

TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local

e-ISSN: 2386-9968

Number 11 (2022), 113-141

DOI 10.7203/terra.11.25528

IIDL – Instituto Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Local

Towards a new rural development in Europe: analysis of the Smart Rural 21 Initiative and Interreg in Spain and Portugal

Gisela Palma Pinar

Doctoranda. Universidad Complutense de Madrid (España)

gpalma@ucm.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1526-4634>

Rosa Mecha López

Dpto. de Geografía. Universidad Complutense de Madrid (España)

rmechalo@ucm.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8169-0677>



This work is distributed under the license Creative Commons
Reconocimiento-No Comercial-Sin Obra Derivada 4.0 Internacional

ARTICLE SECTION

Towards a new rural development in Europe: analysis of the Smart Rural 21 Initiative and Interreg in Spain and Portugal

Abstract: After the 30 years that the European initiative LEADER has been promoting rural development, the Smart Rural 21 pilot project has recently been launched, which seeks to provide new strategies and solutions from an intelligent perspective, where innovation and technologies help municipalities to develop in an integral way and stop depopulation. The article analyzes the proposals that have been submitted to this call in Spain and Portugal, to give a global image of the Iberian Peninsula. The research uses a multi-method methodology, combining quantitative, cartographic, and territorial diagnostic techniques using the SWOT tool. Both Spain and Portugal jointly seek to advance in the transformation of the territories and local development through different projects such as INTERREG and Smart Rural Digital Community, in which the two regions studied participate. Both territories cooperate to reduce the digital divide, improve the economy, and boost the tourist offer. As a hypothesis, it is proposed that the success of this new European initiative for rural development in the next decade will depend on multiple factors and not only digitization. Together with the maintenance of the territorial approach that has been shown to be effective, Smart Rural 21 pursues a series of CAME strategies that help to stop the inertia of the depopulation of rural spaces.

Key words: Smart Village, LEADER Initiative, Ansó, Penela.

Reception: November 02, 2022

Review: December 05, 2022

Acceptance: December 16, 2022

Citation:

Palma, G., y Mecha, R. (2022). Hacia un nuevo desarrollo rural en Europa: análisis de la Iniciativa Smart Rural 21 e Interreg en España y Portugal. *TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local*, (11), 113-141. DOI 10.7203/terra.11.25528

IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

- | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Las Smart Village se convierten en una posible solución frente a la despoblación y el envejecimiento.2. La innovación social y las nuevas tecnologías son elementos clave en las estrategias de desarrollo territorial.3. El proyecto <i>Smart Rural 21</i> es referente en Europa para la transformación de los pueblos en <i>Smart Village</i>.4. Las iniciativas LEADER e Interreg apuestan por proyectos enfocados en las aldeas inteligentes. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Smart Villages become a solution to depopulation and aging.2. Innovation and technology are key elements in territorial development strategies.3. The Smart Rural 21 project is a benchmark in Europe for the transformation into Smart Village4. LEADER and Interreg bet on projects focused on smart villages. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Les Smart Village es converteixen en una possible solució enfront de la despoblació i l'envelliment.2. La innovació social i les noves tecnologies són elements clau en les estratègies de desenvolupament territorial.3. El projecte Smart Rural 21 és referent a Europa per a la transformació dels pobles en Smart Village.4. Les iniciatives LEADER i Interreg aposten per projectes enfocats en els llogarets intel·ligents. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

EXTENDED ABSTRACT¹

Introduction and justification

The rural environment is undergoing demographic and climatic changes that cause new ways of territorial development to emerge, where new technologies and innovation help to curb depopulation and aging. Europe launched the LEADER Initiative, and after 30 years a Smart Rural 21 pilot project has emerged that makes it possible to provide new technological possibilities to the peoples of empty Europe. In the call, 21 municipalities were chosen, among which are Ansó and Penela. It is not the only strategy at European level since the border areas of Spain and Portugal are collaborating in projects such as Interreg or Smart Digital Rural Community. The importance of proposing new strategies focused on Smart Villages that consider innovation and technology as a starting point for smart development.

The importance of analyzing the rural areas of Spain and Portugal is because they belong to the territories of the Emptied Europe that suffer the most from social, economic, and environmental crises. This is favoring the approach of new strategies focused on Smart Villages. As a hypothesis, it is proposed that the European initiative for rural development in the next decade will depend on multiple factors and the implementation of a new territorial model.

Objectives, methodology and sources

The main objective of the research is to carry out a study on the different development strategies in the villages that want to become intelligent territories. For this, it is necessary to know the different historical phases of the LEADER Initiative and its role in the current pilot projects of the Smart Rural 21 and Interreg call, as well as to carry out case studies in different European countries, highlighting Spain (especially the Region of Castilla and Leon) and Portugal (the Central area).

The methodology that will be used is multimethod, a combination of different techniques: inquiry into the regulations of the European Call Smart Rural 21, inventory of applications submitted from the selected places, cartography of the territories of Spain and Portugal and diagnosis of the proposals accepted in the Smart Rural 21 call. It will be structured in a series of sections that will cover the knowledge of the definition of “Smart Village”, the context of the LEADER Initiative and its involvement in the Smart Rural 21 Pilot project. Likewise, it will be shown which have been the winning proposals of the European countries, and of the Spanish candidacies that were not selected. Also, a study of Interreg will be carried out in the field of the Iberian Peninsula and its involvement in the Smart Rural Community project.

The collection of information has been obtained from various bibliographic sources using keywords that are related to the topic of the research to understand and assess the importance of the LEADER Initiative during these 30 years for the rural territorial development of the Iberian Peninsula, and its involvement in projects such as Smart Rural 21. The Interreg cooperation between Spain and Portugal, and the projects they carry out together, will also be analyzed.

¹ Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

The Study area will be the municipalities of Spain and Portugal that have participated in both the Smart Rural 21 call, as well as the territories that cooperate in Interreg. Both territories belong to the Iberian Peninsula and are part of the places that are known as the Emptied Europe.

Results and Discussion

The case studies analyzed, both local (Ansó and Penela) and regional cross-border in the Iberian Peninsula, have in common a series of characteristics that are reflected in the proposals they propose when it comes to becoming smart villages. It has been observed that most of the proposals analyzed focus on tourism as the main source of economic activity and rural development, where new technologies and innovation are necessary to improve the territory and advance in the transformation towards smart villages. All these strategies seek an end that is to attract and fix population in the environment.

The study carried out on the various rural development strategies proposed in Europe focused on innovation and technologies considering the new concept of Smart Village that has been forged for a few years comes from the interest in turning the territories into Smart. This is generating that there are different calls such as Smart Rural 21 and Smart Digital Rural Community promoted by Interreg. Both seek to propose solutions to the different crises that plague the most disadvantaged regions.

The different calls have had a series of limitations due to the scarce public information being so recent and it is not yet possible to determine if the path being taken is the right one or if progress is really being made towards progress in rural development.

Finally, the hypothesis and the objectives set at the outset show how ICT and innovation really favor reducing the existing digital divide in rural areas by increasing connectivity, and the possibility of teleworking. Tourism seems to be one of the activities that is being bet the most, and in turn a way to publicize the rest of the activities as a complement.

Conclusions and Future directions

The Smart Rural 21 call shows the interest in continuing to innovate in the European calls for rural development, and the large participation in both Spain and Portugal reflects the interest of many disadvantaged rural municipalities to become Smart Villages, through strategies that focus on innovation and new technologies applied in sectors such as tourism and not only in agriculture. On the other hand, Interreg through the different cross-border cooperative projects such as the Digital Rural Community is betting on this transformation of the municipalities in a more innovative approach. Some of these projects seek to bet on one of the most important sectors in rural areas: tourism.

Will this be the ultimate way to fix the population and create jobs? The strategies prior to this new call have not reached the expected result in 30 years, but it is expected that the accumulated experience can serve as a springboard for the success of the Smart Rural 21 pilot project. In the coming years, it is expected to become a new phase of the LEADER calls.

The term Smart Village is being one of the bets that Europe is making to reduce the impact that is generated in rural areas. Innovation and technologies are favouring the creation of new projects that are committed to development in the most depopulated areas of Europe.

The lines of research that are opened are very diverse due to the existing novelty in terms of the term of Smart Village that allows to propose new horizons focused on the different Smart dimensions.

The Smart Rural 21 project, being so recent, has not been able to analyze the repercussions in the selected municipalities. It will also be necessary to analyse new European policies and initiatives aimed at developing more sustainable, digital, and participatory territories. Also, the repercussions of the Next Generation EU Funds, the new CAP and the crises that are affecting Europe.