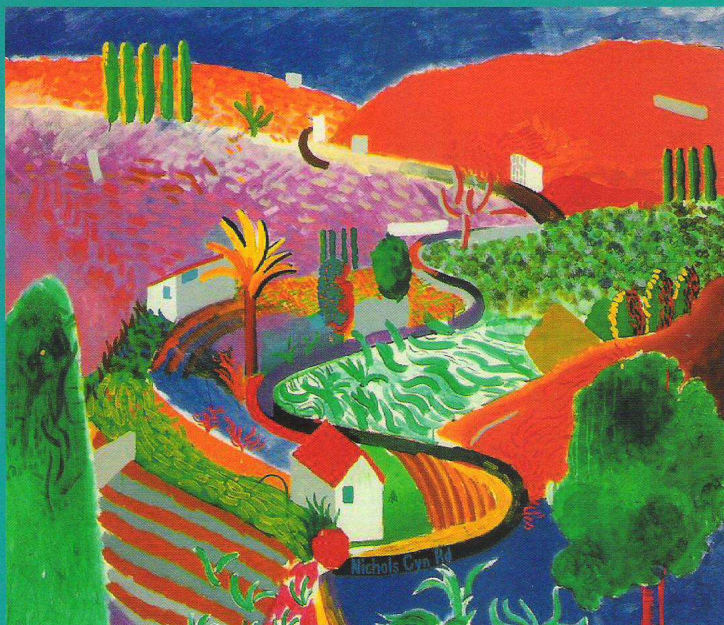


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THE PRACTICE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS IN EUROPE

24 Case Studies in Six European Countries

PRIDE Research Report



Edited by Ada Cavazzani and Malcolm Moseley

Rubbettino

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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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Aprodervi Rural Partnership - Spain

Joan Noguera, Javier Esparcia, Almudena Buciega

Main features of the partnership context

<i>Surface (km²)</i>	1.483
<i>Population density (pop/km²)</i>	7
<i>Resident population</i>	10.354
<i>Number of municipalities</i>	7
<i>Altitude of the territory (metres min-max)</i>	300/1601

1. Context

The partnership is located within the *Cáceres* NUT III province which belong to the *Extremadura* region. This is one of the most lagging areas in Spain. It is located in the South West of Spain, between *Andalucía* in the South and *Castilla-León* in the North. It builds up a territory of 41.634 km² with a total population of 1.070.244 inhabitants in 1996. It is, therefore, a low population density (25,7 inhabitants per square km). This has been, and still is to some extent, the original settlement area of an important number of migrants to other regions of Spain (namely Catalonia, Madrid or Valencia) and to Europe and America. The lack of a well developed economic structure at the regional level has traditionally forced the local population to migrate. During the last 30 years, the total population of the region has reduced by 10%. Unemployment (27% unemployment rate in 1997) and a traditional economic structure (18% of active population employed in agriculture in 1997) are the basis of the low regional *per capita* income (72,6% of the Spanish average in 1996). Industry has a very weak weight, only agri-food industry has some importance.

Extremadura is not a well structured territory having very few urban centres. Most of the population is concentrated in some big centres (*Cáceres*, *Badajoz*, *Mérida*, *Almendralejo* and *Trujillo*). The network of communication infrastructures is deficient in relation to the intra-regional structure.

The partnership area (*Villuercas*) has traditionally been part of a broader area called *Villuercas-Ibores*. This is a historical and natural area (*comarca*)

which was “divided” when part of it (Ibores) became recipient of a LEADER programme while the rest (Villuercas) benefited later of a PRODER programme.

The area integrates 7 municipalities. These can be divided into 2 groups depending on their size; three of them are over 2.000 inhabitants while another three are under 1.000 inhabitants (the remaining one has about 1.600 inhabitants). This difference in size causes other types of differences in terms of power relation and representation in the county institutions (e.g. Mancomunidad – group of local authorities).

An important part of the population is employed in services such as restaurants and hotels; this is, among other reasons, due to the fact that one of the villages (Guadalupe) is a famous tourist centre which attracts an important number of visitants. Local resources have a strong economic potential but there are still very few industries transforming them into elaborated products.

There has been a feeling of peripherality and marginality amongst local people and in relation to other areas within the same region. This feeling has motivated some resignation and a culture of “self-sufficiency” at the same time. In close relation, a dominance of local interests and individualism have been important features that only recently are being changed on the basis of an increased awareness of the importance of common co-operation in order to achieve common goals.

2. *Origin and Composition of the Partnership*

In the 1980s the Villuercas-Ibores area was classified by law as a “Area of Mountainous Agriculture”. This made it possible to benefit from the very first rural development policy formulated from an integrated approach. As a consequence, an exhaustive study of the area was undertaken in order to implement a development strategy. This Program for Development and Management of Mountain Areas Resources (PROPRM) was produced by an external consultancy firm but the proposal was never implemented due to the lack of support from Central Government. The document produced was not considered when in 1991 part of the area (Ibores) joined other municipalities and applied for a LEADER I programme. In this context, the municipalities of the Villuercas area came together and constituted a *Mancomunidad* (formal structure of municipalities), its main purpose being the promotion of tourism in the area. The constitution of this structure was a tough process, showing tremendous difficulties to reach agreement in decisions and a cooperative mentality. This was mainly due to the prevalence of individualist and the strong views of some Mayors. In 1996 the *Mancomunidad* made an effort (especially in economic terms) to apply for Phase A of LEADER II (capacity building) but their application was rejected and discouragement became evident.

When PRODER was launched Mayors were quite reticent to apply again for a new programme. However three technicians (being one of them a Local

Development Agent in the area) made a proposal to the *Mancomunidad*. According to this proposal, they would produce a rural development plan for free in order to apply for PRODER with the condition that if the programme was ever approved the partnership would employ them as managers of the program. Initially, Mayors were a little loary but they accepted the proposal because "it would not cost them anything". All three technicians had some skills and experience in rural development and they produced a very exhaustive diagnosis of the territory and a development plan which was considered as "one of the best plans in the region".

The Rural Development Plan was approved by the regional government and the area became recipient of a PRODER program. This LEADER-like initiative brought to the area an amount on public money coming from different sources (see Table 1). The process of constitution of the partnership was leaded by the technical staff that produced the development plan. They and the Mayors contacted all the representatives of non-profit associations and the economic sectors to explain to them the process and the programme that was going to take place in the area. In that initial moment, "people were receptive but they did not believe much of what they were told". On 23 October 1996 the seven municipalities constituted a non-profit association called "Association for the Promotion and Rural Development of the Villuercas Area" (APRODERVI). There was some controversy about where to locate the technical/management office of the partnership. This is always a conflictive issue because the presence of this office may give certain dynamism to the village where it locates, allowing for better dissemination of the partnership programme there and hence favouring the emergence of project proposals. The technical office was finally located in *Cañamero*.

Table 1 - Sources of funding of the partnership (1996-1999)

SOURCES	ECUS
PEOGA	2.467.649
FEDER	2.472.390
UE	1.990.100
CENTRAL GOVERNMENT	105.123
REGIONAL GOVERNMENT	314.108
LOCAL GOVERNMENT	400.339
PRIVATE INVESTMENT	2.130.370
TOTAL	4.940.040

The partnership integrates more than 200 members in its Assembly, but only 15 of them are included within the Directive Committee, the truly decision-making body of the partnership. Moreover, only those representatives of collectives or municipalities have the right to vote in the assembly. This counts for some 30 members. The remaining 202 members of the Assembly have voice but not vote. It was decided that each village would have

2 representatives (one public / one private) within the Directive Committee plus one representative of the *Mancomunidad* who was later replaced by a representative of a financial entity. Being the main initiators, Local Authorities are the core partners and they participated directly in the selection of the non-public partners; in fact, the real process consisted of Mayors selecting the non-public partners by their own criteria rather than leaving this election to the members of the respective sectors they were meant to represent (e.g. tourism, agriculture, etc.). In practice, what this means is that non-public partners are within the partnership on an individual and municipal basis and they do not encourage feedback between the partnership and the sector they represent.

Non-profit associations are also represented within the partnership but their situation is the same that the one of entrepreneurs, i.e. lack of feedback between representatives within the partnership and those people they represent. Furthermore, despite the existence of a very high number of associations in the area the degree of co-ordination and co-operation between them is extremely low and this makes very difficult any attempt for common proposals.

Civil society is free to become part of the Assembly of the partnership by paying a small monthly fee. However, the main problem is that in reality, the Assembly allows a very limited involvement since meetings only take place once a year. Initially the staff of the partnership included the views of local people within the Rural Development Plan but during the implementation of the partnership programme the involvement of local people in these terms is not taking place. *“Local authorities must play a crucial role but they lead the process too much... civil society should get more involved. There are mechanisms for participation even when they are informal”*. Whether because of a failure of the mechanisms for involvement or because of a lack of interest among local people to get involved, the truth is that local debate and implication are absent in all this process.

3. Objectives and Development of the Partnership

The objectives of the development strategy for the area were defined in relation to the findings of the diagnosis study made by the staff of the partnership and to the action lines and funding measures established by the PRODER programme. In order to be eligible for PRODER funding the partnership had to create a Rural Development Plan. This is a requirement which may be accomplished with varying degrees of precision since for many cases it is seen as a formal requirement rather than as a necessary exercise for the development of the area. In this case, the staff of APRODERVI elaborated a very exhaustive document which shows a good methodology leading to a good analysis of the local context.

In the first instance, the idea that partners (especially Mayors) had of development differed in an important way from the philosophy of integrated

and sustainable development; in fact, once the programme was approved they thought of dividing the total amount of money they had received among the 7 municipalities without any other development criteria. From the beginning the role played by the staff of the partnership has been crucial; on the one hand they elaborated the strategy for the area, but they also took part in the dissemination of the programme among the communities and in the constitution of the partnership.

The actions that the partnership implements and supports are framed within a series of measures or action lines which are determined by the PRODER program. Each measure of the program is given an amount of money and the role of the partnership is to initiate or support projects which may be included within any of these measures by meeting a specific criteria. Action lines are, (i) Valorisation of the agrarian and forestry potential; (ii) support to SMEs, hand-crafting and services activities; (iii) support to tourism investment in rural areas: local tourism; (iv) Valorisation of the rural heritage, and development of agrarian communities; (v) services to business in the rural areas; (vi) support to tourism investment in rural areas: agri-tourism. Training is not included within PRODER and hence it has not allocated funding. However, in the case of APRODERVI, the partnership offers formation and training to the local communities by getting funding from other sources.

The potential promoters directly address funding applications to the partnership office; there are not intermediaries such as Local Development Agents (LDA). There is an annual call for the submission of projects proposals for each of the action lines of the programme which are distributed throughout the whole year. The distribution of spending of the total budget stated as follow: 20% for the first year (1997), 50% for the second year (1998) and 30% for the third year (1999).

The main short-term objective of the partnership is to benefit from the next development programme (i.e. PRODER II) which will be operative until 2006. This programme and hence funding is seen as the way forward to better long-term planning and selection of good projects. Funding dependency seems to be a key issue determining the continuity of this partnership; local authorities have very limited financial and human resources and they would not be able to lead the process if external (EU, national or regional) funding disappeared.

4. Organisation and Operation of the Partnership

As a non-profit association the partnership is required to have at least an Assembly of Members and an Directive Committee. The Assembly is the general structure that includes anyone (private or collective body) with an interest in the partnership strategy and willing to participate in the process. The Assembly meets once a year and it decides upon issues such as: (i)

selecting the members of the Directive Committee; (ii) agreeing the functioning rules of the partnership; (iii) signing collaboration plans with other bodies; (iv) debating the issues proposed by the Directive Committee; (v) approving the annual financial plans. A main function of the Assembly is to be a debate forum of the different views in the area and a place where sectoral (economic and social) representatives would emerge from a collective (by sectors) decision. In practice, the Assembly is a non-operative structure which has no power to influence decisions adopted by the Directive Committee, and which has not been able (or has not been allowed) to place within the Directive Committee sectoral representatives on a real democratic way.

The high number of private individuals and entrepreneurs who are members of the Assembly are so because they have got funding from the partnership or they intend to apply for it for their particular project; however, they are not really aware of the role they could potentially play within the partnership. For the next period of operation (e.g. PRODER II) the staff of the partnership aims to modify this situation and turn the Assembly into a more active structure able to debate and select their own representatives for the Directive Committee.

The Directive Committee is the core structure of the partnership and its functions are to lead the activities implemented by the partnership, to control the administrative and economic matters and to decide about which projects may be funded by the partnership. It is this later task what takes most of the time, and very often most of the interest of partners within the Directive Committee meetings. In fact, given that there has hardly been time to make a conscious selection of projects because of the time restrictions linked to the PRODER programme, it is fair to believe that not much time for a proper discussion about strategy has existed within the Directive Committee.

In its Standing Rules the partnership establishes another figure, Sectoral Committees aiming to structure the different local economy sectors (agriculture and farming; associations; industry and handcrafting; co-operatives; environment; urbanism and tourism; SMEs; commerce). In practice, these structures have never been set in progress and it seems that not much interest and effort were placed towards making them exist and function “... *for the writing of the standing rule we used models from other partnerships and this is why we included this figure... however it has not been possible to put them into practice...*”. A lack of interest of the partnership, the limited time available for the staff to spend time on this, and other structural difficulties may explain the absence of these structures which could have been a very useful tool in order to achieve a greater involvement of the different social and economic sectors.

The staff working for the partnership are a key element within the organisational structure. It integrates three qualified people who are in charge of the day-to-day implementation of the decisions adopted by the Directive Committee at the same time as proposing new ones. The management team

had proved experience in rural and local development working for other partnerships and Local Authorities and this was reflected in the quality of the Rural Development Plan that they produced. Also, this experience was also shown in the way they went through the process of constitution of the partnership and dissemination of information about the programme.

As it has been said, decisions are adopted within the Directive Committee of the partnership where each municipality has 2 representatives. However there are other structures or agents whose presence is not so explicit within the decision-making structure but that also influence decisions within the partnership in an important degree. On the one hand, there is the Regional Government which initially participated in the allocation of budget for each of the measures and hence guided the strategy of the partnership; also, during the implementation of the programme they provided the partnership with a set criteria for the selection of projects and supervised whether the projects met this criteria. This gives the partnership a top-down profile even when "*... it is appreciated the high degree of autonomy that the regional government has given to us as well as the support that we keep receiving from them*". On the other hand, it is the staff (management team) working for the partnership which guides and assesses the partnership. When partners within the Directive Committee decide upon supporting one project, this decision is made on the basis of a report and a presentation made of that project by the project co-ordinator. In general terms, the Directive Committee has followed the "indications" given by the staff of the partnership with some exceptions where "political" criteria have prevailed. This high presence of the staff of the partnership within the decision-making process can be seen with some suspicion by some local people who believe that Assembly and Directive Committee should be the structures with the higher capacity to decide.

In any case, the role that the management team played along all the process of initiation and development of the partnership has been crucial, especially for creating consensus among the different Mayors. It was recognised by one of the Mayors that "*... if the technicians had not been there we (the mayors) would have ended up smacking each other!*". This is because many of these Mayors thought about the programme as a source of funding from which they individually wanted to get the bigger better part. In fact, it was stated from the beginning that apart from the specific projects for the promotion of development Local Authorities would get typical municipal projects (e.g. improvement of local infrastructure) from the PRODER programme. Local interests are sometimes present in the Mayors minds, to some extent understandable since they need to respond to those in their respective villages who voted them in. Once initial confrontations were over, partnership meetings have taken place within a dynamic consensus where most decisions have been reached by agreement. It must be acknowledged that collaboration between the seven Local authorities within the *Mancomunidad* also contributed to encourage this willingness to cooperate.

The partnership concentrated their efforts in supporting and, in some cases encouraging (pro-active), projects coming from individuals or entities and framed within the PRODER measures specified above. The distribution of the total budget among the different sectors by the end of the programme can be seen in Table 2. Dissemination made by the partnership about its programme involved all municipalities in the area; however, the degrees of response obtained from the local communities have varied from village to village. Those places which have submitted more project proposals to the partnership are the biggest villages while the smaller have registered a more reduced response. The logic of this is quite clear; the bigger the village, the more entrepreneurs exist. In order to correct this normal trend, perhaps the staff of the partnership should have dedicated more efforts to encourage people in these smaller villages and even present their proposals in order to be adopted by people there.

Table 2 - *Public funding allocated to the partnership (1996-1999)*

<i>MEASURES</i>	<i>PRODER funding (Ecus)</i>	
	<i>EU</i>	<i>Public administrations</i>
Valorisation of the rural heritage, and development of agrarian communities (projects of local authorities)	109.057	63.509
Valorisation of the rural heritage, and development of agrarian communities (other projects)	134.685	117.499
Support to tourism investment in rural areas: agri-tourism	265.346	88.449
Support to tourism investment in rural areas: rural tourism	541.804	180.601
Support to SMEs, hand-crafting and services activities	167.603	55.868
Valorisation of the agrarian and forestry potential	390.205	130.069
TOTAL	1.990.100	819.570

Networking is being mostly developed by the staff of the partnership and it mainly takes place with other rural partnerships (LEADER and PRODER) in the region. The management team meets once a year with the other PRODER partnerships in the region in order to celebrate working journeys and learn from each other.

To date (July 2000), no formal evaluation to the partnership functioning and actions has taken place. It is however relevant to mention the self-evaluation process that the staff of the partnership is undertaking with the support of an external consultancy, in order to know the degree of effectiveness in the day-to-day management. The main purpose of this exercise is to optimise the management system and to develop a monitoring system for the functioning of the partnership.

5. Partnership and Local Development Outputs

Outputs that may be derived from the actions initiated and implemented by the partnership need to be considered with some reservation since they are

conditioned by a series of circumstances, for example, the time deadlines imposed by the PRODER programme. A lack of good planning and the acceptance of most of the projects which arrived to the partnership office without paying much attention to whether they met the integrated development criteria or not are the consequences of this time restrictions, and what determines the type of outputs achieved. On the other hand, there is the sheer youth of the partnership (3 years) and hence the difficulty for being accurate about its outputs, especially the qualitative ones.

Economic outputs are those more clearly identified whilst social and institutional outputs take longer time to make them evident since they are results of longer-term processes. Firstly, it is important to mention the amount of private investment that the partnership has managed to mobilise in the area (see table 1). Also, economic outputs of the partnership operation are shown in table 3.

Table 3 - *Economic outputs of the programme*

INDICATORS	1999	1997-1999
Total number of jobs created	86	112
Total full time jobs	63	65
Men	39	41
Women	24	24
Total part-time jobs	33	47
Men	18	25
Women	15	22
New businesses created	32	32
New local associations/organisations	2	2
Employment consolidation	33	33
Men	22	22
Women	11	11
Tourist accommodation places	477	477

As it can be seen the majority of the economic results obtained by the partnership were achieved during the last year of operation of the partnership within the PRODER programme. What this shows is the normal delay between the time in which a process starts and the time in which its effects show.

Social outputs can not be glimpsed from the partnership actions and strategy. The partnership has made very little effort to organise and structure the social and economic sectors; for example, they never organised the sectoral commissions mentioned in their standing rules. Nevertheless, some attempts are taking place in this direction, for example with the tourism sector, but it seems that more guidelines and supervision by some of the staff of the partnership would be needed in order to make this structure really operative.

Working with non-profit associations has not been an easy task; a programme guided by the staff of the partnership managed to involve a high number of associations from all the area which met in periodic meetings during a whole year. But the initiative did not come to a happy end because of the difficulties for initiating concrete actions.

Involvement and participation on the side of local communities has been, in general, quite reduced. In fact, some Mayors rise a specific complaint about the sole involvement of local people in terms of submitting projects in order to get funding rather than participating more in a debate about the development of the area. However, it seems that the partnership has not managed to disseminate among local people the idea of the partnership as a group of private and public interlocutors and, in fact, it seems that people identify very clearly the office of the partnership with its staff and the *Mancomunidad* while the knowledge about the partnership as such and its functions is much more reduced.

On the other hand it is difficult to know whether the partnership has managed to create a sense of a place among the people in the area. People are aware of pertaining to the Villuercas-Ibores area as a historical territory. However the idea is growing of being 'part' of a more reduced and local territory which is the Villuercas area (partnership area). Common cultural or economic projects carried out during last years have contributed substantially to increase the local identity. Furthermore, this growing sense of the Villuercas place is more felt between Mayors who also feel more confident about the position of their area within the regional sphere and when it comes to negotiating with the regional authorities.

It is difficult to link these outputs to the mere existence of the partnership. Most processes respond to the existence of a source of funding such as PRODER. It would not be fair to attribute the current co-operation and collaboration between the Mayors to the emergence of the partnership since this co-operation was previously initiated in the *Mancomunidad*; however, it must be admitted the precariousness of that co-operation that has been reinforced since the constitution of the partnership. Collaboration between public and private partners is assessed by all those involved as a very positive aspect. However, given the weak influence of non-public partners within the partnership it seems that this new formula needs further development and interest from all parts. Also, very often local interests prevail over wider interests and this must be overcome within the partnership. It seems that the greater benefit which the arrival of the PRODER programme, and hence the emergence of the partnership, has brought to the area is the chance to have a group of qualified people providing these municipalities with technical support in development issues. This is one of the most valuable resources for development and Mayors are aware of this. However, they also acknowledge that external investment is needed in order to maintain this technical structure since municipal budgets are quite restricted and could not support this spending.

Annex 1 - *Aprodervi 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	11.282	405.616	39.852.651
1.1.1 Resident population 0-14 (%)	13.4	16.3	15.5
1.1.2 Resident population 15-64 (%)	55.5	64.8	68.3
1.1.3 Resident population 65 and > (%)	30.9	18.9	16.3
1.2 Demographic variations (last 10-20 years)			
1.3 Proportion young/aged (0-24/65 and >)	44.9		
1.4 Level of education (graduates/pop.24 and >)	271		
<i>2. Labour market indicators:</i>			
2.1 Activity rate (% active pop. on total resident population)	55	39	41
2.2 Occupation rate (% occupied on total resident population)	21	29	33
2.3 Unemployment rate (% unemployed on active population)	3,7	25	19
<i>3. Occupational structure</i>			
3.1 Agriculture (% on total occupied)	9.4	15.6	8
3.2 Industry (% on total occupied)	12.5	8.7	20.1
3.3 Services (% on total occupied)	67.7	59.1	61.6
<i>4. Structural characteristics of economic sectors</i>			
4.1 Farms per used agricultural land (UAL)	4.612	54.072	2.325.873
4.1.1 Farms < 2 HA (% on total farms)	29	66	28
4.1.2 Farms 2-50 HA (% on total farms)	137	27	65
4.1.3 Farms >50 HA (% on total farms)	4511	7	7
4.2 Used Agricultural Land (UAL)	188.331 has	1.318.861	25.630.128 (Hc)
4.3 Enterprises (total of industrial and services sectors)	820		
4.3.1 % Industry	11.8		
4.3.2 % Energy	0		
4.3.3 % Construction	12.9		
4.3.4 % Trade	35.8		
4.3.5 % Transports and communications	1.5		
4.3.6 % Financial markets	2.1		
4.3.7 % Other services	35.6		

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Annex 2 - *Aprodervi Rural Partnership - Diagram of the organisational structure*

