



Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

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Rural-Urban Governance Arrangements and Planning Instruments

LEADER

Valencian Community, Spain

1. Overview

LEADER arrived in the Valencian Community at the beginning of the nineties in a somewhat experimental way with LEADER-I (1991-1995), although its development in the province of Valencia took place during LEADER-II (1996-1999), lasting until the present day. LEADER is one of the best examples of territorial governance in rural areas, as it prioritises and focuses on its multidimensional nature (it involves all kinds of economic, social and institutional actors). Therefore, the work around LEADER generates and consolidates numerous and diverse relationships both within rural areas themselves and between these and urban areas.

LEADER has two main objectives: First, productive diversification, understood as the complement of income; second, the social revitalization of local communities as a whole, seeking their active involvement in the processes of development and change that are experienced, especially from their mobilization and involvement in the decisions to be taken.

Thus, the emphasis on participation and social contribution is understood as a key to a better assimilation of the processes of economic and social diversification among the actors of the territory. However, this is still an aspect in which it is necessary to continue working on, as conflicting interests are common in many areas that may contribute to slow down agreements and/or paralyse the participatory processes.

2. Main Challenges

Some of the main challenges to take into account are:

- > At least in an indirect way, one of the challenges is related to the conflicts over land use, due to the fact that many rural municipalities in the province of Valencia still lack adequate planning. This would make it possible to deal with the recent (and increasing) processes of relocation of economic activities (such as companies with extensive land needs to develop their assembly and logistics processes), as well as the installation of undesirable or conflicting equipment, such as hazardous waste dumps, penitentiary centres, etc., or even the development of transport and (tele-)communication

infrastructures. In many cases, this is due to the adoption of unilateral and non-transparent decision-making mechanisms by public administrations, which ignore the opinion and assessment of local communities and even of local economic sectors that could benefit from the spatial transformations envisaged.

- > Labour market: this is another of the challenges that in some way LEADER programme has to face, as one form of governance through which it is possible to partly respond to employment needs in rural areas. To date, the efforts made by public, social and private actors have not been able to resolve the structural problems of precariousness that characterise practically all the employment generated (temporary, part-time, low pay, no promotion options, etc.). Numerous attempts have been made to increase the supply of jobs through public initiatives and the promotion of entrepreneurship, although the results are far from the expected ones and even, in the case of public employment, they end up generating derived problems, such as the generation of a captive and dependent public. Anyway, it should be take into account that LEADER programme is not an employment programme, although it may contribute to its improvement.

- > The real estate stock in disadvantaged rural areas is another of the challenges that LEADER's inspiring governance may contribute to face. Currently, as a result of the revaluation of "the rural" and its usual features (tranquillity, landscape, no pollution, security, etc.) by the urban population, there has been an increase in tourist demand in the rural areas not far from Valencia and its Metropolitan Area. In fact, the average price per square metre in urban areas has increased in both rented and owned housing, thus expelling certain groups with limited resources, such as young people, immigrants, etc., who in many cases want to start their life projects in these rural spaces and/or suffer from a lack of previous assets. Despite establishing sectoral roundtables and developing specific initiatives (a housing exchange for sale/rent), the need for close collaboration between current owners and public administrations is clear. Although this is not a problem that should be faced by LEADER Programme, the governance instruments (public-private partnership) may certainly contribute to improve those collaboration and, perhaps, to imagine and generate ways to better face these demands.

- > Services to the population, especially those that are outside the scope of public provision, i.e. cases such as shops, financial institutions, etc., and that suffer from a lack of specific planning. In recent years, for example, commercial activity has seen the emergence of shopping centres in peri-urban areas, which has contributed to the disappearance of small permanent businesses in many rural municipalities. Or in the case of banks, the economic and financial crisis of 2008 has contributed to the closure of many establishments. As a result, many older rural inhabitants have to move from their municipalities of residence to other municipalities where this service is still available. These municipalities with service, in addition, tend to be outside the rural space, or if it remains in the rural space, they are very concentrated in the space, so that there is very little offer. There is no doubt that spaces for dialogue and

consultation around joint decisions between the different actors involved can be a suitable way to find out how best to solve or confront these problems. For example, by harmonising working hours, complementing the supply of services, mobilising banking services through established routes, etc. Obviously, other public institutions and sectoral and/or territorial policies should also contribute to finding solutions to these problems. Moreover, in some cases these other bodies should take the lead in the process and be the ones to take the first step, seek funding, encourage the participation of all actors, etc.

- > In the Valencian rural territory in which LEADER acts as a system of governance, there are still certain limitations to ensure that the population has a good quality of life. Above all, the most vulnerable population, such as women, young people, immigrants, the elderly, people with some kind of disability, etc. Thus, for example, there is a need for greater development of gender equality policies (reconciliation of family life, work and leisure time), greater concreteness of legislation in favour of the active inclusion of vulnerable groups, etc. Up to now, thanks to LEADER, a great deal of work has been done on the development of rural areas, but little or nothing (in a concrete way) on the development of people, particularly those who have difficulties in social integration. The physical remoteness of many of the basic services (health care, training, social services, residences, day centres, sheltered housing, etc.) or the impossibility of accessing them due to timetables, together with problems related to the small size of the job markets, the age of the housing stock and its structural problems (small, cold, damp, dark, etc.), are aspects that contribute to the loss of quality of life and social exclusion (if not economic). Identifying these problems, as well as the people concerned, and the solutions to be adopted (with the allocation of responsibilities) is another of the challenges that rural areas have and where LEADER programme and its governance structures can contribute to solve. Due that planning of most of these issues come from urban areas, without participation of local population (and sometimes scarce understanding of the rural perspectives), the dominant criteria use to be exclusively demographic or urban patterns, which makes it difficult to use them in areas with a small and dispersed population.
- > The final challenge to which LEADER programme would contribute to better face is the need to establish regular and effective relations between public, social and private actors working and living in and for the rural environment and those in the city (that is, channelling rural-urban relationships). The development of regulations or forms of joint work can be a good starting point. For the time being, except for the declaration and management of certain protected natural areas present both in rural and peri-urban areas (such as the Turia Natural Park, which links the territory of LEADER Turia-Calderona with the city of Valencia and its Metropolitan Area to the northwest), most of the actions developed have remained in a list of intentions that can be specified, despite the fact that the relationship between these rural an urban areas is becoming increasingly evident, not only economically, but also socially and ecologically.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Insights related to the broad area of “network governance”

The networked governance system is complex in the study area due to the persistence of individualistic dynamics, the lack of a truly integrated vision of the territory (including at least the nearest rural areas), and the absence of a medium and/or long-term temporal vision (often limited to the period of the municipal elections, i.e. four years). There are other cooperation instruments, such as the *mancomunidades* (grouping) of municipalities, consortia related to different sectoral issues (waste, tourism, etc.), but which end up suffering from the same problems as public administrations. In addition, many of them are economically and technically dependent on rural municipalities, often without the needed resources.

LEADER therefore appears to be a more favourable environment, including not only public administrations (from local to regional levels), but also the social, private and economic actors. All this guarantees the diversity of interests and a certain autonomy of operation. Nevertheless, structural problems in the rural environment (transport, telecommunication, etc.) may still hamper a better operation.

3.2. Insights related to mechanisms of cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation

Cooperation through LEADER arises from the need to act with clear ideas capable of initiating processes of change that allow for sustainable and sustained development of rural territories. These are actors who are involved because they believe in governance processes as a way to obtain appropriate solutions. These actors cooperate out of "necessity" instead of the financial "opportunity" that LEADER represents.

Certainly, LEADER is a platform for territorial cooperation, particularly in rural areas, insofar as it works with the most important actors in these areas (public administrations, civil society and the private and business sector). It is thus a set of key actors capable of reaching consensus (or compromises), bringing together wills and transmitting hope. These tasks should be relatively easy to achieve since these actors are often recognized as territorial leaders due to the prior mobilization of human capital that they tend to promote by addressing specific problems experienced by the population of these areas. The main benefit of this territorial cooperation is its ability to increase local democracy. The reason is simple: this cooperation offers the possibility of the emergence of new scenarios of rural governance in which different groups of actors can play an active role in the design and implementation of development strategies for the rural space.

In this way, places of encounter between equals are created (i.e., between rural inhabitants, regardless of the economic activity they carry out, the political position they hold, etc.). These places are very suitable for promoting more effective local governance, where problems are experienced by all and consensual solutions are proposed. Therefore,

the cooperation promoted by the LEADER method between different agents enriches decision-making at local level, allows the implementation of more innovative and feasible solutions and, above all, more participative ones. In this way, the mere cooperation between institutional actors belonging to different territories is set aside in order to achieve common objectives, and social and economic actors are also incorporated into territorial cooperation. This cooperation makes it possible to propose and develop projects characterised by a broader territorial perspective. This has different advantages, such as the incorporation of new knowledge through innovative, creative and shared learning; the achievement of more and better critical mass; or the more effective and efficient use of available funding (given that most cooperation projects focus on the development of shared activities, products or services, thus reducing the pooling of implementation costs).

3.3. Insights related to the role of (actual, potential) social, organizational, institutional innovations

Within the framework of a well-managed LEADER, social innovation actions, in addition to meeting its primary objective of improving the living conditions of the population, contribute to strengthening the social cohesion of the territory at various levels. And logically, these actions can have significant economic repercussions on the territory. In general, innovative actions differ from traditional approaches and choose to have an impact on the collective capacity to enhance the value of all the human resources and skills present in the territory. It also implies a shared mobilization around strategies that value specificities and differences. In order to achieve this type of innovation, it is essential to promote cooperation. This makes full sense when it is guaranteeing the participation of those actors who have knowledge of the situations and a perception of the complexity of the problems of rural territories.

Another important aspect of LEADER is that the actors work on a local scale. At this level it is relatively easy to reach social compromises and even consensus on complex issues, such as, for example, what strategies to apply to solve problems and/or demands that affect multiple actors. But it is also important, in order to achieve these consensual results, to know how to connect the proposals with other initiatives that are not necessarily rural in scope, that is to say, that come from broader policies that affect the whole Valencian territory (including the cities).

LEADER has enabled the actors involved in the rural territory to set in motion processes with which: i) To achieve a certain demographic stabilization thanks to its commitment to improve the quality of life through actions on basic services to the population. It is true that these actions do not entail strong demographic increases, but they are key to mitigating the departure of the one that still resides in the area; ii) Advance in the “tertiarization” of the rural economy thanks to the generation of new economic activities derived, above all, from tourism, but also from the extraction of natural resources and raw materials, from the manufacture of agricultural products, from the generation, management and distribution of energy (dams, mills, solar gardens, etc.), etc.; iii) Achieve the recovery of a

large part of the historical, socio-cultural and landscape heritage that make up many of the tourist resources of the municipalities of the territory (gastronomy, folklore, religion, handicrafts...). In particular, in a favourable context in view of the increase in the demands that today's society makes of this type of post-material values as elements of local identity and singularity; and iv) Achieve the modernisation of the social fabric by strengthening networks, bringing together certain groups of actors and encouraging the circulation of training and information, key aspects for territorial rural development.

4. Effectiveness Indicators

The main strength of LEADER as an instrument of governance lies in its ability to give voice and vote to local actors. However, it is also true, and this has been pointed out by the European Commission itself for the period 2014-2020, that LEADER must advance and be an instrument to strengthen links between remote rural areas and urban or periurban areas. However, little has been achieved to date. They focus more on cooperation between public, social and private actors in rural areas. Participation between rural and urban actors has so far been very punctual, since it is still at an initial stage. However, the contacts developed contribute to generating a solid work base for the future.

Although the instrument, the LEADER programme, already allows for this urban-rural collaboration, in most of the LAGs of the region an obstacle persists, which must imply a change of mentality. This change should make it possible to move from the traditional focus on the rural territories themselves to a more open approach in which more and more beneficial rural-urban relations can be valued, promoted and exploited.

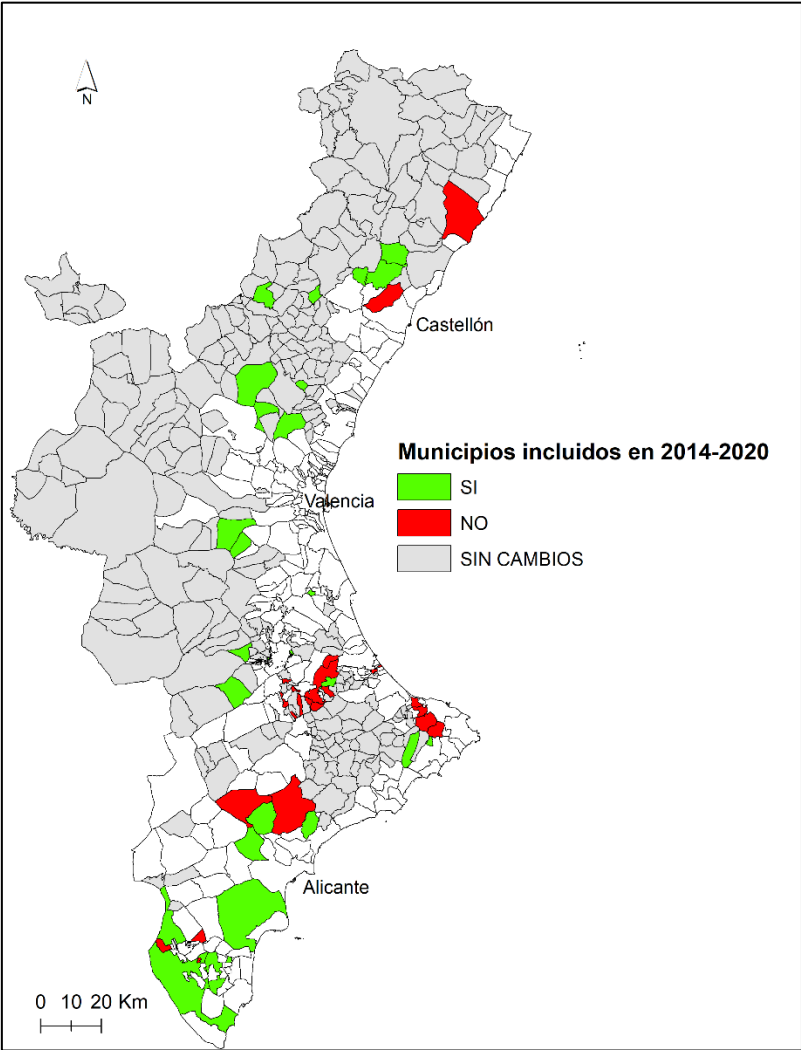
Urban-rural relations can also be translated into new forms of organisation and management of the territory, so that rural territories play a greater role.

In spite of all this, in the design and implementation of the LEADER LAGs for the period 2014-2020 in the region there are no initiatives focused on making progress in this type of collaboration.

However, there are other experiences of rural-urban cooperation, mainly within the framework of INTERREG. Among the most outstanding themes in these experiences are those linked to rural tourism, culture and heritage, employment and training, the promotion of local products, the environment and business development.

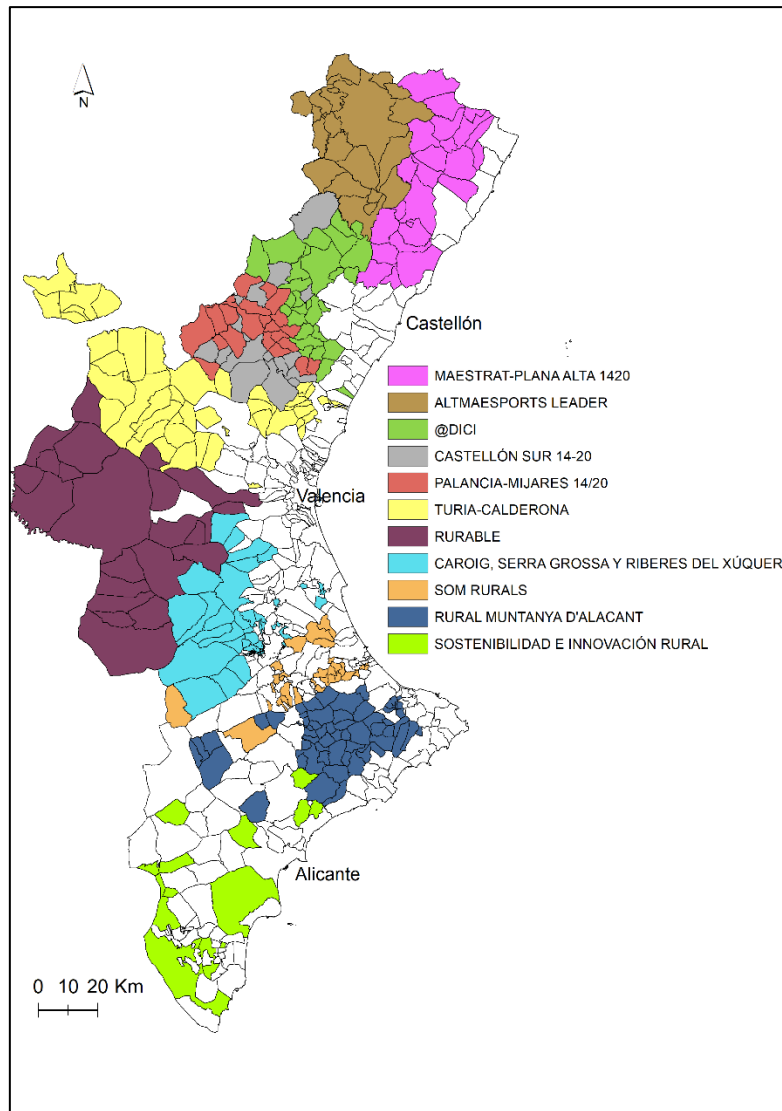
5. Illustration and further information

Figure 1. Municipalities with (green) and without (red) continuity in LEADER 2014-2020 in the Valencian Community (grey: those which already had LEADER previously).



Source: Farinós et al., (2018)

Figure 2. Local Action Groups in the Valencian Community, for LEADER 2014-2020



Source: Farinós et al., (2018)

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This service and related equipment was set up thanks to the mobilisation of civil society. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2920049&orden=0&info=link>

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