



Initiatives in Rural Galicia

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The Experience

It is a response from the community to different necessities and challenges that emerged progressively. Currently, its initiatives cover a provision of a proximity service for the elderly, educational intergenerational activities organised in the village-school, a community home, employability and training promotion, and cultural and patrimony recovering activities, among others.





Origins

In 1985 “Asociación Cultural o Cruceiro” (Crossroad Cultural Association) was created, and, in 1990, it turned into O Viso's CDR

It was an association in which different members of rural centres participated in order to recover communal bonds and community work.

Its main goal was to recover the community spirit that used to be present in rural areas. The school, which was abandoned, was recovered and turned into a social centre. Festivals such as “Entroido” (Carnival) or “Magosto” (a Galician Autumn feast) were also recovered.

Afterwards, conferences focused on community training were organised. At that time, five dairy farms were set up, or modernised, in the village. One of their initiatives was to buy shared machinery.

In the late eighties, a school for the elderly was organised. This initiative was especially welcomed among women. Four groups of new literates and people with a low education level were organised. In addition to teach reading and writing, as well as further education, they also organised talks, short trips, and conferences to inform on how to access different services.

In 1990, the organisation got in touch with the former manager of the rural family schools, and, together with other state entities, COCEDER was created.

Their first initiative was to work with children and young people, monitoring leisure time activities, and recovering cultural patrimony: traditional festivals, such as “Entroido” or “Magosto”, etc.

However, reality, necessities, and potentials faced by the organisation, encouraged other initiatives to emerge. In 1998, the community kitchen starts as a volunteering activity carried out on weekends. In 2000, after obtaining a subsidy by the District Council, it starts to operate daily. Initiatives promoted by the organisation were guided by necessities that needed to be covered.

The community house was opened in 2002. This initiative was requested by those who used the community kitchen. Open a community house would allow them to stay in the village, so that they would not need to move to an elderly home when the time came that they were no longer able to live on their own. At the present moment, there is a new facility: a day care centre. This was possible thanks to obtaining a Leader and PIT subsidy.

The organisation always had to adapt to programs and income, although covering the necessities of the community.



Territorial Identity: Recovering Practices

There is local knowledge about farming activities, community practices, fabric production, working with leather, and many other traditional activities. O Viso's CDR puts into value local knowledge and cultural patrimony, which is transmitted to the younger generation. This is what inspired the initiative of a village-school focused on the elderly, as they are the ones who transmit their knowledge. In addition, traditional tools are put into value: the loom, the traditional oven, etc.

Socio-Economic Conditions

Most members of the community receive retirement pensions. There are some sheep and dairy farms, as well as people working in the construction industry. Three dairy farms are well equipped, and another local business is the village bar. There are also some members of the community working in another area. In one year new homes were built or bought, but due to the economic crisis, people left. It is not easy to live in a rural area, and it is even more difficult to make a living in a rural area if people do not have a well equipped infrastructure or the necessary tools and machinery.





Participation Process

The two key factors of the project are local population and technical staff. The driving force and the predominant relationship model is community cooperation. As soon as services started to be offered, technical work became more important. In fact, some tensions between both factors can be observed:

At the present moment, community action to participate at the board meetings is limited due to lack of technical knowledge. In this type of organisation, hired staff have to carry out an important amount of work, and other staff members are volunteers. These last ones, sometimes do not have enough training to carry out their job, as the organisation has grown and more difficulties need to be overcome. On the other hand, there is also a feeling that the organisation's grass-root members are not as present as they used to be. Previously, every member would participate, but now they feel that they have no ideas to provide in meetings: *"You know what needs to be done"*.

On the other hand, some technical staff do not feel comfortable with people coming and going as if it was their home. However, *it is 'their' home*, they can come and go when they please. Some of them even go to the community house because they feel bored at home. This is sometimes disturbing for the technical staff, but it is how the organisation works.



Administration's Role

Administration does not play an important role in this initiative. It is a community initiative. However, technical coordination with public administrations is established, such as agreements with Social Services of three different Councils, or collaboration with Continuous Care Units, especially the one in Sarreaus. On the other hand, they do access public funds through different open procedures.



Technical Work

Technical work is important. However technical staff are not trained to work in a rural environment. They studied in urban areas such as Madrid or Salamanca, where they received a good training, but the therapy they offer is finger painting workshops, etc. *As if it was meant for children*. It is a therapy adapted to an urban area. Here it is needed to offer something different, something related to their way of life: seedbeds, farm animals, etc. *If you want them to participate in a memory workshop asked them about how many days after a hen lays an egg will go by until the chicks are born.*

On the other hand, good professionals find other jobs. There are steady jobs offers that the organisation is not able to compete against. The organisation works thanks to annual subsidies, and it is never possible to be certain if they will obtain a subsidy the following year year. Therefore, sometimes they train people who eventually leave, although many of them are still helping the organisation when it is needed.

Carmen is the only worker who is a member of the board. She is a coordinator, helps to give continuity to the different initiatives, and plays an important role bridging the board and staff. What is being now discussed is whether it is needed to give more autonomy to the staff members.

The organisation has training agreements with the University of Vigo and Santiago.

Association's Role

The board consists of a president, vice president, secretary, a spokesperson, and spokespeople from different villages. These last ones are not always able to assist to the board's meetings.

Citizenship's Role

The main energises are O Viso's CDR and the local community. The community is a key factor.

It is not the board who detects and channels necessities. The whole community plays a role: any member of the community can detect a problem and ask for services through the working staff or some other member of the organisation, in a direct way. Meetings are not very successful because issues can be discussed at any time, therefore, meetings sometimes seem as something artificial.

There are very specific programs that settle and make the helping network stronger. There is someone in each village who notices if one neighbour is in need of something, such as food necessities, or to make sure that one neighbour takes his or her medication.

This is been done thanks to people's altruism and kindness. People who move to rural areas and settle are people who appreciate this community relation and, perhaps, their only limit is lack of time.

The cession of the Rectory House made the starting of the experience possible.

There are also people who collaborate by supporting with their capital different farming activities. Communal goods are used and it reverts to the community.

Intergenerational Project

They offer projects for different ages, aiming to promote interaction between different generations. The Village-School allows the elderly to be with children. However this is more difficult with teenagers. There are projects offered for teenagers but intergenerational interaction is more difficult. Teenagers like more active activities such as leather workshops, hiking, zip wire, and other activities not suitable for the elderly.



Adults only participate in specific activities ("Magosto", etc.), and they also accompany their children.

The organisation attempted to make part of the board members of the younger generation. There is a youth organisation in the area, and it was decided that they would participate. Three of them are members of the board, but they are not able to attend the board meetings because they are working, or they do not go because they are not able to understand what is discussed, although O Viso's CDR tries not to be too technical at these meetings.



Women's Role

Women are the main supporters O Viso's CDR, as well as the ones who made it possible for the organisation to continue working. There are more female workers than male: 15 women out of 18 workers. In the board there are only two or three people. Women's percentage can be a third of the total of members.

Women in rural areas used to have their socialising space: the communal oven, washing places...At the present moment these spaces no longer exist. Activities organised by O Viso's CDR work as a socialising space for women. Most of participants are women.

Territory and Outside Agents

People no longer living in the area play an important role. They are usually the ones who are more convinced about the importance of the initiative. Perhaps because it is common to be fond of the place you come from. They offer help regarding different issues: they offer land, they let the organisation use their homes to keep animals or cars, etc. Moreover, they help in the organisation when they are back in the village.

Some of the people who left the village were promoters of the organisation, and some live now in urban areas such as Madrid or Barcelona. They provide ideas from other experiences carried out where they now live. There is communication through the internet: photos, emails, social networks...Before they could only exchange information in Summer or at Christmas.

For them it is a guarantee to know their parents are in the village under care and proximity services. It assures their life quality, which would not be possible if the organisation did not exist.



Resources

The organization's own financing percentage is close to a 30% of the total. 70% is on a public or external basis, through subsidies or programs which are not carried out periodically but annually. Users pay a contribution, which is always adapted to their possibilities. Fees differ according to user's rent.

It was not possible for all the initiatives to be carried out successfully. Sometimes there was not enough funding. Profit earned by the hostel and camps allows funding other projects, although the profit earned is not much.



Learnings

It is not easy to combine volunteering with the professional dimension of work. To introduce permanent working staff lead to a decline in participation in the organisation. However, it did not affect locals' participation.

Moreover, projects are inspired by and close to people from the area, which has positive and negative aspects.



Impacts

Intelligent Territory

It is a referent of a practicable utopia. It is also a referent outside Galicia. For instance, there was a collaboration with a school and mayors from the region of Castilla y León. The organisation was also awarded with different recognitions and prizes (Moncho Valcalce, Macario Asenjo Ponce).

To put into value actualised traditional knowledge, means the conservation of a local patrimony in risk of disappearing.

Inclusive Territory

There are people who participate, and people who do not feel the need because they already see the existence of the organisation as a positive impact.

An initiative functioning in a small area without being magnified, as this organisation, needs to be expanded.

There is an improvement in education (1300 children participated in projects from April to May).

There is also a positive impact in the community, not only they receive a service but also gain a stronger sense of community and leave hostilities behind. The collaboration of people from other villages encourage others to collaborate, as they might have felt envious of the people already collaborating. They move from rejection to a positive construction.

The fact of knowing that the organisation is there working already improves people's quality of life. To be certain that someone would be able to help them if needed is already an important service.

Sustainable Territory

The fact of rebuild and use the rectory house, to put into value the communal, allow people to continue living in their territory, at home, are outstanding impacts.

The territory, from the point of view of environmental use and care, is also important.