



# DERREG

## Developing Europe's Rural Regions in the Era of Globalisation

*An interpretative model for better anticipating and responding to  
challenges for regional development in an evolving international context*



## Comarca de Verín

**Case study report (D5.3)**

**(Final Version October 2011)**

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A project funded by the European Union

**Framework 7 Programme**

*Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities*



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## 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Comarca de Verín (The Comarca, from now onwards) is an example of how the existence of good practices represented by specific Grassroots Development Initiatives (GDIs), and operational interfaces among different domains (public administration and knowledge infrastructure) that facing the challenges of globalisation found a way to sustainable development processes. In doing so, we have gained insight into how support is arranged for development in The Comarca that is meant to create a robust region in the era of globalisation.

The Comarca de Verín is a predominantly peripheral area located in Galicia (Spain), a convergence region within Europe. Galicia has a total population of 2.762.198 inhabitants, 29.575 km<sup>2</sup> (approximately 6% of the Spanish territory), thus a population density of 93,40 inhabitants/ km<sup>2</sup>. The population density varies, however, significantly from more than 100 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> in the Atlantic Axis to less than 25 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> in other parts, as it is the case for our area of study.

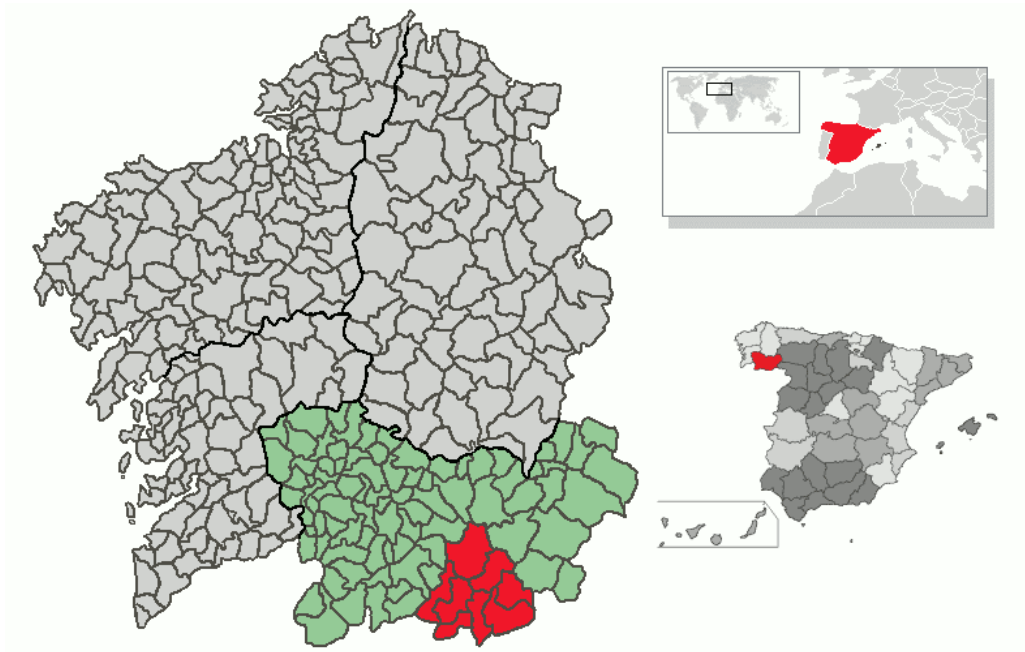
According to Law 7/1996 of 10<sup>th</sup> June, a Comarca is a “specific territorial intermediate environment formed by a set of neighbouring municipalities with an internal cohesion among them, based on geographical, historical, economic and functional facts”. According to the regional government, the Comarca is a stable territorial group of municipalities, being a reference for the historical memory as well as for the organisation and planning<sup>1</sup>. Thus a Comarca does not have any institutional way of government per se, but different scales of government that include local, provincial and regional levels.

Within the Galician region, the Comarca of Verín is situated in the South-West of the province of Ourense (see Map 1) and comprehends 8 municipalities: Castrelo do Val, Cualedro, Laza, Monterrei, Oímbra, Riós, Verín and Villardevós on a surface of 1,007 km<sup>2</sup>. It has maintained a population below 30,000 inhabitants over the last decades (28,596 in 2010), which is scattered and living in small villages, as it is shown by the existence of 175 nucleus of population or singular entities<sup>2</sup> (INE 2010 Nomenclator); and which makes it difficult and expensive to communicate and supply public services.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.xunta.es/galicia2003/es/inicio.htm>, last accessed 28/05/2008

<sup>2</sup> Singular entities are “any habitable area within the municipal area, inhabited or not, clearly differentiated within the area and know by its specific denomination which makes impossible to confuse it with other”. Translation from the Methodology annex of the Nomenclator published by INE. In <http://www.ine.es/nomen2/ Metodologia.do>



Map 1 The Comarca of Verin<sup>3</sup>

### *Demographic trends*

As in many other rural areas, the Comarca is affected by a general process of demographic recession, being its main features the declining population, and a strong process of ageing, as it happens in general in the whole region. Population reached its top in 1960 with 43,285 inhabitants. In 2010 there were 29,497 inhabitants, which represent 8.53% of the total population of Ourense, 1.02% of Galician population and 0.06% of Spanish population (INE 2010a). Between 1996 and 2010, population has declined in The Comarca at an average rate of (-)3.05% following the same trend as the province (-)3.37%; which contrasts with the increase of population in the region (+2.01) and in Spain (+18.53) (INE various years). Concerning these dynamics in the different municipalities of The Comarca, all of them, with exception of Verin, have lost population, since 1996; being the highest declination in the case of Laza, Vilardevós and Riós, 40%, 34% y 29% respectively, between 1991 and 2007. This indicates a short to medium-run difficult context for some municipalities regarding population fixation.

The dynamics of the population obeys to different reasons: a negative vegetative growth, the ageing process above mentioned and to a lesser extent in the last years, migration processes.

As concerns the vegetative growth, this has been negative over the last decades due to a negative trend in the number of births (see Table 4). In 2009, birth rate was 5.2 (0/00), and

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<sup>3</sup> [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Comarca\\_Ver%C3%ADn.png](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Comarca_Ver%C3%ADn.png)

death rate was 15.1 (0/00), while the average number of children per woman was 0.9 (IGE 2010; INE<sup>4</sup> various years), rather below the rate of population regeneration.

The ageing process has become a problem in Galicia, especially in rural areas (Dominguez 2007). The Comarca has followed the same dynamics. Over the last decade, the percentage of population older than 64 has been higher than the one below 16: 12.45% in 1998, 11.25% in 2001, but 9.59% in 2010; 27.76 in 1998, 29.72 in 2001, 31.03. Furthermore, trends are decreasing in the first case and increasing in the second case (INE various years).

Migratory movements have also had a significant impact on population dynamics. Around 1925, emigration to Latin America started, changing in the 60's to Europe, mainly France, Germany and Swiss, as well as to other Spanish industrial areas. The impact on population is still visible nowadays, although the trends are changing in the last years and The Comarca is now receiving immigrants.

As regards migration, among the comarcal population there is a trend of moving within the same province, especially to the capital. In the last years, and changing the migration dynamics of the last decades, there has been a significant arrival of people from other countries and from Spain. This responds mainly to the arrival of people from Portugal, given the proximity of the border, and from South America (following the tendencies in Spain). Thus between 1991 and 2008 the migration balance (in-migration minus out-migration) has increased from -20 to 231, the internal balance (within the province and the rest of Galician) has been negative over the period, but compensated the external balance (with the rest of Spain and with abroad, 369 and 118 people in 2008 respectively) Source: IGE (2010<sup>5</sup>) and INE (various years a) These trends might change in the current economic crisis.

#### *Socio-economic dynamics*

Lack of jobs and low activity rates are a problem in the area. In 2001, the average activity rate (active population/>16 year old population) of the Comarca is lower than the provincial one, presenting therefore a less dynamic labour market. However, there are strong differences between the municipalities. Verín, for example, shows a higher activity rate than the province (48 over 44.9), with values closer to the regional one (50.7 in Galicia). In the case of women, the rate is lower than for men. In 2006, the scenario is probably very similar. For the moment we do not have available data for the Comarca, but for Ourense and Galicia, with similar values to the ones in 2001: 43.01 and 51.45, respectively (INE).

The Comarca presented an average of 16% unemployment rate in 2001. More recent data from the *Tesorería General de la Seguridad Social* (the National Social Security System) showed a similar trend: 14.6% in April 2008. This rate is twice the Spanish one (Source: IGE (2010)).

As regards the productive structure, the employment is higher in the “Service Sector” considering the whole Comarca. However, this is the influence of the municipality of

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<sup>4</sup> Data from 2010 are provisional. Demographic phenomena regarding Galician residents and flows occurred out of Galicia are not included

<sup>5</sup><http://www.ige.eu/igebdt/esq.jsp?paxina=002003004&ruta=navcomarcal.jsp?ESP=3211&COMARCA=Verín>

Verin, as the following table shows. Without including the data of Verin municipality, the Comarca presents a stronger dedication to agriculture, although “services” are still the most important sector.

Between 1991 and 2001, employment within the sector of agriculture diminished from 33% to 10.84% in the Comarca (INE). The same happened with construction decreasing from 18.6 % to 17.8 %. Employment within industry and services increased (from 12.5 to 15.3 and from 36 to 56%, respectively). However these two sectors have not been able to reabsorb the diminutions of the other two sectors, especially the one produced in agriculture.

In December 2007, around 61% of employment was within the service sector, while 8.5% was in agriculture. However the presence of employment in agriculture is higher if we discount the effect of Verin municipality, reaching 22.9% in this case (SFE et al. 2009)

#### *Physical and topographic features<sup>6</sup>*

The Comarca is situated in the high basin of Tamega river. It is formed by the Monterrei Valley, and surrounded by the mountain systems of San Mamede (1618 m) and Fial das Corzas in the North; Sierra Seca and Penas Libres (1083 m) in the East; Sierra de Larouco (1525 m) in the West, and the Portuguese Valley of Amarante in the South. Most of the population settlements are located in the valley, and Vilardevos is the most mountainous municipality. The origin of the valley and the mountains is due to the alpine blending, that was later modelled by erosion.

The Comarca is crossed by many big and small rivers. The main one is the Tamega river, which has its source in the municipality of Laza, and goes down Laza and Castrelo do Val mountains. It crosses the municipality of Verín, continuing through Monterrei and Oimbra, and enters Portugal in Feces de Abaixo. Finally, it flows into the Duero River. Many small rivers join the Tamega: Portos, Trez, Servoi, Gondulfes, Ábedes and Fornos from the left, and Baldriz, Soutelilño and Búbal from the right. There are other small rivers and streams watering the Comarca: Queixa, Cabrociños, Hedreira in the North, or Mente in the East.

The climate in the Comarca varies between the valley and mountainous municipalities, between Atlantic and continental. The weather in the Verin hollow has a dry climate, with hot summers and cold winters (oceanic-continental). In the peripheral mountains the climate is more humid and temperatures are fresher (oceanic of mountain). Rainfall is more abundant, around 1810 mm per year, and snow is frequent in winter.

The landscape in the Comarca is very diverse. However, there are two big features to be distinguished: the hollow or the valley and the mountains around. The hollow is characterised by a soft and flat topography, crossed by the Tamega River. Monterrei valley and specially the area close to the river are of sedimentary origin, deep and giving place to very fertile lowlands and wetlands with high biologic diversity of Mediterranean influence; therefore good for cropping purposes. Big part of the area is occupied by vegetable gardens with a high variety of crops, but very often potatoes and forage. One of the main productions with a long historical tradition is wine –nowadays the Origin Designation of

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<sup>6</sup>Topographic and climate data come from two main references: Rolán A (1994) and La Voz de Galicia (1997).

Monterrei. Here a point of major visual interest is the Monterrei castle from where the whole valley can be seen.

The mountainous areas that surround the valley are characterised by peri-glacial shapes, and peaks covered by different species of heather. There are also big, wooded areas with significant reservoirs of chestnut trees and pines. Although there are also crops, their productivity is lower. Yet wine production has been very important, although it is gradually abandoned due to the difficult orography which requires the use of human labour, not always available due to the hard conditions to work in slopes (Interview Quinta da Muradella, January 2010 and July 2011). The *monte*, formed by forest and bushes, is one of the main economic, ecological and landscape richness of the Comarca. Linked to the forest, there has been a quite important wood industry that is declining in the last years as a consequence of forest fire as well as of the difficulties to access common lands (lands under common property), which, paradoxically, are to a great extent abandoned (Dominguez 2007; and Interviews of Quinta da Muradella and A Xuntoira, January 2010 and 2011).

Another important feature of the Comarca is the existence of numerous mineral water springs originating in the fault that crosses parts of the valley. Many underground waters give place to springs with important mineral-medicinal properties, which resulted in spas in the past; and nowadays in three important industries to bottle water: Fontenova, Sousas and Cabreiroá.

To sum up, the most important natural resources of the Comarca are: the alluvial complex of Támea wetlands that belongs to *Red Natura 2000* and which are very rich as regards fauna and flora; the above mentioned different mineral springs; the forest and bush areas in the mountainous areas; the general landscape of the Comarca. Last but not least, the natural park of *O Invernadoiro*<sup>7</sup> which belonging to *Red Natura 2000 Macizo Central* verges on the municipalities of Laza and Castrelo do Val is an important natural reservoir with a typical Galician *monte* landscape with rounded hills covered by endemic flora and fauna species: Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), oak forests (*Quercus pyrenaica* and *robur*), holly trees (*Illex aquifolium*), Wild Blackberry (*Rubus ulmifolius*), Common Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Birch (*Betula celtiberica*), Blueberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), and Heather (*Erica sp.*); or as regards the fauna, roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), Dormouse (*Glis glis*), Badger (*Meles meles*), Pine Marten (*Martes martes*), Beech Marten (*Martes foina*), Stoat (*Mustela erminea*), Deer (*Cervus elaphus*), European Otter (*Lutra lutra*), Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), among others.

After this brief contextualisation, next sections show firstly, which has been the main goal to be fulfilled in The Comarca research in the context of the DERREG project. Secondly, we summarised the main findings as regards the governance of joint learning and innovation in the region, giving an overview of learning and innovation support strategies coming from policy, the support of joint learning and innovation coming from the GDIs in the area, and the operational quality of the arrangements. Fourth section shows and overview of the processes of globalisation and development in The Comarca. Finally, we end up with some general conclusions and recommendations for policy makers.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.viveaonatural.xunta.es/ES/invernadeiro.htm>. last accessed 07/10/2011

## 2 THE COMARCA DE VERIN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DERREG PROJECT

The research conducted in the case of the Comarca responds to the goal of two packages within the DERREG project: WP4 and WP5. In WP5 the main goal was *synthesising and contextualising the research undertaken through the different WPs*, in this case WP4, which is part of this deliverable. The main research for The Comarca was thus undertaken following the main goals of WP4.

### **Work Package 4 on Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems**

The goal of WP4 was *to understand the capacities of rural regions to respond to the challenges of globalization, and in particular, the role of knowledge systems, innovation and learning in contributing to these capacities*. This required a theoretical effort in order to approach and empirically analyse the governance of regional learning for each area. In doing so, an analysis of the interaction between different actors of the public administration sector, knowledge sector and the region stakeholders was constructed. In the case of the Comarca, results are shown in Figure 1. What the figure gathers is, in fact, the work realised for several milestones.

Milestone 4.1 and 4.2 gave an overview of the public policies, strategies and instruments used to develop regional capacity building and regional learning and innovation in The Comarca. In order to do so, we proceed firstly to map the aims and priorities of policies and governmental strategies that within a more global context (European, national, regional) might influence and/or are specifically oriented to support strategies of rural development in particular areas as it is the case of The Comarca. We focused on the specific measures and policies that have been or might be implemented in The Comarca, as well as the main *public* stakeholders involved. Milestone 4.2 was devoted to show available learning and innovation support structures, so we were able to synthesize where different operational interfaces among public administration sector through policies and the knowledge sector existed.

In Milestone 4.3 the objective was to select and describe best practices as regards regional learning and innovation, or what was called regional grassroots development activities. Furthermore, we formulated policy advice for policy makers on how to support those grassroots development activities will be done as well. Therefore the milestone was structured in two parts. Part I showed the inventory of grassroots development initiatives in The Comarca and Part II focused on an in depth-analysis of some of those grassroots development initiatives as regards the operability and support and facilitation provided by the different formal arrangements and informal networks. To carry out the objective of M4.3 the researcher interviewed 9 grassroots development initiators, giving special attention to the role of support and facilitation of (formal) arrangements as well as to informal (coincidental) networks. A matrix summarised the key characteristics of the support and facilitation received by the different grassroots development activities.

In order to fulfil the goal of Milestone 4.3 a specific research method, data collection and processing was set up. Therefore, between January 2010 and January 2011, the researcher travelled several times to the case study area in order to interview different local stakeholders (comprehending initiators related to farming, non-farming activities, NGOs and other associations). In this way the researcher was able to map (following the goal of Milestone 4.3 Part I) important grassroots development activities in The Comarca linked to different domains of local (rural) reality: rural economy, agriculture, agriculture combined with nature and landscape protection, and culture and traditions have been mapped.



For about two hours they were asked under a semi-structured interview about general information of their activity, its evolution, and support and facilitation they have received. With their permission, conversations were recorded using a mp3 IC recorder device, and later they have been translated from Galician and Spanish into English. In the cases the interviewee did not want to be recorded the researcher took notes. Additionally, a picture was taken of the initiator or the place where they carry out their activities. Some of the initiators have been interviewed two times considering its importance for next steps of the project and taking profit of the visit of a researcher responsible for the case study of the Westerkwartier (The Netherlands). This gave the possibility to exchange knowledge and experience from the Dutch case study. In some cases initiators from two different initiatives joined the meeting which produced a higher interaction and exchange of opinions about the different analysed grassroots initiatives.

The semi-structured interview was divided into 4 parts containing (1) General information about the goal, organisation, participants activities and evolution of the development activity was identified; (2) the support they received to carry out their activities from public administration was inventoried and evaluated; (3) Support and facilitation for activities from knowledge facilities were inventoried and evaluated; and (5) the initiators were asked about their future goals.

The interviewees were asked if their position into the framework was correct and to get more in depth about the goal and evolution of their initiatives as well as of support/facilitation received.

Based on the information provided, a matrix with the following columns was designed to capture and synthesise the key characteristics of support and facilitation within the different grassroots development activity inventoried, including the following items: (1) Name, Type of organisation, Goal, Participants; (2) Activity; (3) Type of support/facilitation received from public/private administration and from whom; (4) Type of support/facilitation received from knowledge infrastructure and from whom

The evaluation of the support and facilitation received was summarised in a table (see below) of support and facilitation received as headings. Thereafter, key words describing the different points of evaluation were added to the column “Evaluation of support and facilitation received”. Although intended, the evaluation does not always refer specifically to the arrangements found but to the different forms of support and facilitation received in general.

Available form of support/facilitation	How is support/facilitation arranged?	Evaluation of support and facilitation received
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In Milestone 4.4 Regional best practises were selected and described. The next section gathers the main findings in the case of The Comarca.

### 3 GOVERNANCE OF JOINT LEARNING AND INNOVATION IN ‘THE COMARCA DE VERIN’

In this section<sup>8</sup> we are going to focus on the governance of joint learning and innovation in The Comarca. In doing so, we will go through an overview of learning and innovation support strategies, a synthesis of the support of joint learning and innovation in GDI's, and a summarised overview of the quality of the arrangements in area.

Learning and innovation support strategies depend on actor's initiative in this region based on processes of learning and cooperation; as well as on regional and rural development policies acting at different levels; and on relations established with knowledge coming from academic public and private institutions. In all cases, the interfaces generated through those relations and different domains should elevate and promote the capacity to act, autonomy, resilience and sustainability of the region.

As said in the previous section, and defined by Wellbrock et al.(2010) the questions posed were how public support could be best arranged to be effective and beneficial to the development activities of choice, and particularly, how to best support joint learning by doing among those engaged in grassroots development initiatives. This would enable to answer how public support and facilitation of joint learning and innovation within and between grassroots rural regional development initiatives could be best arranged, i.e. how operating interfaces could be best created between a) public policies, b) grassroots development initiatives and c) learning and innovation facilities, considering the contextual differences across the case study area.

#### **Overview of learning and innovation support strategies (policy)**

The Comarca is a rural area, and from the organising perspective and intervention, is subdued to different levels of “public” governance: municipality (*concello*), province (*Diputación provincial de Ourense*), Autonomous Community (Galician government or Xunta de Galicia), Central (Spanish) government, and European Union. As regards development, two main political and funding “public” sources contribute to it: *regional development policy* and *rural development policy*, which is formulated by the region, central national administration and Europe. As a *convergence region*, Galicia will benefit from the initiatives and financing of the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), as well as the Cohesion Fund in the period 2007-2013. Those funds will mainly drive rural and regional policies in our area of study.

**Regional development policies** have been implemented through regional development programmes. As regards regional development programmes, during the period 2007-2013 Galicia might benefit from several national, multiregional, regional (specifically for the Galician region), cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operation programmes.

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<sup>8</sup> This section has been elaborated from different deliverables within Work Package 4; namely Roep, Wellbrock, 2011; Wellbrock *et al.* 2010; Wellbrock *et al.* 2011a; Wellbrock *et al.* 2011b.

Especially interesting for learning and innovation are the operational programme ‘knowledge based-economy’, the operational programme ‘Spain-Portugal (POCTEP)’, and the Galician operational programme, which is indeed the most specific one for the region as regards both regional and rural development.

**Rural development policy** is implemented through rural development programmes (RDP) which are established at regional level by the autonomous communities. In this respect, 17 regional programmes, and 2 horizontal programmes related to the national framework have been established. The Fondo Español de Garantía Agraria (Spanish Fund of Agricultural Guarantee), an autonomous organism belonging to the Ministry of Environment and Rural and Marine Environment (MARM), is in charge of controlling the right application of the CAP funding to the specific goals. The Dirección General de Desarrollo Sostenible del Medio Rural is in charge of coordinating the managing authorities of the different rural development programmes co-financed by EAFRD, as for example, Plan Estratégico de Desarrollo Rural y del Marco Nacional de Desarrollo Rural (Strategic RD Plan and National RD Framework, respectively). The Dirección General cooperates and collaborates with the autonomous communities and other entities related to these matters. It also elaborates Spanish proposals of RD for the European Union. Development programmes formulated at regional level, as it is the case of Galicia, may only contain additional information in accordance with the six horizontal measures. The overall objective of the RDP, which derives from the Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG) and the National Strategy Plan, is to “resolve the imbalances between the Atlantic Axis, where growth is concentrated, and the trend to abandon the rest of the Galician territory, especially the mountain areas and inland territories”. The overall aim is Galicia is to achieve a sustainable, strong and viable rural environment by 2013.

The LEADER programme is one of the four strategic axis of the RDP and Galicia is the only region within the EU with its whole territory under Programmes managed by LAGs. Galicia has been a recipient of LEADER money since 1991. Besides the LEADER initiative, other programmes of development have been carried out (PRODER, PRODER II and AGADER), especially in those areas that did not benefit from LEADER. AGADER, for example, was created as an instrument of economic diversification and development in the rural areas, based on the principles of endogenous, sustained and integrated development. The main goal was to contribute to an integrated rural development through the implementation of different measures. The programme has strategic aims in five different fields: social participation, improvement of life standard conditions, promotion of human resources, environment and improvement of local economic activity. AGADER is similar to PRODER and LEADER, but totally financed by regional funds. Furthermore, the Comarca is also benefiting from other projects financed by European Funds, from different European programmes as Interreg III and Urban: the VIARRAIA project, the Eurocity Chaves-Verin project, and the ARRAIANO project.

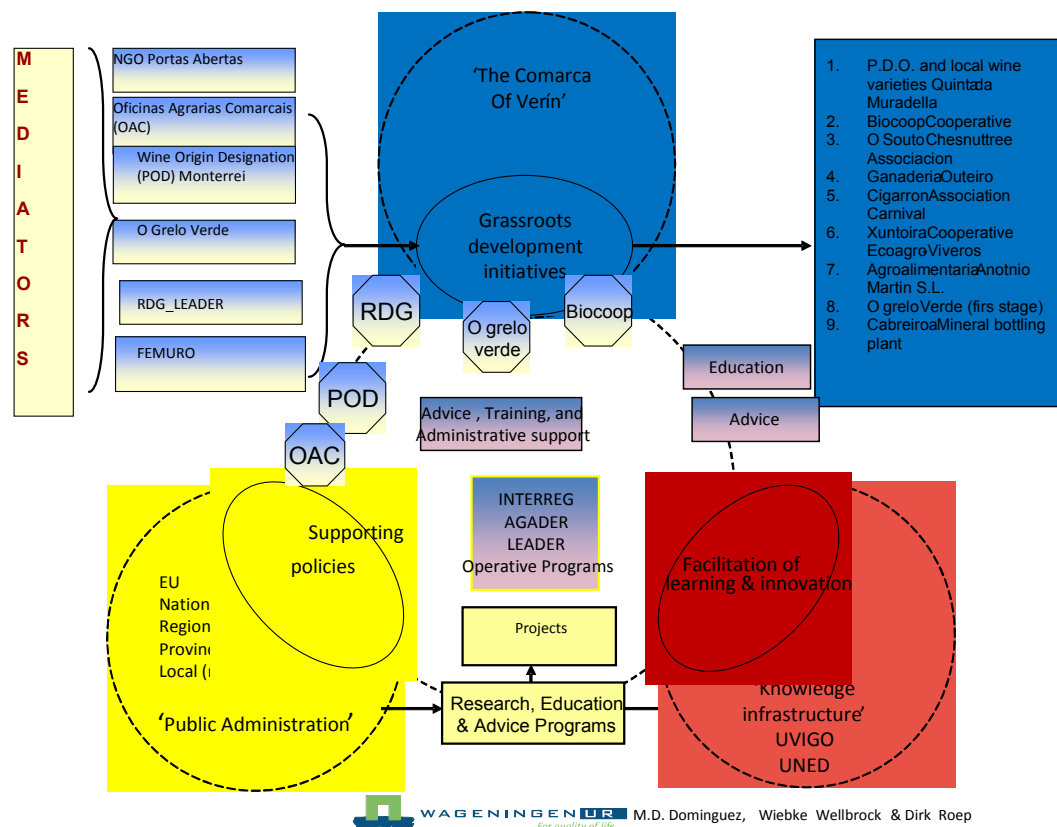
### **Support of joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives**

In the Comarca, 9 active grassroots development initiatives were inventoried. They covered different domains: rural economy, agriculture (combined often with nature and environment protection) as well as civic and cultural development. Most of them are

directly or indirectly related to farming, because of either production or commercialisation. Those that are mainly focused on commercialisation have been classified within rural economy.

With regard to *public administration*, the support provided for grassroots development initiatives inventoried is coming from three main sources: EU funds, Regional Ministry of rural environment (before agriculture) and National Ministry MARM (before agriculture). The Comarca has benefitted from different regional and rural programmes which have been implemented mainly through the action of the LAGs (currently RDGs) which, as figure 7 shows, is the one of the most important hub for different local organisations, public and private stakeholders. RDGs work as any other non-profit association and must obey the principle of “open doors”, i.e., any organisation of the area that wish to participate in the project has the right to be admitted. Any professional, non-professional, agrarian, commons may join the RDG. Only individuals may not join the group directly. Stakeholders from the private sector must be the majority within the GDR. This group must elaborate a strategy of comarcial development where the main possibilities, opportunities and necessities of the territory must be included, as regards productive, socio-economic domains and services. Their application must be addressed to Agader (Galician Agency of Rural Development). The municipality and the diputación provide information and technicians in order to facilitate knowledge transfer and access to development programmes financed by European, national and regional funds. Support from local government- given that members work for the municipality, materializes further in rooms for meetings, announcements, and so on.

With regard to the *knowledge support structure*, there are numerous private agencies which are also relevant for rural regional learning and innovation processes in and around the Comarca. Consulting offices, for example, write proposals or reports concerning the Comarca in order to get the information from European, national or regional project calls. These private agents are located at regional or even national level which is perceived as resulting in significant delays of development in comparison with other rural regions in the European Union. A further, significant with regard to private agents and agencies is the case of the NGO Portas Abertas (see figure 7). Portas Abertas was able to create a network of personal contacts that survives until today. When speaking about fostering, promoting, and starting grassroots development initiatives, the name of Portas Abertas appears frequently. Besides necessary personal contacts within the knowledge infrastructure, a grassroots development initiative also needs to have access to necessary funds in order to be able to engage with knowledge facilities. Many of the grassroots development initiators argue that being a real initiator means that you would pursue your initiative, even without subsidy and looking for the necessary knowledge formally and informally. Finally, the University of Vigo and Santiago have also played some role by giving courses and lectures on specific local natural resources (chestnut trees management), participating in different projects that research socio-economic development in the area. The connection from locals with the university is however not highlight at first, it takes a time to realise that they are also a part of the knowledge in the area.



**Figure 1 Arrangements to facilitate and support learning and innovation within grassroots development initiatives in the Comarca de Verín** (Source: Wellbrock *et al.* 2011a; Roep, Wellbrock 2011)

### Operational quality of arrangements

*Public administration* supports grassroots development activities in the Comarca through different lines, mainly initiation, advice, expertise and facilitation and finances. These forms of support and facilitation appear to be particularly relevant regarding the general focus of developing and pursuing a collective development aim.

#### *Initiation*

In Galicia there has been a strong process of transformation to scale up farms, with the need of strong investments in infrastructure and machinery. These investments have been generally financed by European funds. In the case of the Comarca, however, as regards the initiatives inventoried, LEADER programmes have played a key role. Thus, funding from the EU (especially through LEADER), regional and national government has been basic to set up all the grassroots development initiatives with the exception of the Cigarróns, and Cabreiroá. Local administration, in contrast, seems to have a smaller role in the initiation of these activities except in the case of O Souto, and Ecoagro. In the case of the first one, the municipality plays an active role to foster the association providing all the means at reach: infrastructure, announcements for meetings and financing if applicable. In the case of the second one, one of the initiators and current partner was a major of the municipality where the enterprise is located. Other initiator highlighted that there were better times as regards

the collaboration with the municipality. Nowadays the relation is broken because of conflicts of interests and power struggle.

### *Advice, Expertise and Facilitation*

With regard to advice, expertise and facilitation, every initiator was very keen on the role played by the old Agrarian Extension Service (nowadays Oficinas Agrarias Comarcales OAC, see figure 7). In LEADER I and II the OAC was an external advisor and played an important role in the programme. Nowadays they follow separate trials since the OAC must cover lines that are not covered by LEADER (from interview with Castor Gago, director of the OAC in The Comarca).

Furthermore, grassroots development initiatives seek contact with public administration in their aim to look for information about the possibility of financing, normative and measures of support. In other cases, public buildings are used as meeting place. Another initiative is using an office in the Centre of cooperative development which was created in Verín with funding from different European and national and regional fund.

### *Financing*

The role of LEADER in financing grassroots development initiatives in the Comarca must be highlighted. The initial two programmes run by LAGs, GDRs, Portas Abertas and OAC have been very significant for the area. Associations and cooperatives also have membership fees and fees for activities in order to generate an own budget. In the light of the current crisis and reluctance of banks to give out loans, however, new initiatives are being cut since the start, even when their projects are already accepted by the program. It was thus stated that public administration provides good and clear communication about their requirements to give out subsidies. Provision of subsidies, however, could be faster especially in the current context of crisis. Bad management of the funds has also been pointed out by most of the initiators. Funding seems to be mostly oriented to activities that only generate punctual benefits (employment, good image in front of the community) and are not really fostering a more long-term development. Some also pointed out that subsidies should be in fact loans without or with lower interest to avoid misuse. Furthermore, a negative evaluation is given about the current way of understanding development processes which in the end might jeopardise projects that are in process or future projects. This is a consequence of the increasing power of local governments within the different development programmes. Currently, this pessimism appears to extend to some initiators regarding their future development. Public support- or the lack of it- is also criticised regarding policies related to land structure, a limiting factor in the area (and most of the Galician region). The lack of decision to implement a clear policy that helps abandoned land to re-enter in the productive system seems to be closely related to the possible negative consequence in terms of re-election. Other demographic and economic factors (infrastructures, lack of services) as well as a lack of training and education are argued to be jeopardising development without regional or local institutes doing something.

Support and facilitation from the *knowledge structure* is very relevant in the initiative's focus on acquiring joint learning and innovation capacities to jointly achieve a development goal. The knowledge infrastructure provides support and facilitation by expertise, seminars, training, and skill development. When asked, some initiators deny in the beginning having had support from the knowledge support structure. In the course of the interviews, however, it popped up that practically all of them had used this sort of support at least in the beginning of their activity. It was either through attending courses organised by the university or when some mediators brought experts to the area to give conferences. In some cases, visits of students were organised to raise awareness of development problems and to encourage an exchange of knowledge, new ideas, etc. This made us think about the disconnection between public knowledge institutes (education, research and consultancy) and society, especially in rural areas. Universities are still seen as something out of their scope, distant, and with no use, although it is present. As an interviewed professor said *the connection is lost when we left, or when the course is finished*. Some initiators also commented that they had already participated in other interviews for European or national projects, or have given information about their enterprise but in the end, they do not see any improvement as a result of it. Another important way of informal support is the assistance to go to fairs or meetings. The contact with occasional encounters and informal networks are also important. When asked, interviewed initiators stated to get information about available expertise through informal talks with other members, through lectures giving by professors and technicians who came to the area or attending courses organised by private enterprises or the university. This also served to receive suggestions about potential knowledge facilitators. The OAC, despite being a public organism, is stimulating informal networking opportunities by creating needs of cooperation.

## 4 GLOBALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN 'THE COMARCA DE VERIN': A DISCUSSION

The Comarca is on the interface of at least three global influences. First, it has been historically located on the crossroad between.... Second, it is a border area, close to Portugal. Third, it has been confronted, as the rest of the region, with strong waves of migration since the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The geographical situation of the Comarca as a crossroad between the Galician and Castilian region, as well as Galicia and Portugal, has always made it an important stop-by place for those travelling to Castilla y Leon and Portugal since the Middle Age. Roads are the most important ways of connection in the Comarca. During summer there is a high flow of cars because of the emigrants coming home, nowadays specially to Portugal (SFE et al 2007). Verín is also on the way (Benavente-Vigo) from Castilla or Madrid to the tourist area of Rias Baixas (South-coast area). The Comarca is also well connected by road to the capital of the province, Ourense (69 km), the biggest Galician city, Vigo (166 km), and the capital of the Galician region, Santiago de Compostela (173 km, a toll road in this case). Vigo and Santiago have the most important airports in the region. Recently, good road connections have been opened to Portugal.

The municipalities of Oimbra, and part of Vilardevós, are the ones closest to Portugal and have good communication with this country. On the contrary, Castrelo de Val and Laza located to the North are the most detrimental in this respect. The Comarca has in fact always maintained a close relation to the neighbour country, proof of that is the smuggling museum located in Vilardevós.

The Comarca has changed its migratory flows in the last decades but still an important amount of natives live out of the region. In summer, the population increases significantly. The influence of migration has been highlighted by several interviewees during field research. In fact, the most active promoters of change have all migrated or studied out of the region for a period of their lives. In general, it is seen as a positive experience what "gave the opportunity of understanding the value and potentials of The Comarca" (Interviews Biocopp, Quinta da Muradella, A Xuntoira, January 2011). They took advantage from this experience and applied them to their initiatives.

In The Comarca the GDI's analysed, as well as the actions of some institutional and non institutional intermediaries, taking advantage of different operational interfaces among them and with public administration and knowledge actors, are a good example of how global processes can promote local development. Furthermore the GDI's have revealed to be good examples of what Woods (2011) labels as *relocalizers*; one of the eight different models of engagement with the global economy from rural regions. Those models *involve some form of collective action, and some degree of territorial expression, such that they are each more than just the actions of individual firms, organizations or households*. As they are not closed or independent typologies, the GDI's present also features of other models such as the *niche innovators and global conservators*.

Re-localizers are according to Woods representing *radical movements to 'opt-out' that take localization to an extreme by constructing essentially self-sufficient communities (Halfacree, 2007); but more commonplace are strategies that aim to reconstruct or strengthen local value chains through initiatives such as farmers' markets, farm shops, local branding schemes, and promoting local procurement by the public sector and large institutions. These actions can be positioned as responses to globalization because they are*



*often aimed at stemming leakage of value from localities as global corporations and imported goods creep in, or at replacing income lost as a consequence of shifting transnational networks.*

In the case, of the Biocoop cooperative for example, bringing together organic beef farmers was formed into creating market products, creating –previously non-existing - short and long commercialisation channels, and aiming to preserve the regional heritage of cattle breeds. O Souto is an association of chestnut tree owners that aims at fostering the traditional chestnut economy of the region, trying to add value to this natural, local resource with great potential from the economic and environmental perspective. The small winery Quinta da Muradella is using and recovering local wine varieties to export a small production of selective wines all around the world. A Xuntoira is a carpentry cooperative that produces distinctive wood kitchen doors by importing materials from different countries and also exporting the final product a. As Woods (9:2011) points out, *all this initiatives are adding value to local resources by asserting local distinctiveness and local networks of production and consumption.*

The promoters of these GDI's are to a large extent also *niche innovators, engaged with the global economy by producing and exporting goods to serve global niche markets, or attracting international visitors to niche events and attractions (...) utilizing different resources and starting from different points,* in this case from agricultural diversification and innovation, *able to provide specialist products to international markets.* (Woods 7:2011). In the case of The Comarca, GDIs have been able to 'materialize' the capacity of the niche-actors to build strategies fostering long-term sustainable development in the area. Furthermore, by combining various natural and socio-cultural components, the initiatives represent niches for sustainable rural development. In these niches, actors learn how to achieve success and sustain their ecological entrepreneurship (Dominguez Garcia and Swagemakers, 2011 forthcoming). By doing so, GDIs in The Comarca are potential *global conservators.*

## 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 'THE COMARCA OF VERIN'

Economy, society and environment in The Comarca have been exposed to globalisation processes and consequences, to a large extent related to structural factors. Being located at highly transited cross roads, on a border area and subdue to strong migration flows, opportunities and threats have had an influence on the development of different, particular and regional, processes of development. The influence of outsiders has brought in many new ideas and the recognition of local, natural resources; although migration has also deprived the region from population and human capital.

In view of our research outcomes, we see that a global economy gives also opportunities to export local products with high value added for the region when worked out by local actors. In The Comarca, local agents have been able to adopt particular models to take advantage of globalisation process as Woods (2011) supported to a larger or smaller extent by local agents choices and policy.

In order to take advantage of the globalisation process and to minimise its threats or limits in a particular area regional reflexivity is needed. Being local actors (or some of them) and process of learning one key for regional development, institutional support is not only needed but most important. It should therefore be adequately addressed. New and old knowledge should be fostered and preserved, respectively, when it is based on activities that are able to keep value added within the region without limiting or depleting natural resources.

The lack of coherence and integration from the perspective of rural areas and the lack of intermediate practices and agents (or agencies) interconnecting and interacting between the 'world' of those that make and implement policies and the 'world' of those making a living in rural areas affect the effectiveness of policies. Therefore, a proper working interface is needed. This is what researchers within WP4 looked for when they analyse rural development policies capacity building.

In regional and rural development policies, capacity building, elevating the 'capacity to act' of inhabitants individually as well as collectively, is generally seen as key to promote more resilient, robust and inclusive European rural regions in an era of globalisation with economies depending ever more on knowledge creation and innovation (Wellbrock et al. 2011a). The case study research in The Comarca provided a context for analyzing how interfaces between rural development initiatives, knowledge infrastructure and policies do and can effectuate regional learning and capacity building. Our first conclusion is that in the Comarca de Verín, the interfaces between rural development initiatives, the knowledge infrastructure and policies have been mostly developed within informal networks of the niche-actors.

In the case of The Comarca, we have checked that individual and cooperative GDIs are able to foster local development, although cooperation reinforces their power of negotiation (Dominguez and Swagemakes 2011 forthcoming) In some cases, development reaches only one socio-economic domain while in other cases environmental and traditional knowledge and culture are part of the equation, too. Along with this *informal net* able to foster capacity building and learning in the region, *formal support* has also played a role in the last decades. As the interviewees (both from GDIs and Mediators) stated, individuals are the key of these initiatives but often different forms of support and

facilitation are needed, especially to set up the project, to broaden the scope of the activity and to enlarge its scale. Therefore, our second general conclusion is that progress is mainly booked in practice by initiators and informal networks.

However, most of the initiators are of the opinion that local governmental institutes are currently limiting real development because local politicians have taken profit of European, national and regional funds to assure their re-election. It seems that after LEADER+ the inclusion of majors within the Local Action Groups (or currently Rural Development Groups) has caused the appearance or reinforcement of power struggle, making the perpetuation in power positions a primary (political and personal) aim. So support is not always granted to the most appropriate GDIs. Therefore, third, general conclusion is that local figures holding power limit the capacity to act of others. Patron-client relationships hamper the further unfolding of the relevant actor-networks for rural development.

Finally, the future perspectives of the initiatives mapped are generally good, despite the structural permanent problems related to rural areas that keep on reproducing in The Comarca over the last decades: ageing, low employment levels, inadequate land structure and difficult to access land.

Therefore, examining the role of individual private actors as knowledge users as well as *producers and disseminators of knowledge*, we conclude that informal regional learning processes and sustainment of rural development and the rural economy should be fostered by an adequate policy framework. In order to do so, we recommend that policy should:

- (1) *Foster formal support* for *informal* mediators and relevant actors, agencies. In order to do so, studies and research are needed, which includes the improvement of the interface with knowledge infrastructure.
- (2) Promote the (good) use of existing infrastructures for fostering development processes: *Centro de desenvolvemento cooperativo de Verín*, *Centro de interpretación da Castaña* located in Riós, different museums (olive oil and smuggling in Vilardevós, chestnut in A Chaira-Riós, Ethnographic museum in Castrelo do Val)
- (3) Promote good practices that are sustainable and therefore long-lasting ones, especially those that aim at preserving the local natural resources such as Biocoop, Quinta da Muradella, O Souto chestnut tree association; also those ones that have the goal of mobilising local resources, such as A Xuntoira.
- (4) Give operational agents room and decisive powers to adjust to the needs of the beneficiaries.

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