

REVITALIZING TERRITORIES VIA SOCIAL AND DIGITAL INNOVATION





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The adverse phenomenon of depopulation in rural areas in Spain currently affects 13% of the country. More than 1,350 Spanish towns are now considered to be in scarcely populated regions with fewer than 8 inhabitants/km².

The contributions from different parties that work in the rural environment by way of ideas and disruptive projects working on the ground are of vital importance in attracting new population.

For this publication presented in Presura, the Fair for the Repopulation of Empty Spain, we have chosen a dozen cases of good practices to reactivate our villages' environs via social and digital innovation in various areas of Spain so as to motivate others and act as an example for them.

We understand that revitalization in rural areas via social and digital innovation helps encourage people to remain in or come to an attractive rural environment that generates wealth and quality employment, leading to integrated, broad-based development.

Women and youth are a fundamental part of this process, since they are often the main ones who return to the rural environment. Their skills and liveliness will leave their mark in a range of activities being carried out to motivate people and create networks for action.

The success stories in this publication clearly show the growing trend in the generational renewal and the empowerment of women, in contrast to an elderly, masculine environment.

Another essential feature of this process should not be forgotten: digitisation coupled with information and communication technologies and communication technology, which make repopulation of rural areas easier.

National institutions are committed to tackling rural depopulation via a Government Agreement involving all of civil society with active participation from people from rural areas in order to draw up a Strategy for the Demographic Challenge.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, present at the second Presura event, shares the aim of making scarcely populated rural areas attractive places to live.

Presura is an initiative that continues to attract entrepreneurs from around the country to discover that the rural environment is a world full of opportunities to launch their ideas. This publication with good practices to revitalize rural areas aims to enrich the fair's philosophy.

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PULLING THE WOOL TO KEEP LIVING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

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Citizens' movement against rural depopulation

Valverde de Burguillos wishes to awaken so as not to fall into oblivion due to depopulation.

The townspeople, the university community and the town council itself make up the citizens' platform Activa Valverde, which launches strategies to staunch emigration, gain new population and create jobs in its agriculture and culture.

The people of this town in the province of Badajoz want to contribute their little bit to halt the trend of rural depopulation, an adverse phenomenon currently affecting 13% of Spain. For two years they have been working on a platform in which the residents of Valverde de Burguillos link up with the town council, which in turn helps them link up with official institutions.

Work is done to raise awareness among the townspeople as regards rural depopulation while at the same time fostering their participation to tackle it

The University of Seville is working with them for new local governance, taking students from different specialist fields to the town in order to use some aspect of the architecture, anthropology, culture or agroecology around the town as the subject for their master's or bachelor's final year projects. The talent of young people who emigrated is also used online via the Activa Valverde platform, which works to increase the population by providing affordable housing, recuperating traditional horticulture and raising awareness.

When did you realize that steps had to be taken to tackle the town's depopulation?

Some time ago in 2011, when a meeting galvanized us to analyse the causes and consequences of the depopulation. In just over twenty years we've lost half the population. Moreover, most of the population is over 65 years of age. Since then we have been looking at working through a citizens' platform, which over the past two years has been addressing strategies to combat the problem. Activa Valverde is well on the way in the process of becoming an association.

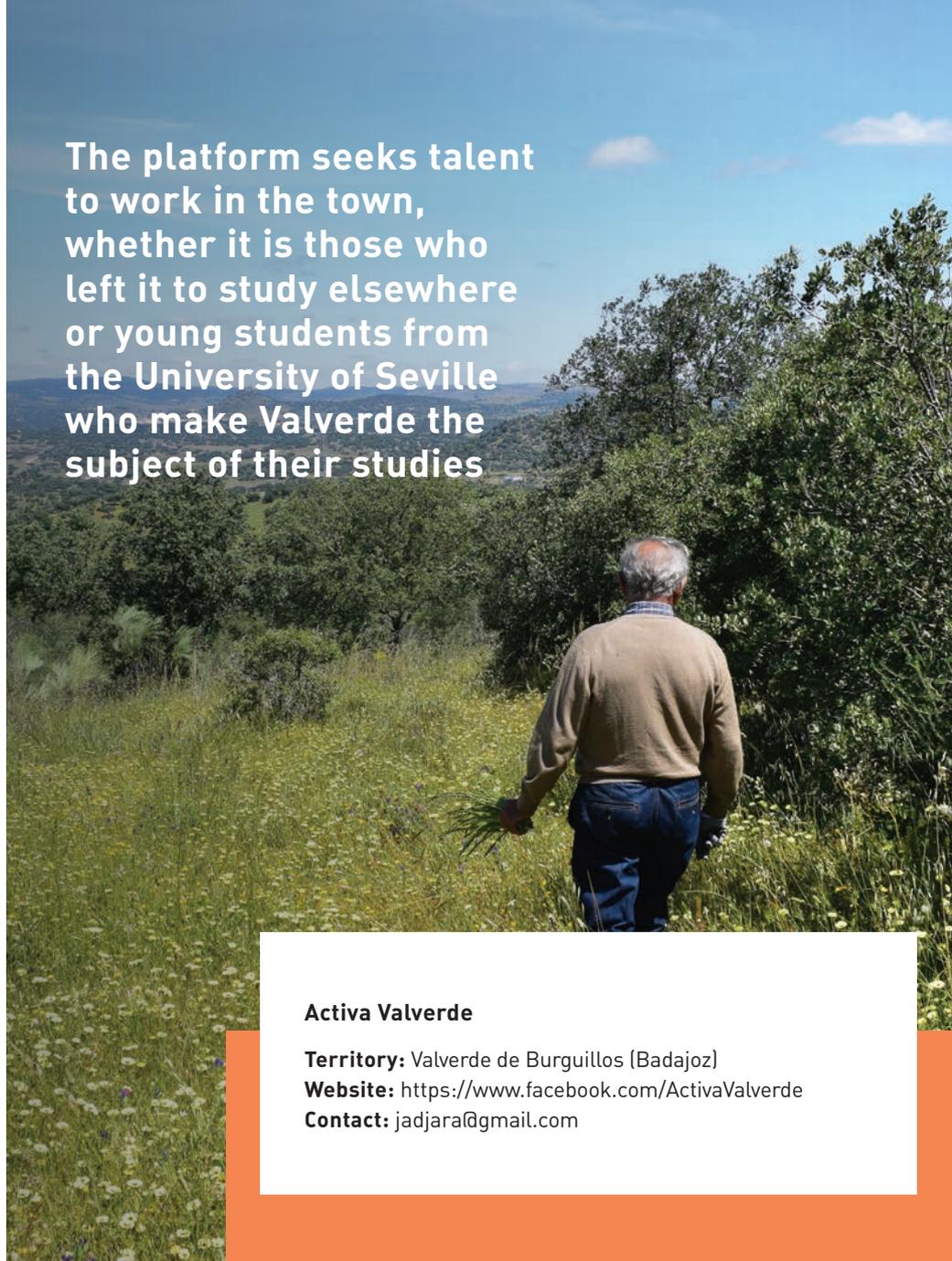
What are the main aims considered in the platform's strategy?

The first is for people not to leave the town, whether young or old. What I call the third emigration is taking place: those who went to the city in the sixties have returned, now retired, but they have to go again due to the lack of geriatric residences. The solution involves providing a home-care service, which requires adequate funding. The other aim in our strategy is to attract new population.

What work is being done to increase the population?

While we're raising awareness among the townspeople about the effects of depopulation, we are urging them to make housing and work spaces available for rent to newcomers, or to offer them agricultural allotments and market gardens that are currently abandoned.





The platform seeks talent to work in the town, whether it is those who left it to study elsewhere or young students from the University of Seville who make Valverde the subject of their studies

Activa Valverde

Territory: Valverde de Burguillos (Badajoz)

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/ActivaValverde>

Contact: jadjara@gmail.com

The townspeople's platform is backed by institutional support from the town council and the University of Seville's Department of Social Anthropology, which has encouraged students to locate the subject of their studies in our town, thereby raising appreciation for its traditions and cultural heritage. The university has been organizing training workshops for the townspeople to educate them about a new form of local governance.

Only by being aware of the wealth we have can we attract new population, and that begins by simply becoming familiar with our town.

The people of Valverde de Burguillos wanted their children to go to university, which meant them leaving. In Activa Valverde there is an online version of the platform that acts as a meeting point for them, in the hope that the talent will return, work in the town and raise new generations here.



Youth learning, cooperating and revitalizing their environs

Young Rural Motivators (Jóvenes Dinamizadores Rurales) is a LEADER cooperation project carried out by Aragonese Local Action Groups that have joined forces to achieve a common goal: to boost initiatives via mutual education and exchanging experience.

It was driven and launched by 14 Local Action Groups as part of the LEADER measure for the 2014-2020 Aragon Rural Development Programme, co-financed by the Aragonese Government's Rural Development and Sustainability General Directorate and the European Union's EAFRD programme.

The project is based on the work in the network made up of young people between 14 and 35 years of age and by professionals from the sphere of youth and rural development. Geographically, its activity covers 17 of Aragon's 31 counties ("comarcas").

In the near future the Local Action Groups hope to broaden their work to other counties in Aragon and make the leap to national cooperation in order to share their experience with young people from other regions.

Leader implements rural development through Local Action Groups where rural society is represented, whether publicly or privately

You work in the field of cooperation to carry out the project.

Yes. The Local Action Groups involved in Young Rural Motivators work within the framework of the LEADER cooperation projects. We join forces to contribute some of our work and financing in order to achieve a common goal for all of the territories. In this case, that means 17 counties in Aragon.



Young Rural Motivators (Jóvenes Dinamizadores Rurales)

Territory: 17 counties in Aragón

Website: <https://dinamizomipueblo.es/>

Contact: jovenes@cedemar.es

We coordinate ourselves and follow the regulations of the Aragonese Government's Rural Development and Sustainability Department to carry out activities and funding. The CEDEMAR Local Action Group, which works in the Ribera Baja de Ebro and Bajo Aragón-Caspe counties, coordinates the project.

How do you work on the ground with young people in rural areas?

Our aim is to stimulate the rural environment via activities that involve young people. We provide a structure, tools and resources for participation, training, action and anything that occurs to us for young people to be able to gain in personal, social and professional development. We value young people, who are a very scarce asset in rural areas, yet with great potential.

Depending on the age range, we work in two channels: up to 18 years of age through youth advisers in each county, and from 18 to 35 via different activities.

What are the most representative activities?

We work along various lines. Right now, we are placing more emphasis on employment, because if young people do not have a way to make a living in the medium and long term, they won't stay in rural areas. In this regard, we carry out training among young entrepreneurs and we help them with consultancy and by accompanying them.

Activities like “Made in Rural” are a response to what young people are truly seeking: “I know what my town needs, but give me the training and economic resources, or simply accompany me to carry it out”

We help them value the feeling of belonging to the rural environment, which is why we have created activities in which they explain via the social networks what rural life is like as well as young people visiting from the city.

Another line of activity is aimed at social and environmental action in the environs via work camps involving people under 18.

One of the most significant activities is “Made in Rural”, an annual call to listen to young people from the territory and give support to their own initiatives in matters of social reactivation through consultancy, mentoring, financing, and accompanying them.

Model of territorial governance in “Campos y Toroños”

For one year, the activities launched by the Agora project have laid the foundations for a process of territorial governance in “Campos y Toroños” (Valladolid) and which will form the backbone of the Participative Local Development Strategy presented by the Group for Rural Development in Tierra de Campos for the LEADER 2014-2020 call.

The pilot project “Elderly People’s Senate” carried out in three towns in the Tierra de Campos area in the province of Valladolid (Tordehumos, Morales de Campos and Villalba de los Alcores) has involved creating a model of governance underlining the importance people have in taking decisions.

This initiative stems from the idea that it is the people who live in the villages who truly know the real situation in their area and its needs, as well as the most viable solutions best suited to the territory.

The “Elderly People’s Senate”, together with activities that educate young people in participative techniques and spread good practices in Campos y Toroños, make up the Agora project. This project is part of the Participative Local Development Strategy in this territory, adapted to LEADER measure 19.2 of the 2014-2020 Castile and Leon Rural Development Programme.



People have not only got involved in the project’s activities but have also played a big part in the process of participation

What have you been aiming to do with the project?

To get interaction and agreement between the governing bodies and the people governed. All too often in rural areas, communication does not work well when solving the townspeople’s problems. In small communities, we believe it is necessary to have spaces for townspeople to meet with those who direct the public institutions in order to reach more simple solutions. That is why the Agora project has been launched for 12 months with an investment of 25,000€ in response to one of the main thrusts of our group’s strategy as regards territorial governance.

The LEADER approach has paid more attention to economic activity and job creation, but has left aside the people, the strengthening of social fabric and support networks for people who live in the villages, and furthermore in the midst of a process of depopulation.

Agora project

Territory: Campos y Torozos in Tierra de Campos (Valladolid)

Website: <https://proyecto-agora.webnode.es/>

Contact: colectivo@cdrtcamos.es



What are the results of the “Elderly People’s Senate”?

In general, it’s been a pilot project. In the three workgroups we created in Tordehumos, Morales de Campos and Villalba de Alcores, we wanted to see if what we had drawn up on paper in our strategy could go ahead. And that is the case, since the people have a lot to say.

Among the project’s activities, creating the “Elderly People’s Senate” has been the most important. Through weekly two-hour meetings with debates and an atmosphere of reflection, all of the matters to do with life in each town have been addressed. There have been proposals for improving the “Campos Góticos” commonwealth or “Mancomunidad” of towns in order to ensure well-being and respect for the rights of people who live in rural areas. The most noteworthy among the common conclusions that have been conveyed to local institutions are the handling of medical visits and improvements in connectivity for the Red Cross’ remote assistance service.

In the elderly villages, the older people are essential for the knowledge they can provide about the real situation in which they live. Their participation has been fostered through Agora by creating the “Elderly People’s Senate”

What other activities has Agora backed?

A small educational programme has been carried out for participation from young people from Campos y Torozos in the secondary school in Medina de Rioseco and neighbouring villages, about social participation techniques for them to get involved in our county and discover channels to change the situation around them.

We have also identified good practices in associations in the territory and they have been published in the county newspaper La mar de campos for the populace to learn about them.

Interview

Antonio Marín Perdices, communications coordinator and board member of the Iberian Network of Ecovillages (RIE, *Red Ibérica de Ecoaldeas*)

Trial laboratories for a sustainable future in the territories

Ecovillages are groups of a minimum of five people who share values and a common goal through ecological, social and economic sustainability. Different methods are involved in them and once they have been shown to work, the intention is to apply them in society. The Iberian Network (RIE) includes 13 ecovillages, all of them rural ones in Spain and Portugal.

The Iberian Ecovillage Network is a non-profit NGO that includes ecovillage projects from all over the Iberian Peninsula. In order for a settlement to be an ecovillage, it has to include at least five “fires” (households or families) according to the definition by the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) to which RIE belongs. They have to meet some basic requirements that involve applying criteria such as a horizontal, clear management system, gender equality and full commitment to respect for the environment and ecology.

Ecovillages can help meet the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Ecovillages are not isolated or cut off. They are a kind of living laboratory for developing a new way of life with low environmental impact and CO2 emissions, and which aspire to developing a dynamic community structure.

What can an ecovillage teach us in terms of environmental and social sustainability?

Many millennials approach the ecovillages in search of becoming ecologically sustainable in agriculture, bioconstruction, permaculture, using renewable energies off the grid and collecting rainwater, to give a few examples.

In terms of social sustainability, there is the horizontal, clear management system, conflict resolution, the group structure for decision-taking and other ways of cooperatively interacting with the others. To sum up, an ecovillage needs to have a common vision, a dream shared by its members in terms of goals to create an inclusive culture with ecological, social, economic, political, technological, cultural and spiritual aspects.

How can ecovillages tackle rural depopulation?

The Iberian Ecovillage Network (RIE) has been working actively for over 20 years in backing the creation of new initiatives in the rural environment. Through the ecovillages, permaculture and Pueblos en Transición (“Towns in Transition”) movements, we put forward a lively rural environment where agriculture, livestock farming, forestry management and other sectors are in the hands of those who live and work in that environment.



We also suggest government backing for sustainability with resources to help rural populations with their ecological transition, and wherever towns and local communities can innovate and do business, thus revitalizing the life of the towns by introducing new approaches to economic activity, so new inhabitants appear from different backgrounds with group projects who wish to settle down in areas that are depopulated today.

How can ecovillages help the territory where they are set up?

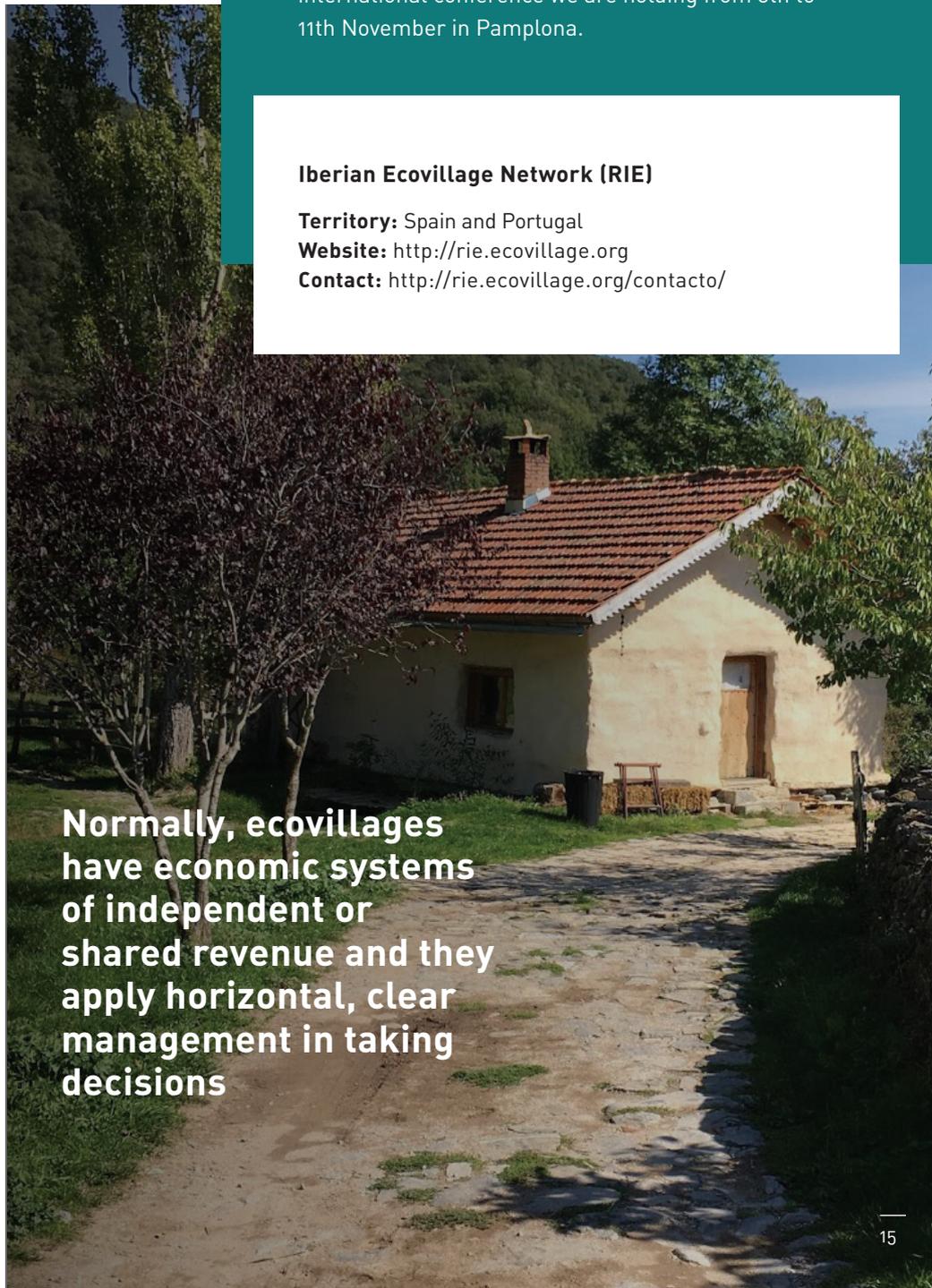
There are ecovillages that have been very successful, some from the economic point of view and others because they have helped the environs with their research in technology, renewable energies, new business models, and carrying out agroecology and forestry management. In Portugal, one ecovillage has managed to raise the temperature by 2°C in winter and lower it by 2°C in summer by an engineering development involving the accumulation of water in large reservoirs. The Government of Navarre has asked us to implement the ecovillage model to bring people to abandoned villages, because we already have a pilot project together with other proposals to reverse rural depopulation via sustainability. It is being showcased at an international conference we are holding from 8th to 11th November in Pamplona.

Iberian Ecovillage Network (RIE)

Territory: Spain and Portugal

Website: <http://rie.ecovillage.org>

Contact: <http://rie.ecovillage.org/contacto/>



Normally, ecovillages have economic systems of independent or shared revenue and they apply horizontal, clear management in taking decisions

Interview

Pilar Amorós, director of “Los Titiriteros de Binéfar” (“The Binéfar Puppeteers”)



Pulling strings in cultural tourism in the county of Sobrarbee

This is a veteran company celebrating 40 years on the stage this year. “The Binéfar Puppeteers” have made their own theatre and permanent space to show their creations out of the ruins of three village houses in Abizanda (Huesca), acting as a tourist magnet in the Pyrenees foothills and a cultural stimulus for a depopulated town.

It has been a magical afternoon surrounded by puppeteers and exuberant nature in a town in the Sobrarbe county area. Since 2004, about 25 townspeople have seen how their town has become a cultural attraction against the backdrop of the Pyrenees. Since the “Binéfar Puppeteers” settled here, rescuing three of the village’s houses from ruin to set up a stable space and their own theatre, museum, residence and creative area, about 7,000 people (as many as the number of inhabitants in the area) visit Abizanda every year to enjoy the puppet show surrounded by nature.

The Puppeteers of Binéfar won the “National Theatre Award for Childhood and Youth” in 2009 from the Ministry of Culture, which gives it a subsidy, as does the Government of Aragon to bring puppet companies from other areas into its programme, thus encouraging development in the county with environmentally friendly artistic and economic activity. They are now townspeople like any other.

Every season as many visitors come to Abizanda attracted by the show as there are inhabitants in the county of Sobrarbe

What spaces in the village have you renovated?

Three houses. First, we took over the old Lecina house, whose structure was still standing despite its state of neglect, and today it has been turned into a puppet museum with an active display so people can touch and handle puppets from many places that use a great variety of techniques.

Later, we acquired the neighbouring house, Casa Simona, which now houses a stable theatre with 100 seats where we put on our shows, present our new creations and welcome

sister companies from other places. The last space to be rehabilitated was Casa Maza, a space for creation and artistic residence. Its tower dates from the 11th century, as part of Abizanda's defensive wall.

The rehabilitation project was carried out by the architect Javier Domingo and was the runner-up for the García Mercadal prize.

What do you wish to offer visitors with the “Puppeteers’ House”?

We'd like to have a stable space where we can put on our own creations continuously so that the families that visit us can discover and appreciate the different approaches used in putting on all varieties of puppet shows.

We can thus provide lovers of art and nature who visit the Pyrenees foothills in search of laid-back tourism with the chance to enjoy leisure activities related to popular music, festival and theatre culture from the area.

We are also aware that we have helped development in the Sobrarbe county via an artistic and economic activity in keeping with the marvellous surroundings. This acts as a precedent for giving other companies and artists the possibility of creating their own work in a natural, peaceful and suggestive environment.

“The Puppeteers’ House” harks back to the theatre group that took classic theatre to rural areas in 1932, codirected by Federico García Lorca

We bring theatre companies and popular theatre here from around the world, creating ties for exchange.

We give teachers and fans of the genre the chance to broaden and perfect their projects related to puppet theatre.

Within the activities, what role is played by this space that used be an ancient threshing floor?

The agricultural symbol of a wheat threshing floor has become a natural balcony open to the mountains and at the foot of the renovated houses. It is a place where, after the performance, the puppeteers, puppets and audience come together to handle the puppets and dance. In the midst of nature, a special three-way bond is created between artists, the audience and the environment.



The puppet house in Abizanda

Territory: Abizanda, Abizanda, in the county of Sobrarbe

Website: <http://www.lacasadelostiteros.com/>

Contact: titiriteros@titiriteros.com



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Integrating people to regenerate rural communities

The Granada Regeneration Project, carried out by La Bolina Association, seeks new ways of fostering the integration of migrants, refugees and locals in rural areas suffering from depopulation, by creating means of living based on permaculture, agroecology and sustainable trade.

This is a multidisciplinary group of 12 people from Europe, West Africa, South America and the Middle East who live and work together in a rural hub facing abandonment in three villages in the Valle de Lecrín valley (Granada), but who share a common vision as regards integration, sustainability and regeneration.

The project involves cooperative work with migrants, refugees and locals to repopulate rural areas by creating the means for a stable life and not only regenerate the economy and life in the villages, but also that of the land by using agroecological and permaculture techniques.

This initiative was one of 11 awarded the Lush Spring Prize in 2016, out of 450 international nominees.

How did your initiative begin?

A group of people got together two years ago to rethink new ways of addressing problems related to migration. The project was launched during a residential stay in the Eroles Project's "Countryside as if people mattered" ("*Un campo como si la gente importara*") in August 2016. For three weeks in the Pyrenees, together we found people with experience in migration, those that work with refugees

Granada was chosen for being a gateway for migrations, for its agricultural production and because it is suffering from the problem of rural depopulation



and migrants and other parties interested in finding positive solutions to the humanitarian crisis. We shared experiences about borders, belonging, identity and so on, and analysed the crisis through a systemic focus addressing the root of the problems.

We chose Granada as an area to experiment because Andalusia is a gateway for migrations, it has a great panorama of agricultural production, and because the Alpujarras Mountain range is suffering from an alarming problem of rural depopulation.

What is the project's strategy based on?

It rests on theoretical and practical education in permaculture, agroecology and sales for refugees, migrants and locals. To bolster this knowledge and above all create support networks for these people, work experience programmes are needed in local cooperatives and micro-companies.

Moreover, it is essential to support entrepreneurs that wish to work in rural areas in order to create a feeling of community. We focus on the work of community integration, cultural diversity and access to housing. Lastly, one has to work hand-in-hand with public institutions to create structural changes as regards local policies on integration and the promotion of rural development.

La Bolina Association

Territory: Valle de Lecrín (Granada)

Website: <https://www.labolina.org>

Contact: info@labolina.org

The project proposes economic and cultural stimulation and regeneration for rural spaces and the land, co-creating sustainable means of living for local people and migrants settling in areas suffering from abandonment

What are the early results on the ground?

The town council has given the La Bolina Association lands on which to begin the project, where education is given to migrants, refugees and locals in agroecology, permaculture and the sale of organic crops, while also using traditional techniques and renewable technologies.

The idea is for them to act as a model for collective entrepreneurship, so they can share sales channels and become the starting point from which they will finally work as a cooperative. Micro-companies are to be launched that sell organic hampers with preserves and olive oil to eco-friendly shops next year.



Digitally transforming the management of our forests

The associations, technological entities and companies of the OG *“Abandono Forestal y Medio Rural: Activación digital”* (“Forest abandonment Rural Environment: Digital activation”) have proposed halting the abandonment or underuse of forestry resources by digitalising a large part of the paperwork involved in managing them, moving them to a digital platform and thus ultimately providing an activity connecting rural and urban society.

For this trans-regional Operational Group (OG) from the European Innovation Partnership (EIP-Agri), forests are much more than a group of trees. They form part of our experience of life and our personal history. The problem of negligence as regards forest areas not only leads to forest fires but also the loss of biodiversity and economic and social opportunities in rural areas, especially in the mountains.

The partners in this project (COSE, the Forestry Association of Soria, the Alto Narcea-Muniellos Development Centre Association, COCEDER, esMontañas, Innova Next, Trackglobe and the University of Vigo) are convinced that the digital transformation of forest resources is the answer to the problems. They want all the opportunities offered by the rural world to be a click away to take decisions that help it.

The regional and inter-regional OGs involve multiple sectors. In order to tackle a problem in the territory, they seek innovative solutions and are funded via the Rural Development Programmes

What need did you detect to launch this OG?

In Spain there are over 5 million hectares of abandoned or underused woodland. This abandonment not only leads to forest fires, but also generates another kind of deterioration that is more difficult to see: the loss of biodiversity and economic and social opportunities in rural areas, especially in the mountains.





Trans-regional OG "Abandonment of the Forests and Rural Environment: Digital activation"

Territory: Forest areas and rural environment in Spain

Website: <http://activacionruraldigital.es/>

Contact: asfoso@asfoso.org

The associations, entities and companies that make up this OG are aware that in order to tackle depopulation it is necessary to have modern, fast systems that can easily reach millions of people. And that can only be achieved if everything to do with the rural environment has been previously digitised and is accessible to those people.

Is that why the idea came about to digitalise the paperwork to do with forest spaces and bring them together in one platform?

Our aim is for the digital platform to become a meeting point between people who have land and those who want to work on it; those who want to invest and those who have something to offer to develop that investment; inhabitants of the villages and technological advances; and between people who wish to sell and those who wish to acquire resources etc.

This proposal already exists in other economic sectors, but has not happened in forestry and the rural environment. From our point of view, this holds back progress and modernisation of the countryside.

Can you give some examples?

One: Something as common as updating the papers for land inherited from ancestors and taking a decision to make them productive, whether by planting trees, using them for cattle, growing crops etc. That all requires numerous, gruelling procedures and trips. For many people, this is truly a restriction and they end up abandoning the lands. And we mustn't forget that 70% of Spain's forest area is private.

The only way to tackle the abandonment is to implement profitable business models in these spaces that give a significant social return and which are environmentally sustainable

When will the platform be running at full steam?

The deadline we have given ourselves to get the platform fully operational is 18 months, although approximately 9 months before that we hope to have a sufficiently operational first phase that will allow content to be introduced and to begin generating users until it is fully operational.

How can people from rural areas benefit from the final result?

For those currently living there, the project will give them new areas of activity and employment, and not only for them but also for their children, which is most important as it should staunch the brain drain.

The fact that the project is directly geared towards creating panoramas of activity and attracting new residents is also of great benefit for those who are yet to come and for those who are still living in the villages so as to guarantee the continuity of certain infrastructures such as schools, medical centres, nurseries, etc., as well as for the cultural enrichment that contact with new people brings.

Interview

Roger Solé, local grower from Vilassar de Mar (Barcelona)
Clara Safont, “head of hive” in Barcelona

Collaborative economy between rural and urban environments

Small producers and processors get in touch with nearby consumers via online and direct sales tools that have been launched by *¡La Colmena que dice Sí!* (“The Hive that says Yes!”). The “hive heads” are more than just creators of consumer communities in any part of their town; they weave socio-economic ties with local agriculture.

There are 100 “hives” marked on the map of Spain. Another 30 are under construction. They are consumer communities with over 75,400 people who are supplied with foodstuffs from about 630 nearby growers and processors within a maximum radius of 250 km, though the usual distance is no further than 43 km.

The “hive head” opens a “hive” on the project’s website where they then contact the growers to find them consumers from their district who wish to buy their products. They handle the weekly orders and decide on a single place of delivery in the district: a school, park, restaurant or other civic space. That is where the ties, which are not only economic, begin to form between nearby buyers and suppliers.

The project combines the culture of entrepreneurship with digital innovation to create a social, collaborative model

From the sales revenue, 20% is divided in half between the “hive heads” and the service for *¡La Colmena que dice Sí!*’s website and network development service.

What role do you have in “La Colmena que dice Sí”?

RS: I have been in the project for four years, since it began. I am an agricultural farmer with 3 ha of organic fruit and vegetables, and I dedicate between 30% and 40% of my produce to “La Colmena”. But I also join forces with others who work on the land to bring together the supply of products, which I divide among 50 or 60 families in the high sales season, and 20-30 in the low season.

CS: I am the head of four hives in Barcelona. Every week, my daughter Gemma Xufré and myself choose the growers and we start the sales so that consumers can make their purchase according to their needs. We also stimulate the networks, spreading the “hives” on the street or in fairs. We are also in contact with growers to see if there has been any problem with distribution and we get in touch with the consumers when there is an incident and try to solve it, for example if the product isn’t available, it’s been forgotten or gone off, and if the problem can’t be solved then a refund is given. We act as a link between parties.

Why did you get involved in the project?

RS: Working in the field with small quantities of produce was not big enough to offer to wholesalers. This project has the potential to reach proximity consumers. It’s like a local market, but right in the





The three parties in the “hive” are the grower, the consumer and the head, who creates ties in the district and supports the local agricultural farmers and processors

¡La Colmena que dice Sí!

Territory: 130 “hives”, 75,400 consumers and 630 growers in urban and rural areas in Spain

Website: <https://lacolmenaquedicesi.es/es/p/open>

Contact: asistencia@lcqds.es

city and offering my crop via the website to meet the consumers’ weekly needs, so the products we distribute to each “hive” have already been sold beforehand.

CS: At the family level, we are concerned about healthy eating and the importance of organic food. We realised that buying fruit and vegetables was very difficult, as it was for meat and fish that wasn’t farmed. And surfing the Internet we came across “*La Colmena que dice Sí*”, which at that time was looking for a head for the Sopa restaurant’s “hive”. So we got involved there.

What advantages do consumers and growers get by joining this collaborative economy initiative?

RS: We growers have the advantage of a direct distribution channel. We put the price on our product, cutting out intermediaries as much as possible. We prepare the products upon order, get paid immediately and reduce our risks.

CS: In one purchase, the consumers have meat, fruit, vegetables, fish, eggs, milk, bread, coffee, cheese... everything is very convenient, with quality and trust. Furthermore, they get to know many producers and we arrange visits to learn about their projects. In addition, consumers do not have to make a commitment to buy a minimum purchase. In fact, I only go to the supermarket to buy toilet paper and little else.

Interview

Astrid Henmark Aguirre, vice-president of the Ábrego cultural association



“The land cultivates everything”, ethnographic festival

ARTIMUSIC is a festival with traditional music, folklore and educational workshops within the gathering *“Todo lo cría la tierra”* (“The land cultivates everything”) in Espinosa de los Monteros (Burgos). It has been evolving every year, but it has become a different way of learning and leisure with the aim and atmosphere of promoting the rural environment and creating a network of people who wish to live there.

The music and its texts have provided a wide-ranging drive to recover traditions. ARTIMUSIC “The land cultivates everything” is an ethnographic festival of arts, music and rural traditions, providing a meeting point for disseminating the traditions of the Las Merindades county of Burgos with cultural leisure activities open to everyone. It is an exchange of culture, folklore and education in ancestral know-how and traditions.

The festival is organised by the cultural association Ábrego: Environment and Rural Development. It aims to raise awareness among society about the need to get involved in bringing about change to improve and enrich people’s lives. Above all, people who are members look to local development as an answer to global problems, generating networks and bridges between peoples and cities.

People attending the event have found encouragement to take up projects in the rural environment

What was the seed for ARTIMUSIC?

At first, it was called ARTIM and arose from the idea of how to revitalize our villages in the county of Las Merindades, where there were fewer and fewer activities and we were thus less keen on coming in summer.

The event began five years ago thanks to seven friends between 22 and 25 years of age, and ended up being an educational gathering specialising in agroecology and rural development to



ARTIMUSIC

Territory: Espinosa de los Monteros (Burgos)

Website: <http://www.todolocrialatierra.com/>

Contact: comunicacion@todolocrialatierra.com

recover traditions and professions. The first year it was held for seven days and the courses were about botany, bioconstruction with straw, traditional music, awareness of the food chain, etc. It had good repercussions, with 150 enrolled, and in subsequent years this grew.

How has it evolved until today?

We saw that there was growing interest in it, so in subsequent years it was extended to 10 days. After spreading the word via the social networks and communication 2.0, people from urban environments then need to come to this kind of event in their free time, but also thanks to ARTIMUSIC there are people that have changed the course of their lives and have come to live and work in the rural environment.

The surveys we carry out each year show that out of about 250 enrolments on average, 5 to 10 people have shown an interest in returning to the villages.

The greater attendance has exceeded expectations. We are talking about some 3,000 people for the last one, which we decided to shorten to 4 days and concentrate it on recovering professions, music, theatre and leisure, as well as inviting artisans and local growers to organise a traditional trades fair that saw a big attendance, and folk musicians too. When the event is over, we are going to see what kind of format we will give it in the next ones.

Ábrego was launched to create ARTIM, but there is more: it gives a response to the challenges of repopulating rural areas, creating quality employment, creating networks and protecting the environment

What does the association **Ábrego: Environment and Rural Development** do, apart from organising the festival?

It was launched in 2014 by a group of seven youths educated in different areas of know-how who shared the common goal of giving our time and work to help halt the depopulation of rural areas. Now there are over 70 members.

Among our activities, we teach different techniques and knowledge that we believe to be useful for life in rural areas and in the city, always attempting to generate greater commitment to the land, the environment and the villages' traditional culture.

We have a calendar of activities that are held in villages in the province of Burgos and in the city itself at our recently inaugurated headquarters. The upcoming activities are based on education in networks and strengthening the social fabric.

Geocaching as a pretext for discovering the territory

The first Geotour of Spain is now up and running in the far west of Cantabria. “Treasures” have been hidden around 1,000 km² and they can only be found with the help of a satnav, delving into the “gems” in the landscapes and villages of the Saja-Nansa county. Most importantly, it is a journey and an opportunity for other kinds of tourism.

Today’s “treasure hunters” are not motivated by greed, but take part in any open-air adventure: hiking, climbing, cycling, river sailing, etc. The excuse is a geocaching game. The treasures or “geocaches” are hidden by using GPS geo-localisation devices and the “geocachers” use the coordinates in Geocaching.com to locate and track them. Once they have been discovered, they are shared online.

The Saja-Nansa Rural Development Association in Cantabria has already been behind the pioneering Geotour of Spain with 148 well-hidden geocaches and a year to find them in the 18 towns of the county covering an area of 1,000 km², where one can discover valleys tucked away, peaks, meadows, mountain pastures, forests rivers, marshes, sea cliffs and beaches. The Santiago Way and the Order of Knights provide the backdrop to the adventure.



We have created some prizes to acknowledge the inhabitants of the county who have got most involved in the Geotour

What other activities has Agora backed?

Why did you choose geocaching as the way to use the Geotour?

Geocaching is a game using high technology to find “treasures” that is played all over the world by people who enjoy the adventure and have devices with GPS. The main idea is for users to find these “treasures”, which range from special plaques for collectors to recipients hidden among nature or unique buildings, called “geocaches”, and then share their experiences online.

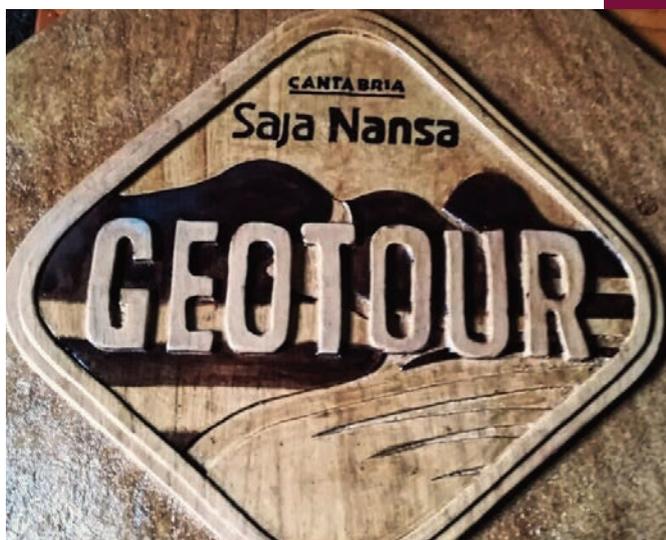
About 300,000 people play geocaching in Spain, 5 million in Europe and about 12 million around the world. Saja-Nansa’s Local Action Groups saw the great potential of this kind of game for the Geotour in order to raise awareness about our county among young people, families and those who love nature, sports and culture, who all see another way of enjoying tourism for adventure, the family, education and socialising via this pastime.

Geotour Saja-Nansa: the treasure of the Templars

Territory: Saja-Nansa County (Cantabria)

Website: <https://geotoursajanansa.es>

Contact: info@geotoursajanansa.es



These lands' history has been used to encourage geocaching

The Santiago Way runs inland and along the coast of Cantabria. The Order of the Knights Templar protected pilgrims in the Middle Ages, and thanks to their custody and battles they accumulated great riches. According to literary sources they left clues as to where they hid them. In fact, in the last version of the Book of Saint Cyprian, 148 locations are mentioned, which we have recovered and emulated to organise the pioneering GeoTour of Spain using Geocaching. It will last one year until 14th September 2019, according to the licence we have acquired that has been validated by the US company that has the rights, which was very pleased to have the game associated with the Templars and the Santiago Way. We have chosen this period so as to be independent of the tourist season.

How have the Local Action Groups got the people from the county involved in the game?

It's all yet to be invented. The Local Action Groups have been able to launch projects that have stimulated the rural environment and they continue to be exemplary in organising events like this.

The participants create their profile in the Geocaching website, download the free app and begin the search for their "treasures". What they discover are really treasures amid nature spots and monuments

When we presented the Geotour we were sure about the need to win over many people to come and visit the Saja-Nansa County under the pretext of the game, but we have found that its 40,000 inhabitants have also got involved, including people from the world of gastronomy, culture and artisans. Some "treasures" are to be found in chapels that are locked, but the key holder has decided to take part in the game.

In addition, every month there is a theme-related day such as about the environment which we had in September on cleaning rivers, beaches and waterfalls, and in which geocachers and locals got involved.

Pulling the wool to keep living in the countryside

In recovering the local textile industry's potential, the aim is to boost pasture farming by shepherds in the Valencia Community region by placing value again on wool from the Guirra sheep, a breed with falling numbers. The Esquellana project, which has been financed by crowdfunding, intends to buy this natural fibre so that this type of livestock farming can keep up its work and sell it.

It all began when *Col.lectiu l'Esquella* ("the Esquella Group"), which promotes and champions extensive livestock farming in the Valencia region's central counties, decided to sustain a way of dignifying the work of twenty shepherds so they can live decently off it. Above all this is the case with this territory's autochthonous breed: the Guirra, of which only about 5,000 remain. One member of this association recalled the "Obrador Xisqueta" initiative in the Catalan Pyrenees, and the Esquellana project concentrated on rescuing wool as another product from sheep farming.

The farmers' habit of throwing away the wool after shearing had to be avoided, giving them a fair price for processing it. They bought 1,600 kg and after starting to prepare it by artisan means, they decided to go back to the industrial process, which in bygone times was excellent in the Valencia Community region. The next step was to fund the project and they chose crowdfunding.

Lateuterra, a pioneering Valencian crowdfunding platform engaged in environmental projects

We want livestock farms to begin to appreciate wool not as a by-product, but as a product that gives them value

How did the crowdfunding project go?

We decided to resort to a crowdfunding campaign to get funding to process the wool. The campaign ended in December 2017 and the response has been incredible. Through Lateuterra, the pioneering Valencian crowdfunding platform committed to environmental, ecological and sustainable projects, the amount contributed by 265 people made it possible to launch our project, bringing in 12,650, well over the minimum funds of 10,000 that was our original target.

In return, those who contributed are given balls of 100% Guirra wool, products designed especially with this natural fibre, as well as accompanying shepherds on their transhumance treks, shepherding in couples or accompanying us to get to know us as part of a festive event.



Now it is up and running, where is the project headed?

Our project has three goals: to keep up the shepherding activity; reverse the fall in numbers of Guirra sheep, which is autochthonous in the Valencia Community region; and to use the wool to rescue the local textile industry.

Washing and processing the wool to sell in balls, we have had to go from being a non-profit association to form an associated work cooperative, which in future will be a cooperative for sheep farmers where they can deliver their wool. Over time, we intend to buy wool from different breeds of sheep. Furthermore, we are preparing an online store to be able to sell it and we will have some designs with this exclusive wool.

Why recover this wool?

In the end, by doing all of this we encourage the people at the head of the flocks to go on living in rural environments by continuing with their work. The aim is to avoid losing the sheep breed and the wool industry. We want no livestock farmer here to throw away the wool when shearing, and for them to recover the cost of shearing. They currently get paid 15-30 euro cents for a kilo of wool, when the cost of shearing each sheep comes to 1.5-2 euros to obtain 1.5-2 kg of wool.

In the long term, the goal is to recover production of our own quality, proximity, natural wool, creating rural jobs in the Valencia Community region so as to carry out the entire process for wool including washing, spinning, etc. to turn it into natural skeins with no artificial or synthetic fibres or dyes. Awareness must also be raised about where the clothes we wear come from and how they are made.



Esquellana Project

Territory: Valencia Community region

Website: <https://www.lateuaterra.com/esquellana>

Contact: esquellanaprojecte@gmail.com

By encouraging livestock farms to continue their activity and for small local textile industries to start up again to prepare wool in the Valencia Community region, we wish to tackle rural depopulation

Interview
Borja Piedra, head of Huerta Tropical



Digital trade at the service of the human face of fruit growers

Huerta Tropical is an online distributor of tropical fruit directly from farmer to consumer. The produce is seasonal and grown locally on the “Tropical Coast” of Granada and Malaga. Moreover, this is a personal initiative that raises the visibility of the work done by agricultural farmers to grow high quality fruit and put value back into their business.

What makes Huerta Tropical stand out from other e-commerce businesses is the relationship of trust with suppliers that it conveys to its clients, delivering within 24 hours with no go-betweens and prioritising quality over quantity. Indeed, they have great quality with mangoes, avocados, custard pears, papayas, guavas, lychees, loquats, sugar cane, etc. They also help garner recognition for tropical agricultural farming, disseminating the gastronomic culture of the Granada and Malaga coast with its subtropical climate.

The image of its creator, a young Asturian of 33 years of age, is now used as an advertising symbol of digital entrepreneurship on a global scale by a US giant that provides products and services involving the Internet, software, electronic devices, and new technology: Google.

Digital entrepreneurship is within the reach of anybody who has been educated in it. It is very democratic

How did this digital project begin?

“I did some courses given by Google about digital skills to help my job search. That training changed the course of my life. It was the “Google Activate” programme.

With the tools that I learnt, I applied them to my digital business in Andalusia after detecting the lack of awareness about tropical fruit on the coast of Granada and Malaga. This was a niche which, furthermore, was on the rise, so I made my move.

These instruments, such as carrying out advertising campaigns in search engines or positioning my website using SEO, allowed me to launch my own e-commerce page: Huerta Tropical (“Tropical Market Garden”).

Later on, Google gave me a satisfaction survey about the course and I told them about my website. That’s how my project was chosen as a digital entrepreneurship “Success Story” and became Google’s first and only worldwide TV campaign.

Who are your typical suppliers and clients?

Huerta Tropical is merely a vehicle between the two. It is the producers who call me to form part of my list of suppliers, thanks to the clarity and way I work with the farmers. I’m looking for approachability and honesty in them, as well as using good agricultural practices. On acquiring small amounts of tropical fruit of supreme quality, I usually pay better margins to farmers who do not succumb to the dictates of the market. For example, I prefer for an avocado to stay on the tree for longer than usual so that it acquires a better taste.

My clients include millennials, people with high purchasing power that seek good quality, the HORECA channel (delicatessen groceries), people who seek health when buying proximity food, and clients around 50 years of age who wish to eat fruit with the taste of yesteryear.

Its creator is Google’s image as a “Success Story” for digital entrepreneurship and he stars in the multinational’s first and only worldwide TV campaign

Why is there a great opportunity in digitalisation for the agri-food sector?

There are people who still think that the countryside and technology are poles apart, but I think completely the opposite. In fact, it is in agriculture where digital tools can be best applied, because that is where there is a greater business niche and because it raises the visibility of the work done to get the crop.

I don’t only sell; I also inform people and that is precisely where the added value comes from. When I show a person that has grown a piece of fruit, the outreach soars with “likes” in the social networks and in terms of repercussion. In commercial terms, the costs are minimal.



Huerta Tropical

Territory: Costa Tropical (Granada-Málaga) Online national sales

Website: <https://www.huertatropical.com/>

Contact: hola@huertatropical.com





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