

SPAIN

Local development

Location

Catalonia

Programming period

2014 - 2020

Priority

P6- Social inclusion and local development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

RDP budget 100 214.67

EAFRD 43 092.31

National/regional 57 122.36

Project duration

2017 – 2017

Project promoter

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A project that supports generational renewal by promoting employment opportunities in the rural areas of Catalonia.

Summary

Odisseu is a response to rural youth exodus that aims to provide solutions for healthy generational renewal and fight the brain drain that affects most rural areas of Catalonia. Odisseu focuses on those aged up to 40 from rural and urban areas.



Through a range of diverse activities, the project accompanies young people interested in learning more about the opportunities that exist in rural areas for professional initiatives. It is fostering entrepreneurship and improving the employability of young people as well as their engagement with their rural territory of origin.

Results

20 workshops were held in 12 educational centres (659 students) with an additional 1 385 students attending events and participating in activities outside the educational centres – i.e. business ferries. In total 2 044 young people were reached.

In 2017, eight informative actions were organised attracting 226 young students in the ICT sector and agri-food sector in Catalonia.

In 2016, the first Odisseu Practicum was convened, which led to 12 grants for companies located in rural municipalities being nominated in order to host paid professional internships for university students (300 hours, compensation 5 EUR per hour, 50% co-financing by the company).

Since October 2016, through the Retorna online tool, 367 young people, mostly women, enrolled in 17 different professional sectors and have interest in working in several rural districts.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ An important element for the achievement of the project's objectives is the joint work between the LAGs and the network of youth professionals.
- ❑ It is necessary to ensure flexibility when choosing the actions to be implemented according to the needs of each territory. This means using many and diverse actions better adapted to the local needs, although this can hinder harmonisation of results of the overall project.
- ❑ It can be very difficult to involve universities in a project and establish contact with university students, as well as other young people who have already left the area. That is why the project holders continue to test different methodologies and have opted to intervene before young people leave the area.

Context

Rural areas must address the ageing and depopulation of their communities, which are the consequence of lack of generational renewal and loss of socio-economic dynamism. Experiences from LEADER and academic studies confirm that, in parallel to the persistent population migration movement from rural areas to urban and peri-urban areas in search of new job opportunities, there is an increasing number of young people, especially women, who want to return to rural areas. Supporting the economic dynamism of rural areas can create job opportunities that will be attractive for young talent. In short, work is a key factor for linking youth with a rural territory.

In the current Rural Development Programme of Catalonia, young people are a priority in all Catalan LAGs' Local Development Strategies (LDS). In view of the social, economic, environmental, technological changes, it is possible to give value and make visible the role of the rural world as a space of opportunity for young people and society as a whole. It is essential to act and involve territorial actors such as the local administrations – especially economic promotion, work, rural development-educational centres, as well as companies and young people.

Objectives

The general objectives of the project were to:

- Promote the return of young people in rural areas;
- Stop the aging of the rural population;
- Promote the professional integration of young people in rural areas; and
- Raise awareness among businesses on the added value that young people represent for their companies and reinforce links between business and universities.

Activities

The project methodology allows actions to be adapted towards young people setting up a company according to the local context and the rural development strategy of each Leader group. Since 2016, the interventions towards young people have been structured in different areas, or circles that coexist in the rural world and are related to the urban world:

IN Circle: This circle is targeting young people who live in the rural area and especially students in the second year of high school, or professional training. The work includes informative presentations and workshops about the

project in secondary schools. Some project partners have developed additional specific activities. This is the case, for example, of the LAG Noguera-Segrià Nord. Under the name of "Arranca", they provide start-up training and organise visits for students to innovative companies where they learn about the business networks in the area that could offer them some future employment possibilities. Other participating LAGs organised entrepreneurial training activities, networking sessions for young people, informative days on resources for the job hiring processes, presentation of experiences and successful return cases.

OUT Circle activities are targeting young talents outside the territory and include actions for young people who are studying or working in urban areas. Through an anonymous questionnaire, young people that have their origins in rural territories are asked about their perception of what they would need to return, and test their knowledge of employment and entrepreneurship advisory services that exist in their region. This will help them to get to explore the possibility of a return. Train stations were the spaces where the project team interviewed young university and post-graduate students, mainly on their Sunday outward journeys back to the city. A significant proportion of the people who were interviewed showed a predisposition to return to the territory once their university education finishes.

COMPANY Circle A project about young people's return to rural areas does not make sense without the involvement of rural enterprises as generators of opportunities and main recipients of young talent. A weak relationship between them and universities was detected. In 2016, the first 'Odisseu Practicum' was convened offering grants for companies located in rural municipalities to host paid professional internships for university students with young people. Another important action concerned connecting young professionals and companies in rural areas through the virtual tool 'Retorna' (Return). It is an online platform aimed at companies that seek to employ young people, and makes visible young people with higher education who want to work in rural areas. The only two requirements for registration are a professional profile on LinkedIn, and to be less than 40 years of age. Companies that need to hire, or contact young professionals, can access their public profiles. Retorna offers an alert system that can be activated by any company so that the platform automatically sends a monthly notice that a person has registered highlighting the search criteria of the professional sector and/or region that interests them.

INCOMING Circle - Host antennas. One of the main strengths of the LAGs is the knowledge and proximity with the agents of the territory. The bottom-up philosophy resulted that local actors have created networks with local businesses that can be useful for young people who want to settle in a rural area. The participating LAGs have developed guides explaining the available services of their territories (coworking, housing, health, education, sports, environment and culture and leisure). To facilitate access to all this information in a single platform, a virtual portal was created.

AGRICULTURE circle aims to incorporate young people into the agricultural sector. One of the main lines of action of the 2014-2020 RDP focuses on the generational renewal in the agricultural sector. In 2016, through Odisseu, a quantitative and qualitative analysis was made of the new entries of young people in the agricultural sector in Catalonia from measure 112 of the PDR 2007-2013. This study should allow the project to function better to meet the needs of this group.

Main Results

IN Circle: In 2017, 20 workshops were held in 12 educational centres (659 students) and 1 385 students attended activities outside the educational centres i.e. business ferries. In total 2 044 young people were reached.

OUT Circle: In 2017, eight informative actions were organised with 226 young participants of higher education in the ICT sector and agri-food sector in Catalonia.

COMPANY Circle: In 2016, the first Odisseu Practicum was convened, which led to 12 grants being nominated for companies located in rural municipalities to host paid professional internships for university students (300 hours at 5 EUR per hour, with 50% co-financing by the company). In 2017, 45 new grants were nominated of which 44 have been approved. (80 internships, 58 interested companies and 165 registered students) at a 28% job placement rate.

Creation of the "Retorna" (Return) tool to connect young people with higher qualifications and companies in rural

districts. Since October 2016, 367 young people, mostly women, have enrolled in 17 different professional sectors and have shown their interest to work in several rural districts.

INCOMING Circle A virtual platform to visualise and facilitate access to the local resources of rural territories Leader of Catalonia was established (www.viurearural.cat) More than 1 000 resources were georeferenced and organised into seven vectors: Work and entrepreneurship /education/health/housing/sports/culture and leisure/ environment and mobility.

AGRICULTURE circle The study helped identify four profiles of farmers and the viability of their farms: traditional (rooted and mobile) and newly arrived (rural and urban). It also helped define challenges and proposals for improvement in favour of generational change in the field in three areas: territorial, support and social challenges.

Key lessons

An important element for the achievement of the project's objectives is the joint work between the LAGs and the network of youth professionals.

It is necessary to ensure flexibility when choosing the actions to be implemented according to the needs of each territory. This means using many and diverse actions better adapted to the local needs, although this can hinder the harmonization of the results of the overall project.

It can be very difficult to involve universities in a project and establish contact with university students, as well as other young people who have already left the territory. That is why the project holders continue to test different methodologies and have opted to intervene before young people leave the territory. Even so, in Catalonia, universities are relatively close to rural territories. Four of them have a regional character and these were the ones that showed the greatest interest in the project.

The results indicators are not short term and it is difficult to measure the impacts of such projects.

Additional sources of information

<http://retorna.odisseujove.cat/>

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdMiyEB7cBz6ZCsEUoDZ5EA2WK3qcnvyRw0rKFuq9Wvc92P-g/viewform?c=0&w=1>

www.viurearural.cat

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