

## MEETING WITH RICARDO PIZARRO VILLANUEVA FROM SODEBUR (SPAIN)



Sodebur is the Society for the Development of the Province of Burgos, in Spain. It is a public body, created in 2009 by the Provincial Council of Burgos and aiming at promoting the development of this rural and mountainous area. Thanks to the diverse composition of its Board of Directors, including stakeholders from the industry sector, universities and municipalities, Sodebur strives to improve various dimensions of the quality of life in the Province of Burgos. We met with Ricardo Pizarro Villanueva, Director of Sodebur, to better understand the Society's activities and role in the network of Euromontana.

### ***Euromontana: Can you briefly introduce Sodebur?***

*Ricardo:* "Sodebur was created in 2009 as the Society for the Development of the Province of Burgos. It is an extension of the Burgos Energy Agency, which was established in 2004. Since 2009, we work not only on sustainable energy but also on strategic planning, industry, institutional cooperation and tourism. These are our working 5 topics, always with a focus on rural development. In terms of governance, our Board of Directors is composed of 15 people who are stakeholders from universities, chambers of commerce and municipalities, representing activities and challenges of the Province of Burgos. All together, we work on the development of our rural and mountainous Province."

### **What are the specific challenges of the Province of Burgos in terms of rural development?**

"Our province is very wide, about 2 times more than the Basque country, and we have a very low density of population. In our rural areas, there are less than 8 inhabitants per square kilometer. The Cantabrian mountain range encircles the province to the north and northeast and many municipalities are facing depopulation issues.

To tackle this challenge and improve the quality of life in rural areas, we believe it is crucial to promote the development of employment opportunities and the settlement of entrepreneurs. In this regard, we developed micro credits to support local entrepreneurs in the creation of their company, with a low fixed interest rate of 1.5%. Another challenge, however, is the development of broadband. Connectivity is crucial for the creation of jobs but also for electronic administration and for the tourism sector in the Province. This is the reason why we want to work on projects related to smart territories in the future and to help in the extension of broadband in the most rural areas of the Province of Burgos."

*"Institutions are more and more concerned about depopulation, they realise our territories are important for the development of the whole society"*

### **As you mention projects, can you give us an example of valuable projects you have been involved in?**

"During the last 2 years, we worked for instance in the project PRIAP (Integral Renovation of Provincial Street lighting Project). Within this project, we changed public lighting by putting LED bulbs in all the municipalities of the Province. Local companies were contracted to carry out this work. Thanks to the project, we reduced the consumption of energy by 40% to 60% depending on the municipalities and we supported local entrepreneurs. Another one is RURAL SMEs, an Interreg Europe project aiming at identifying policies to develop entrepreneurship and innovative SMEs in rural areas."

### **When did Sodebur join Euromontana? What is the added value of the association for the work of Sodebur?**

"We joined Euromontana in 2015. Before that, we collaborated with Euromontana in the Move on Green project. Based on this experience we decided to join the network.

To us, Euromontana plays an important role in connecting mountainous territories which face similar challenges all over Europe. Exchanging and working together is crucial to find common solutions for our mountain areas. We are, for instance, working with Euromontana in the SILVER SMEs project and with a lot of Euromontana members in the P-IRIS project, for which the idea was born during one of Euromontana meetings."

### **How do you see the future for Sodebur and for other rural mountainous areas in Europe?**

"I think institutions are more and more concerned about depopulation, they realise our territories are important for the development of the whole society. The challenge now is to make sure that funds are efficiently tackling the problem. If we manage to generate economic activity and employment, other services will emerge from a spill-over effect and help our territories to be vibrant and attractive."