-2020 (EUR 3.4 billions from the EU budget and EUR 740 millions of national co-funding).

Hungary's RDP is putting emphasis on actions related to restoring, preserving, and enhancing ecosystems, promoting food chain organizations and risk management in agriculture, and promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

Situation and key challenges

Hungary is a rural country with 66.3% of its area classified as rural, 33.1% as intermediate and only 0.6% is considered urban. 46% of the population lives in rural areas. Agricultural land covers 57% and forestry 21% of the total territory. Compared to the EU average the Hungarian agricultural sector is atypical with very high share of arable farming (81% of agricultural land) and low grassland (14.2%). Hungary has very favorable agro-ecological conditions for agricultural production, which represent a significant growth potential. The share of agriculture in the GDP is 4%, while the overall agricultural industry (agricultural engineering and chemical industry, food processing industry, etc.) has a 15% share of the GDP. Agriculture and food industry are important pillars of the local economy, particularly in rural areas. The average farm size in Hungary is 8.1 ha - much below the EU average; 87% of the farms have less than 5 ha. The average age of farmers in Hungary is 56 years. Therefore, there is an urgent need for generational renewal. The extent of horizontal and vertical co-operation in the Hungarian agri-food sector is low. The rural employment rate is low, and the unemployment rate for young people and women is especially high compared to the national average. Concerning climate change, Hungary is frequently hit by important water imbalances between drought and floods and there is a clear need for more efficient water management. Hungary has a limited and outdated irrigation system and only 2.4% of the agricultural area is irrigated. Organic production is among the lowest in EU with 2.7%. Concerning biodiversity 83% of habitats are in poor condition. The main environmental challenges to be tackled concern the protection of biodiversity, the quality of surface and ground water and soil erosion.

How Hungary's RDP will address these challenges

In addressing these challenges, Hungary's RDP will fund actions under all the six rural Development priorities – with a particular emphasis on restoring, preserving, and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry as well as promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas and promoting food chain organizations and risk management in agriculture.

1. Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas
2. Competitiveness of agricultural sector and sustainable forestry
3. Food chain organization, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture
4. Restoring, preserving, and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry
5. Resource efficiency and climate
6. Social inclusion and local development in rural areas

Program of the training (October 2021)

In the frame of the ESPRIT training in Hungary we will visit several projects in two internationally less visited counties- Heves and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén.

Heves county is a geographically diverse area; its northern part is mountainous (the Mátra and Bükk are the two highest mountain ranges in Hungary), while at south it includes a part of the Great Hungarian Plain. From south it is bordered by Lake Tisza, the largest artificial lake in Hungary.

Heves is famous for its wine from Eger, *Egri Bikavér*.

Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, in north-eastern Hungary, is the second largest county of Hungary both by area and by population. The county bears the name of three historic counties of Hungary, each of them was centered around a castle. Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén is one of the most geographically diverse areas of Hungary. It lies where the Northern Mountains meet the Great Hungarian Plain, thus the northern parts of the county are mountainous – with some of the highest peaks and deepest caves in the country –, the southern parts are flat. Tokaj region is known for its sweet wine, *Tokaji.Aszú*.

During the Socialist era the region was developed into the center of heavy industry. Whole new towns came into existence in place of small villages, the industrial character of existing cities became more important. Urbanization was rapid, workers from all over the country were arriving in cities and towns, and

the population of Miskolc (county seat) reached its highest level in the 1980s (around 211.000.) The end of the Socialist era and the recession of the 1990s hit hard, the unemployment rate is one of the highest of the country, and the local governments try to get over the crisis by strengthening the touristic potential.

Innovations

1. Solutions implemented

Heves county



In Heves county we visited the Lake Tisza Ecocentre in **Poroszló**, which is surrounded by a leisure park of more than 7 hectares. It was designed in the spirit of 'exploring nature'. It is not only a relaxing promenade or a zoo where visitors can closely observe animals but also an amusement park with challenging playgrounds. As the Local Village Museum of Poroszló also belongs to these gardens, together with a traditional poultry run, rabbit yard and a display of old fishing tools one may participate in a short symbolic trip back to the 19th century. Another attraction is the giant freshwater aquarium, where the sophisticated decoration evokes a real underwater image of streams, rivers, and lakes, and makes visitors feel as if they were really walking underwater.

In **Demjén** we visited the Korona Mushroom farm. The Korona Mushroom Union was established via the collaboration of family-run businesses while maintaining traditions and commitment and utilizing the latest technology. By now it has evolved into one of the most important members in the mushroom industry of Central Europe. The Union encompasses the complete mushroom cultivating sector: from producing mushroom spawn through producing mushroom compost and performing high standard growing to processing in the canning industry.

Winery in **Egerszalók**: Helli and Son Kft. received HUF 3,037,989 in the framework of the LEADER project of the Local Rural Development Strategies in 2013 under the title “Environmentally conscious energy use at the Egerzalók site of Helli és Fia Kft.”.

Within the framework of the project, a small household power plant (solar energy) will be built in order to reduce electricity consumption. By using the system to be built, about 50% electricity savings can be achieved, as the current electricity consumption is 22 KW, and with the installation of the new technology, 9 KW electricity can be generated.

Cave dwellings in Egerszalók: Rhyolit tuff stone of the upper layer of the rocks at the foot of Bükk mountains from the valley of Tarna river to Miskolc is easy to cut and carve, so it was much utilized by our forefathers. cellars, dwellings, stables, sheds were carved in it and the cultivated stone was used for building houses. 33 cave-dwellings existed in Egerszalók in the middle of the 20th century. Presumably the dwellings were made in 17-18th centuries. The last ones were inhabited even at the end of the 20th century. The cave-dwellings at the end of Sáfrány street were bought by the local municipality and got local protection. They were renewed by EAFRD subsidy for preserving rural heritage in 2011.

2. Examples

Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county



Gömörszőlős

Gömörszőlős with a population of 70 people, is located in the north of Hungary, close to the Slovakian border. The next big city is Miskolc, 50 km from the small eco-village. The settlement carries all the characteristics of small-village rural areas: an aging local population; buildings that have lost their function; vacant local markets; the traditional peasant culture still to be found in its traces; the revitalized natural landscape; the relative calm, quiet, clean environment.

The Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development implemented the Gömörszőlős program in 1993 as a pilot project. The program tries to offer a solution to the above-mentioned problems in terms of sustainability. How can we live in this socially and economically sinking world without damaging the natural environment?

Szuhafő, Kocsis guesthouse

In Szuhafő the Kocsis family runs a family business producing premium quality milk products by processing milk of jersey cattle. The tender funds of the Rural Development Program were used in the implementation of the investment. Although the English jersey type cattle produces less milk than the Holstein-Friesian, its fat and protein composition is much better and, based on the first results, produces A2 milk, the biggest dairy innovation in recent years. The secret of the so-called “super milk” is that due to its specific protein structure, it causes fewer digestive complaints, which may offer a solution for those who have problems consuming milk.

The Szuhafő Family Manufactory is also exemplary in raising the standard of the settlement in this disadvantaged area, providing work for the locals. Only tourism, animal husbandry, game management and hunting can provide a livelihood and future for this region.

The Kocsis family is also involved in the development of the countryside and community building. Several plots and houses were purchased in the settlement, some of which were converted into guest houses, as well as a successful event house.

An expansion of a Hunting Training Center is underway in the village, as Szuhafő is already closely related to hunting. Thanks to the determination of the members and the president, several dilapidated buildings of the village were purchased, from which, while preserving their architectural character, comfortable hunting lodges were built. Meanwhile, a mutually respectful, good community begins to form, saving the settlement from depopulation.

Trizs- the fruiting village

The village of Trizs is located on the edge of Aggtelek National Park. It is a small settlement with only 234 inhabitants. The community is keeping their traditions alive, which may be the reason for the initiative of producing local products in large numbers. Because the products are made by hand, they become more and more popular.

First the community's work was dominated by women and therefore mainly the processing of fruits, herbs and vegetables were in focus. With help of the municipality more and more fruit trees and bushes were planted and today they sell over 50 sorts of jams and syrups.

„Flavors of Trizs” is the brand which won several prizes and is recognized all over Hungary.

This project created job opportunities, the products and the traditional way of processing attracts tourists. At the same time, it strengthens the local traditions.

Kánó, Pálinka distillery

In the period between 2007-2013 numerous grants were announced for the processing of jam, honey and pálinka, among others. The pálinka distillery in Kánó won 60 000 Euros (65% of the expenses) for its project.

In order to broaden its customer base, it organizes brandy tastings, factory visits and has set up a private accommodation. Thanks to the development, it was able to increase the number of employees by 1 person. Following the investment, they had the opportunity to sell, store and process more widely, and to buy wild fruits, berries from local primary producers.



Erasmus+

Thank you !



Leader France is a national federation dedicated to the coordination of rural territories engaged in the LEADER approach and managed by representatives from the territories.

Contact :

<https://leaderfrance.fr/>

Spanish Network for Rural Development is a non-profit, non-governmental organization, with network made up of 180 local action groups and nearly a dozen regional networks.



Contact :

www.redr.es



The LAG Tecuci association is a public-private partnership which aims to achieve a balanced territorial development of economies, services, and rural communities.

Contact :

www.galtecuci.ro

The Estonian National LEADER Network is a national LEADER network whose objective is to unite Local Action Groups and defend the interests of its action groups.



Contact :

www.leaderliit.eu



MAGYAR NEMZETI
VIDÉKI HÁLÓZAT

The Hungarian Rural Network contributes to reflections, exchanges and debates on rural territories and policies useful for their development, collect examples of good practice and to support cooperation activities.

Contact :

<http://www.mnvh.eu/>