

SPAIN

LEADER

Location

LAG Centro de Desarrollo del Somontano.

LAG Asociación para el Desarrollo y Fomento de las Cinco Villas.

LAG Gúdar- Javalambre Maestrazgo Asociación de Desarrollo.

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 100 063

EAFRD 64 041

National/Regional 16 011

Private 19 911

Project duration

2016 – 2019

Project promoter

Centro de Desarrollo del Somontano

Contact

palomafabregas@cedersomontano.com

Website

www.cedersomontano.com

A project to address depopulation and attract new settlers in rural areas of the Aragon region.

Summary

‘Living Villages’ is an interterritorial cooperation project aiming to reverse the depopulation problem in rural areas of Aragon (Spain). As a pilot project, it established and tested a methodology of work to support the population in rural areas and attract new settlers.



The project is based on the active involvement of local people and local administrations. They will benefit from a series of actions such as awareness raising and training, collection and publication of information of interest for new settlers, actions to support the local population to remain in their territory as well as actions to improve the attractiveness of the three areas involved. The project promoter is the LAG Centro de Desarrollo de Somontano.

Results

Twenty-eight municipalities and their councils are actively involved in the project.

One hundred people participate in the network of volunteer collaborators.

Thirty awareness-raising actions were carried out to disseminate information and exchange experiences.

Twenty-eight municipal inventories of resources and utility services for new settlers have been prepared.

A website to disseminate the municipal inventories and other information that may be useful to potential new settlers has been created.

Twenty initiatives tackling depopulation have been documented and analysed. This includes both successful and unsuccessful examples.

Eight groups/profiles of potential new settlers have been identified.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Ensuring the involvement of the population and local actors - in this case through a network of volunteers - was key to the success of the initiative.
- ❑ Flexibility is essential: the project adapted the actions to the needs and characteristics of each specific case.
- ❑ An integrated action strategy: we work on different aspects influencing rural depopulation like employment, housing, internet connection, communication network, services to the population, etc.
- ❑ Working in a network with other territories eases communication and the transferability of results.

Context

The territory of Somontano de Barbastro is located in Aragon, Spain. The Centre for Integral Development of Somontano (CEDER) brings together organisations and associations that are committed to the sustainable development of the territory. Currently, it is supported by 46 public and private entities, which represent social, economic and cultural sectors. CEDER launched this project for several reasons:

- The whole territory suffers from depopulation which endangers its sustainable development - integrated action was necessary.
- Villages can offer a good quality of life and there are people living in the cities who would be interested in moving to rural areas.
- Keeping the population in rural areas is fundamental as it is here that food production takes place. This also ensures territorial cohesion.
- It is necessary to act locally and customise solutions. Although public institutions can make a valuable contribution by providing strategic plans and support, certain actions can only be implemented locally.
- Local people sometimes believe that the solutions to their problems lie outside of their control. They may not be aware of their capacity to improve the conditions in their territory through participation in common actions.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this project were to:

1. Raise awareness among local councils and local people about the problem of depopulation.
2. Collect and disseminate useful information to sustain the current population and attract new inhabitants.
3. Design methodologies and actions to help improve the quality of life and the attractiveness of the territory for the existing population and newcomers.

Activities

1. Raising awareness and involving local actors.

- Organise workshops and meetings to inform municipal councils and the local population about the project.
- Create a 'network of volunteer collaborators'. Define the volunteers' role and functions and prepare an action plan for them.

- Organise actions that stimulate discussion about the causes of depopulation and how to reverse it. Organise workshops focussed on finding ways to improve the welcoming of new settlers. Organise a conference on housing and internet connectivity and prepare a guided tour around a photo exhibition about depopulation, etc.

- Organise visits to promising initiatives (such as agri-food incubators for new entrepreneurs, villages that actively work against depopulation, etc.) where stakeholders can share experiences, information and opinions. These actions help CEDER to identify and propose new actions.

2. Collecting and disseminating useful information

- Prepare an inventory of useful resources and services for potential new settlers.
- Prepare a list of the needs of each municipality and an action plan to improve their capacity to welcome new settlers and encourage local people to stay.
- Design a website through which the collected information will be made available.
- Prepare a catalogue of relevant good practices.

3. Defining the profile of potential new settlers and implementing an information plan.

- Identify the profiles/types of potential new settlers that might be interested in living in the areas involved in the project.
- Develop a dissemination and marketing plan to inform and motivate potential new settlers. This includes defining the communication channels and media to be used, preparing messages, designing the communication formats etc.
- Implement the information and communication campaign called 'Sons of the village', which includes actions and events to contact potential new settlers, inform and motivate them to move in the rural areas.

4. Encouraging local people to stay in rural areas.

- Deliver workshops to improve the operation of local associations' through teamwork training, the design of new activities, the identification of potential sources of funding etc.
- Develop actions to promote social integration and work placements in the territory, mainly addressed at young people and local women: e.g. a digital bulletin of job offers, training and guidance in job-seeking etc.

5. Designing instruments and proposals for actions to improve the daily life and attractiveness of the territory

- Create a welcome and integration program for new settlers.
- Prepare reports, protocols and management systems to facilitate the sale and rental of homes. Development of an inventory of homes for sale or rent, identification of empty houses etc.
- Implement a series of actions, studies, reports etc. to encourage the local population to stay in their villages and to attract new settlers. For example, cooperate with telecommunications companies to improve internet connections, negotiate with a public research group that made proposals to improve medical care in small towns, organise a congress to show the conclusions of a study on fiscal measures to support the rural population etc.

Main Results

Direct benefits:

- Twenty-eight municipalities and their councils are actively involved in the project.
- One hundred people participate in the network of volunteer collaborators, working against depopulation.
- Thirty awareness-raising actions were carried out to disseminate information and exchange experiences.
- Twenty-eight municipal inventories of resources and utility services for new settlers were prepared.
- A website to disseminate the municipal inventories and other information that may be useful to potential new settlers, was created.
- Twenty initiatives tackling depopulation have been documented and analysed. This includes both successful and unsuccessful examples.
- Eight groups/profiles of potential new settlers have been identified.
- A marketing plan addressing five of these eight groups has been devised.
- Five information and awareness actions were carried out with 100 potential new settlers attending.
- One common procedure for welcoming and integrating new settlers has been established.



- Three employability improvement actions for young people and women were carried out, with 45 participants.
- A report, a protocol and a common management system, to facilitate the sale and rental housing market, have been successfully launched.
- A study was carried out and a report prepared with proposals for addressing the need to improve the capacity of rural communities to welcome new settlers and encourage local people to stay.

Networking value:

The project involved Local Action Groups, volunteers, municipalities, associations and the local population.

Transferability:

The approach is transferable although in every territory, each action should be adapted to the specific characteristics and existing situation.

‘Living Villages’ is a pilot project. Its results will be analysed and if they are positive, it will be extended to the rest of the rural territories of Aragon which also face depopulation as one of their main challenges.

Synergies with other EU policies :

The ‘Living Villages’ project contributes to the horizontal objectives of European Rural Development Policy, which are to support the environment, tackle climate change and encourage innovation.

“It is of vital importance, that the inhabitants of our villages are aware of the problem of depopulation, that initiatives arise from the local population.” Carmen Sahún, Mayor of Estadilla

Additional sources of information

<https://www.facebook.com/Pueblos-Vivos-Arag%C3%B3n-209364349670341/>

*This project has been categorised under ‘LEADER’ by the nominating National Rural Network