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THE PRACTICE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS IN EUROPE

24 Case Studies in Six European Countries

PRIDE Research Report



Edited by Ada Cavazzani and Malcolm Moseley

Rubbettino

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Malcolm Moseley, Professor of Rural Community Development

Osservatorio di Economia Agraria
per la Calabria - INEA, Italy
in association with
Countryside & Community Research Unit
Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, UK



Rubbettino

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Osservatorio di Economia Agraria per la Calabria
Dipartimento di Economia e Statistica
Università della Calabria - 87036 Rende
Tel. + 39 0984 837435
E-mail: gaudio.inea.@unical.it

© Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education
Countryside & Community Research Unit
Swindon Road
Cheltenham GL50 4AZ
United Kingdom
Tel + 44 1242 544083
E-mail: mmoseley@chelt.ac.uk

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ASAM Ambasierras Rural Partnership - Spain

Almudena Buciega, Javier Esparcia, Joan Noguera

Main features of the partnership context

<i>Surface (km²)</i>	1.875
<i>Population density (pop/km²)</i>	26
<i>Resident population</i>	64.469
<i>Number of municipalities</i>	82
<i>Altitude of the territory (metres min-max)</i>	522/2.425

1. Context

The partnership area is located in the north-west of Spain, in the NUTS III administrative area of *Salamanca*, inside the *Castilla y León* region. This Objective 1 region is one of the biggest in Spain in terms of area (93.773 km²) with a relatively low population (2.508.496 inhabitants) that results in a population density of under 27 inhabitants per square km. The regional trend is towards stagnation and an aging population with a population loss of about 4% in the last 30 years. Though the region includes 9 provinces (NUTS III) it does not have a well-developed urban system with only a few relatively dynamic centres (Valladolid, Burgos, León, Salamanca). The economy still has a traditional structure with nearly 15% of the active population in agriculture and only 57% in the tertiary sector. Unemployment is not a big issue in relation to the general situation in Spain (18% unemployment rate in 1997) .

Salamanca, the NUTS III province in which the partnership area is administratively located does not vary much from the regional trends. Apart from the cultural centre of Salamanca, the rest of the province basically consists of deep rural areas with small and sparse settlements.

The partnership area currently includes 82 municipalities but only 6 of them are over 1.000 inhabitants, Béjar with 17.125 and Guijuelo with 4.804 inhabitants being the most populated. Two sub-areas can be distinguished within the partnership territory, the Mountains of Béjar and the Mountains of France. The former benefiting from the existence of a main town centre

(Béjar) which until the 1980s was an important textile industrial centre, and also from better communication with the North and the South of the region.

Forestry is one of the most important activities in the area. Agriculture is not very relevant with some notable exceptions (fruits, olive trees, and vineyards) currently growing in importance in some parts of the area. Cattle is important, especially pig breeding which is the prime reason for the high quality pork industry that supports part of the economy in the area. Tourism is also of some importance since it takes advantage of the high quality natural and built heritage of the area. In fact, this has been a growing sector in many municipalities of the area.

Social mobilisation experienced a good development during the 1980s which is the time when the former core of the studied partnership emerged. However, this type of mobilisation is experiencing an important crisis these days.

In administrative terms the partnership area coincides with the limits that the Mountain Agriculture Law established during the 1980s. According to this public program an Area Committee would be established in order to co-ordinate an integrated development programme that would be produced for the area. Eventually, no actions were implemented under this programme and the Law was reduced to the provision of subsidies to farmers.

2. *Origin and Composition of the Partnership*

The origins of the partnership can be traced back to 1981 when the *Diputación of Salamanca* (NUT III administration) launched a socio-cultural programme to mobilise the rural communities of the province. Groups of young people from different villages of the area started working together and during about 6 years they developed social and cultural activities in the area related to recovering traditions, environmental protection, leisure. They took special care in involving communities in all the different activities. In 1982 the Mountain Agriculture Law was launched and the existing informal group of people became formally constituted as a non-profit association (ASAM) in order to be able to participate in the Area Committee that would be established to manage the policy. Their main aim was to translate rural peoples' needs to this Committee which would implement a strategic development plan for the area. The development plan was never implemented but ASAM kept translating people's needs into different sector committees (education, health...) and applying for funding for specific proposals.

In 1991 LEADER I was launched. At that point, ASAM received the program with the warmest welcome: indeed, its philosophy, approach and objectives reflected so accurately their own views that they never looked at LEADER as something external created by people at the European Commission but as something that could have very well been created by them. LEADER was, therefore, seen as a great opportunity for ASAM since it reflected all the ideas

programme in the area. At this point the area itself assisted to the emergence of a new "partnership" which in practice would be solely concentrated in the management tasks of the LEADER programme or, in other words, in the LEADER projects to be funded.

The current LEADER II Directive Committee (Decision Committee) includes eleven representatives of AMBASIERRAS (9 Mayors, 1 representative of the ham industry, 1 representative of the hotel businesses) and 9 representatives of ASAM (6 representatives of associations, 2 of local authorities, one of the agriculture sector). ASAM includes more than a hundred members a third of them the more active core of members. The association includes different individuals representing various sectors and activities and also representatives of local authorities who have always been in the association on an individual basis but that also inevitably means some kind of institutional representation. On the other hand, it is not possible to be accurate about the representatives that integrate AMBASIERRAS because with the last local elections in summer of 1999 many mayors left the association while new ones came into it and no information about the composition of AMBASIERRAS was provided to the researchers. Apart from mayors, there are two private economy representatives within AMBASIERRAS.

3. Objectives and Development of the Partnership

Considering that it was the LEADER programme that allowed the partnership to implement development projects in the area it could be argued that the partnership objectives and strategy would meet those linked to the LEADER programme. However, making both objectives coincide was not an artificial or forced task since LEADER was seen as the tool that addressed perfectly the previous ideas that ASAM had for development. The main objective of ASAM for LEADER I was to organise the local economic sectors also, to initiate specific projects which would have a demonstrative character in the area.

The planning process was not induced by the setting in progress of LEADER I but it had been developed during the several years of operation of ASAM. Therefore, it was not difficult for them to fulfil the LEADER measures (rural tourism, formation, handcrafting, etc.) with ideas and furthermore it was easy for them to be very detailed about the projects they were going to implement; *"I believe that we got the management of LEADER I because the Rural Development Plan that we produced and submitted to the Administrations was very concrete ... it presented specific actions that we wanted to implement within each of the measures"*.

In LEADER II the objectives and the strategy of the former partnership (ASAM) was forced to change in practical terms because of the emergence of the new wider partnership (ASAM-AMBASIERRAS) and, therefore, the variation in the number and type of partners. In this sense, the inclusion of an

that they had been fighting for during a decade with very limited success because of the lack of financial resources. With no specific direction or impositions from the regional authorities, ASAM prepared a Rural Development Plan for the area and the LEADER I programme was approved for ASAM to manage it. At the time, this was a quite rare situation since there did not seem to be many associations in the Spanish areas with the capacity to manage a programme with these characteristics. Therefore, the most usual formula used to be Local Authorities leading the process. However, ASAM had on its side the fact that it included public and private members and also they were well-known in the administration because of all their previous years of work.

During LEADER I the partnership was constituted by mayors and individuals from different sectors that constituted the Assembly and Directive Committee of ASAM, except for those members who were actively participating in the management of the programme and hence could not participate in the Directive Committee. The degree of involvement of these partners within the partnership was very high since they were moved by a personal commitment towards their area rather than by sector or personal interests. Not many new partners came into ASAM because of the lack of insistence of the side of the association but also because of the lack of interest by other actors in the area. In this sense, local authorities were also contacted but only a few responses were obtained even in terms of benefiting from the LEADER I funding. Also, because of their previous work in the area they had good relations with other bodies such as co-operatives or enterprises, but they did not become members of the partnership either. It seems that ASAM was not seen as a partnership where other local actors could take part, but as an association which had been working in the area for many years and that then had an important source of funding to implement projects.

By the end of LEADER I the scene had changed, local authorities had become aware of the programme, of the amount of money that it involved and also of the political advantages that this had. Some local authorities complained of the fact that during LEADER I information about the programme had not been disseminated around the whole area with the same intensity, but that the Mountain of France area had benefited more. Others complained of the fact that most of the LEADER investment had mainly benefited municipalities with a local council dominated by a particular political party. What came out from this critical situation was a new association (AMBASIERRAS) that included mostly local authorities of the Mountain of Béjar area. A confrontation of philosophy, views and interests became clear between AMBASSIERRAS and ASAM; on the one hand, AMBASSIERRAS was trying to make the LEADER II programme a "local authority business"; on the other hand, ASAM was trying to keep it as a "civil society business".

AMBASIERRAS submitted a LEADER II programme at the same time than ASAM presented its own. Both projects were approved and the two associations were called to come to an agreement in order to implement the

programme in the area. At this point the area itself assisted to the emergence of a new "partnership" which in practice would be solely concentrated in the management tasks of the LEADER programme or, in other words, in the LEADER projects to be funded.

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important number of Local Authorities within the partnership has implied to consideration of more "municipal" or local authority-induced projects with a not so marked "integrated" character. "... *with the intervention of politicians in LEADER II the programme is not making its best... many projects are only used (by politicians) for getting publicity and having a page in the newspapers*". In practice the situation has been that ASAM tries to keep implementing the development strategy initiated with LEADER I (and matured even earlier) but this strategy is disturbed by pressures on the side of AMBASIERRAS to include other type of projects with a more municipal character.

What we have here is a confrontation between two very different ideas of development; on the one hand, the approach of ASAM which aims to initiate an integrated and sustainable development process and, on the other hand, the view of AMBASIERRAS which represents those Mayors with a more restricted view of development and aiming to benefit from the LEADER funding in the short term rather than investing in projects leading to long-term and sustainable benefits. Given this situation the future of the partnership ASAM-AMBASIERRAS may depend more on external impositions or needs rather than on mutual agreement for co-operation, that is, the partnership may keep working together as long as this is a requisite for being recipient of external public funding; however, as soon as this funding disappears the continuity of the partnership may be seriously questioned.

4. Organisation and Operation of the Partnership

For LEADER I, with ASAM being the only recipient of the programme they used the structures that they already had as a non-profit association. Therefore, the Directive Committee of ASAM was the structure in charge of profiling the strategy and deciding about the implementation of project. Decisions adopted by the Directive Committee had to be ratified by the Assembly of Members of ASAM; in practice, most decisions were adopted within the Assembly of members rather than only in the Directive Committee because there was a reduced core of very involved people within the Assembly and meetings were operative.

Apart from these two structures ASAM established a Consultative Committee in order to involve other relevant bodies and actors in the development process of the area. This Committee did not have a decisive capacity but only consultative and it integrated several associations and institution with no formal links with ASAM, e.g. University.

Some of the most active and committed people of ASAM became the technical staff of the partnership during the implementation of LEADER I in order to work in the promotion of the different economic and social sectors that the partnership intended to address. Therefore, in LEADER I there was one project co-ordinator who was at the same time the Chairman of ASAM

and the Directive Committee (this situation was consulted with the Central Government and they accepted it) and two full-time staff; but also there was a group of 9 “animateurs” in charge of different sectors (tourism, organic agriculture, farming, environment, “municipal” formation, formation and training, publications, technical assistance to local authorities in environmental issues).

In LEADER II co-operation between ASAM and AMBASIERRAS was forced and a new partnership emerged for managing the programme. With this aim a Decision Committee was constituted with representatives from both parts, 9 on the side of ASAM and 11 on the side of AMBASIERRAS. The main function of this Committee was to promote LEADER II funded projects and to decide about the amount of funding (%) to be given to projects submitted to the partnership by private or public actors. On the other hand, no decisions seemed to take place in relation to the definition of a strategy for the area or the achievement of common objectives, etc.

Considering the “artificiality” of the situation which was created by the union of the two associations (ASAM and AMBASIERRAS) is it easy to understand the difficulties which emerged for creating consensus among the partners. From the beginning conflicts arose between the two parts within partnership meetings. AMBASIERRAS pretended that the period for the management of the LEADER II programme was divided in two so that each association would manage the programme in an independent way during two years. ASAM never supported this decision but they accepted it and kept managing the programme while a new Directive Committee was constituted paying attention to show a wide representation of the society. After the two years of management, the opposition of ASAM to divide the management of the programme was formally recognised at national level. AMBASIERRAS also recognised the convenience of leaving the staff of ASAM in charge of the day-to-day implementation of the programme since they have the experience to do it in an efficient way. However, a new Decision Committee including 11 representatives of AMBASIERRAS and 9 of ASAM was created. During LEADER II the staff working for the partnership were not as numerous as they were in LEADER I. The ASAM Chairman is still the project co-ordinator of the partnership while 3 other people that were also working during LEADER I kept their posts.

The main problem that the partnership faces when trying to reach consensus is the incapacity to develop common projects involving all the partnership area rather than each sector or municipality trying to get benefits for their areas (i.e. ASAM for the Mountain of France and AMBASIERRAS for the Mountain of Béjar). In practical terms, from LEADER I to LEADER II the type of projects may have varied in a significant way. *“As a philosophy LEADER I was better (than LEADER II) and funded more projects. LEADER II is more selective and the projects contribute to development in a lesser way...”*

In fact, the conflictive situation within the partnership may have been channeled by sharing the distribution of the type of projects that each side was willing to support. However, in practical terms the uneasy situation may

have diminished flexibility in the managing of the programme and the initiation of some projects.

Financial resources that the partnership managed to mobilise during the implementation of the two LEADER programmes vary in an important way. On the one hand, it is significant to mention the greater input of the regional government in financial terms during LEADER II. On the other hand, it is remarkable the lesser investment on the side of the local administrations even when a higher number of Local Authorities are formally represented within the partnership and hence they are theoretically more involved than during LEADER I (see table 1).

Table 1 - Investment distribution in LEADER I and LEADER II

<i>Source of funding</i>	<i>LEADER I (Euro)</i>	<i>LEADER II (Euro)</i>
EU LEADER	1.972.135	3.402.651
National	217.395	135.093
Regional	370.995	726.008
Local	717.790	415.224
Private	1.476.589	2.900.489
TOTAL	4.754.904	7.579.465

The partnership takes an active role in the Spanish Network of LEADER Groups, in fact the project co-ordinator of the partnership and president of ASAM is the Secretary of this Network and has an active participation in the activities (negotiations, organisation of the groups, etc.) developed by the Network. Transnational co-operation which is promoted among the LEADER partnerships is seen as something quite complicated because they believe that not all groups are willing to transfer their know-how. Relationships with other Spanish LEADER partnerships are good because of its membership of the Spanish Network and also they have some joint projects with other groups in the region.

The ASAM partnership passed the LEADER I final evaluation and also it was selected with other LEADER I partnership in Spain for an audit implemented by the Agriculture Department of Central Government. For the LEADER II implementation the partnership (ASAM-AMBASIERRAS) will also be evaluated. In an informal way, the partnership (ASAM and ASAM-AMBASIERRAS) does not have any monitoring or internal evaluation mechanism.

5. Partnership and Local Development Outputs

All the previous informal action of the partnership and the later eight-year period of implementation of the LEADER I and LEADER II programmes allows us to identify some conclusions about the outputs attribut-

able to the partnership operation in the area. However, it must be acknowledged that LEADER II and the need for a new partnership in charge of managing the programme broke the continuity of the process that ASAM had initiated many years ago and had strengthened with the existence of the LEADER I funding. What this means is that outputs may have been more visible if ASAM had implemented its strategy during the whole period rather than being "forced" to introduce new views into its strategy or taking a different point of view; if a development strategy for the area had been developed since the beginning including the views from all the actors and bodies in the area.

Since the beginning the ASAM partnership has worked very closely to local people and one of their main aims has been to organise all the different economic sectors in the area. Leaving aside the economic implications of this fact the social implications may be varied, for example, to include within people's attitudes some culture of co-operation and group organisation. However, despite the efforts made by the partnership in order to mobilise people it may be the case that there is a fundamental problem of attitudes which needs to be progressively changed. *"During the 80s there was a period of social activism and a lot of associations emerged but now, associations are disappearing because people are not interested in participating and also there is not political support to this kind of movement"*. It is important to consider that the conflict between ASAM and AMBASIERRAS was not good publicity for the programme among local people and many people became disappointed with the new situation after the expectations generated with LEADER I.

As a result of trying to organise the economic sectors, in 1994 a hand-crafter association was created also a rural tourism association and more recently a farmers association. On the agricultural side, the partnership (ASAM) is placing a lot of effort in creating "2nd level" co-operatives (cooperatives of cooperatives) for different local products (cherries and other fruits) and modernising other small co-operatives (olive oil and wine). In this sense the outputs are important since some co-operatives which were in very precarious conditions and almost going to disappear are now producing quality products and increasing in a significant way their benefits. The partnership is also working with the ham industry of *Guijuelo*; they are trying to add value to the high quality product that they already produce by introducing new forms of marketing and selling at the place of production.

It could be said that results can be more easily appreciated among structures such as co-operatives and enterprises but it is more difficult to work with sectors organised around an association. The hand-crafter association which emerged in 1994 is not currently as active as it used to be during the initial years perhaps because of the lack of a leader able to mobilise and initiate new actions. However, it is important the great impulse that has been given to this sector since many workshops that were about to close down are now increasing their production and employing new workers. Another relevant fact is that a new association with a more marked commercial character

has emerged and includes some of the hand-crafters who were initially included in the former association but that now have more ambitious plans. In a different way, a new rural tourism association has derived from a former one, which includes rural tourism businesses that do not need to fulfil so many requirements for being part of the association as in the former. The association which integrates goat farmers in the area is still in a very early stage but it seems that they came together because of a very clear need (to face an illness which affects goats) and apart from this, other actions will not be easy. In any case, it is important to consider the social implications of these experiences since new structures are emerging by the own initiative of producers.

Within the Spanish context, an already constituted local non-profit association (i.e. with thematic or area objectives) becoming the solely recipient of a LEADER programme and managing such an important amount of money is a quite unusual situation. Even when most of the partnership adopt the legal status of a non-profit association, initially the most common case is the initiative coming from the public administration (regional or local) which encourages Local Authorities to come together and constitute a partnership with other social and economic actors. During LEADER I, negotiations for obtaining a LEADER II programme were mainly between the national government and the groups while the regional government did not have much capacity to decide. In LEADER II, regional governments were given a stronger voice in the selection of the partnership and they may had been pressured by Local Authorities in order to give them more control or participation in the programme. Furthermore, Regional Authorities may have also looked at the programme as an important tool for political control and the way to do this was through Local Authorities. In any case, we must admit that an association managing such an important amount of public money may in fact be quite hard to assimilate by Local Authorities in the sense that they could feel as if they were losing power.

At a different level, LEADER II brought AMBASIERRAS into scene and this necessarily implied a change in the relations of ASAM with Local Authorities in the sense that now they are all included in the LEADER II partnership. Relations were not easy initially and even now, it may still be a bit early to evaluate what this relationship is and its consequences. However, it must be acknowledged that Local Authorities have progressively changed their views of ASAM and are now accepting their advice for projects initiation. Relationship with Regional Authorities is good in general terms however, sometimes political compromises make it difficult to reach some agreements. In any case, it is remarkable that the degree of implication of the regional government is now higher than during LEADER I when they looked at LEADER I as something coming from Europe and therefore not much related to them.

The previous background of ASAM as a non-profit association may have marked the character of the relations between ASAM and many Local

Authorities during LEADER I and II; that is, ASAM has often manifested a claiming and opposing voice to Local Authorities in relation to environmental and cultural subjects. Also, there has been on the side of Local Authorities a misunderstanding of the philosophy of the programme and of integrated development in general, and a difficulty to accept the fact that a civil society association could promote development and manage public funding.

Annex 1 - ASAM Ambasierras Rural Partnership - Table with statistical data and socio-economic indicators

<i>Data</i>	<i>Local level</i>	<i>Nuts 3 level</i>	<i>National level</i>
<i>1. Demographic characteristics</i>			
1.1 Total resident population	48.322	349.550	39.852.651
1.1.1 Resident population 0-14 (%)	16.23	13.3	15.5
1.1.2 Resident population 15-64 (%)	60.7	65.4	68.3
1.1.3 Resident population 65 and > (%)	23	21.2	16.3
1.2 Demographic variations (last 10-20 years)			
1.3 Proportion young/aged (0-24/65 and >)			
1.4 Level of education (graduates/pop.24 and >)			
<i>2. Labour market indicators:</i>			
2.1 Activity rate (% active pop. on total resident population)		42	41
2.2 Occupation rate (% occupied on total resident population)		32	33
2.3 Unemployment rate (% unemployed on active population)		23	19
<i>3. Occupational structure</i>			
3.1 Agriculture (% on total occupied)		6.2	8
3.2 Industry (% on total occupied)		22.5	20.05
3.3 Services (% on total occupied)		61	61.6
<i>4. Structural characteristics of economic sectors</i>			
4.1 Farms per used agricultural land (UAL)	6.537	26.018	2.325.873
4.1.1 Farms < 2 HA (% on total farms)	56.2	37	28
4.1.2 Farms 2-50 HA (% on total farms)	39.5	47.6	65
4.1.3 Farms >50 HA (% on total farms)	4.3	15.3	7
4.2 Used Agricultural Land (UAL) (HA)	88.256	862.484	25.630.128

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Annex 2 - ASAM Ambasierras Rural Partnership - Diagram of the organisational structure

