“Commercial services and mobility in sparsely populated mountains: examples from Aragon”

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La vitalità delle montagne europee nella programmazione 2014-2020

Roma, 6-7 giugno 2013
TERRITORIAL CONTEXT: Aragonese mountains

- Aragon: 1,400,000 inh.
- Average density: 28 inh/km²
- Density Teruel: 10 inh/km²
- Rural/mountain and sparsely populated!
SERVICES & MOBILITY : THE PROBLEM

• Demographic challenges:
  – Sparse and seasonal population: most villages < 200 inh. 3X more in summer
  – Ageing population: av. age 53, 38.5% above 65 → mobility issues, access to daily needs, health, social interaction…

• Economic challenges:
  – Shops have closed, sometimes 10-15 km to find a shop
  – Ambulant shops only in summer time or once/week
HOW DID IT START?

• Three women, one village, one innovative idea:
  – Blancas, 2001: Esther, Aurora and Encarna went to the Chamber of Commerce of Teruel with the idea to re-open the grocery store of their village, with ‘a bit of everything’

• 2002: scheme created in Teruel

• 2006 → Zaragoza

• 2011 → Huesca

• 2012: **62 rural multiservices** in Aragon
  – Teruel: 42
  – Huesca: 4
  – Zaragoza: 16
MULTI-SERVICIO RURAL: WHAT IS IT?

- A municipal building, transformed into …
- … a social + market place with a grocery store, bar, restaurant, rural Internet, library, touristic information and in some cases accommodation
- Main objectives:
  - Provide services to a depopulated area
  - Attract new inhabitants, including youth and tourists
- Opening hours:
  - Normal in summer
  - Reduced in winter (2-4h)
Selection of beneficiaries: municipalities with less than 300 inhabitants + no private shop or bar left

Initiative of a municipality offering a building and seeking financial support

Viability study by the Chamber of Commerce

Investment for building renewal and adaptation (Province + Region funding)

Public procurement for selection of a service manager
FUNDING AND ORGANISATION

• **Management:** Chambers of commerce

• **Funding:** shared between Provincial and Regional governments: 2.300.000€ in total
  – Teruel funding 2012 – 2013: 170.000€ (for around 9-10 shops)
  – Until 2011 the main granted part was from Regional
  – No EU funds because we are not FEDER territory

• **Investment costs:**
  – Range from: 30k€ to 250k€ depending on nb of services (from simple shop around to a hostel, restaurant, bar, grocery…)

• **Functioning costs:** the manager pays a rent and receives no operating grant: it has to be economically self – sustained!
WHAT RESULTS? DOES IT WORK?

- Yes! Significant development since start
- Positive impact on population, population increase in some cases, attractiveness for ‘second home’ owners and tourists → revitalisation
- Some shops closing as well
- Perspectives depending on local dynamics
- Great advantage for people without cars

Conditions for success:
- Manager is from the village or can access a cheap accommodation
- People play the game!
- Tourism potential
- Commitment of the manager

Difficulties:
- Not always profitable as one-only job → income must be completed
- People are happy having a meeting point but… keep buying in supermarkets a bit too much
PERSPECTIVES FOR THE NEXT PERIOD

• Development perspectives:
  – Where it works, development of accommodation (added value ++)
  – Room for development of local products sales (limited so far!)
  – Raise awareness at population level

• Reflection on sustainability and financial support:
  – Private activity disappeared as it was not profitable: can it be maintained without operating aid?
  – Northern countries → usually operating aid + possibility of specific services: postmail, lottery, pharmacy…(Norway); legal aspects

• Spain: so far, no possibility of operating aid

• Wish to maintain the scheme in the following period (Funds and programming to be defined)
Other initiatives on mobility: a few ideas

- Province of Teruel Lead Partner of ‘Move on Green’ INTERREG IVC. 
  [http://www.moveongreen.eu](http://www.moveongreen.eu)
- Comprehensive reflection on mobility
- One example: ISEAL
- Service for transporting disabled people and their accompaniment in rural areas of Aragon.
- Began in the previous ESF program (2007 - 2008) and it will continue until 2013.
- Has created 68 new jobs in the regions. The vehicles are vans with 10-12 seats and acquired through leasing.
- About 600 people / year use the service regularly.
Thank you for your attention
any questions?

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