

25 YEARS OF EUROPEAN POLICIES IN EXTREMADURA: RURAL TOURISM AND LEADER METHOD

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The current demographic situation in Extremadura is the result of a series of phenomena such as a mass emigration suffered in previous decades and the negative natural growth in their minor rural areas –with less than 2,000 inhabitants– due to high mortality rates and lowest birth because of the large aging population. To this, the lack of job opportunities must be added, which affects the development of rural Extremadura and turns it into a space that generates revulsion at the young and active population, especially in the municipalities of lower population entity (Nieto and Gurría, 2005).

For all the above, keeping the population in rural areas is necessary, equating their socioeconomic characteristics with those of urban areas. This concern also exists at European level, resulting in the design of rural development aids grounded in three principal areas: equal living standards of urban and rural areas, promoting the establishment of diversified productive activities through industrial sector and service and halting depopulation and decay of rural areas (Canoves et al, 2006).

Promoting a development model based on the practice of pluriactivity is one of the ways to improve the living standards of the rural population, in which the main actors and initiatives emerging from the local environment itself. From this perspective, the development of tourism is an important factor that can contribute to increasing the living standards by generating new income opportunities.

In this paper, one of the methodologies of the EU to promote socio-economic development of rural areas is analysed. It is LEADER initiative and PRODER programmes, and specifically its investments in the tourist sector in Extremadura, one of the sectors in which more is invested in the more rural areas of the region.

Rural development aids under LEADER Method arise in the early 90s with the objective of activating the demographic and socio-economic potential of rural areas through the implementation of a series of projects co-financed by European Structural Funds, national administrations and private actors –social and economic– (Nieto and

Cárdenas, 2015). Over the past 25 years, investments in rural tourism through LEADER have been focus on three priorities (Pitarch and Arnandis, 2014):

- The creation of a tourist offer that provides earnings to family income, which out-putting agricultural and livestock products and with which handicrafts is marketed.
- Conservation and rehabilitation of cultural and artistic heritage.
- The revitalisation of local life.

Evolutionarily analysing investments in rural tourism in the successive stages of LEADER and PRODER in Extremadura is the main objective in this paper, as well as locating them in the territory. Moreover, it is interesting to relate the investment with several context indicators such as volume of investments and projects by population and surface, population growth, aging index and economic activity. In this way, it is intended to check whether the investments in the tourist sector tend to concentrate on mountain and more economically and socially depressed areas and if the primary purpose is being achieve: to maintain, or even increase, the population in less dynamic areas. On the other hand, establishing a categorisation of Local Action Groups of Extremadura, which manage the investments, is pretended through statistical method such as *NADIR* and *Ideal Point* (Márquez et al, 2006), based on indicators of effectiveness (number of projects by surface and population) and efficiency (investment by surface and population).

METHODOLOGY

In the first part of the work, the European regulation of different programming periods and measures that subsidise rural tourism actions were analysed. Since the name of measures has been changing, homogenisation of these was conducted (table 1):

Table 1
HOMOGENISATION OF LEADER, PRODER AND FEADER MEASURES

Programming Period	Action 3. Tourism
LEADER I (1991 – 1994)	Rural tourism
LEADER II (1995 – 1999)	B3. Rural tourism
LEADER + (2000 – 2006)	108. Rural tourism
PRODER I (1995 – 1999)	3. Agrotourism and 4. Local tourism
PRODER II (2000 – 2006)	3. Rural tourism
FEADER 2007 - 2013	313. Encouragement of tourist activities

Source: prepared by the author.

In the second phase, an evolutionary analysis of rural tourism actions in Extremadura was performed to examine, on the one hand, the investments trends in the different periods, and on the other hand, the types of projects and beneficiaries. For this, a carto-

graphic database was built from the municipal mapping of *BTN 1:100.000* of National Geographic Institute. Additionally, an alphanumeric database was built with various data at municipal level that were assigned to the cartography of the municipalities of Extremadura and at Local Action Group level (they manage the rural development aids). Demographic data were obtained from the National Institute of Statistics and socioeconomic variables from *Atlas Socioeconómico de Extremadura (2014)*. Finally, data concerning aids under the LEADER Method were given by the Council of Environment and rural, agricultural policies and territory of the Government of Extremadura. This data consisted of dossiers of all committed projects and they were worked on an Access database, thus building information on total investments, financing funds and number of projects at municipal and Local Action Groups level. The latest available data are dated to December 31, 2015.

In the last phase methodology, through statistical techniques *NADIR* and *Ideal Point*, the territorial incidence of rural tourism investments was measured, which were related to the area and population covered by each Local Action Group. The main objective is to test the ability to mobilise the largest number of projects (effectiveness) and the relation between investment and population and territory (efficiency) and to obtain a typology of Local Action Groups based on these two indicators.

RURAL TOURISM ACTIONS IN EXTREMADURA

Although LEADER and PRODER were not designed as tourist development programmes, they have functioned as real drivers of the sector in Extremadura because of the enormous weight of the specific measures. In this way, almost 120 million euros have been allocated to the sector (table 2), which represents 22.5 % of total investments, through 1,200 projects (12 %). In addition, more than 7,800 new hotel rooms have been created and more than 600 enterprises have been created or improved as well.

Table 2
INVESTMENTS AND PROJECTS IN TOURISM DURING THE DIFFERENT PERIODS OF LEADER METHOD

Programming periods	Investment in Tourism (% of the total)	Projects in Tourism (% of the total)	Total investments	Total projects
LEADERII - PRODER I (1994-1999)	32,670,624 (25.4 %)	651 (19.3 %)	128,608,329	3,372
LEADER + -PRODER II (2000-2006)	43,209,173 (22.5 %)	732 (20.1 %)	195,027,487	3,638
FEADER (2007-2013)	42,139,632 (20.1 %)	673 (16.7 %)	209,612,646	4,022

Source: prepared by the author.

At regional and national level, a reduction in the contributions in Tourism has been found in the analysis. With LEADER I investment accounted for 37 % of the total and 20.1 % in the last period, 2007-2013.

European legislation defends, for the development of rural areas, diversification of them. However, environmental protection, recovery of local products and the enhancement of natural and cultural heritage are closely related to rural tourism. Therefore, evolving into an integral tourism offer in which new leisure activities, awareness campaigns, the creation of museums and interpretive centres, hiking trails are included would be appropriate, taking advantage of the offer created in earlier stages of LEADER.

Analysing all projects that have been funded and dedicated to tourism since 1991, it has been found that a small tourist infrastructure has been created, both in mountain areas and plains, because each Local Action Group has created its tourist offer following a strategy itself, i.e., some groups have exploited their natural resources, other cultural or historical ones or their cultural identity. Thus, the tourist infrastructure has been created from 237 cottages, 48 inns and hotels, 33 campsites and hostels and 62 rural apartments.

On the other hand, in the last two periods of LEADER, new projects have been developed, such as the creation of accommodation reservation systems, the exploitation of natural resources and hunting routes, the tourist promotion through media, etc. With all of this, many jobs have been created.

Considering the results of the analysis through *NADIR* and *Ideal Point*, the Local Action Groups located in northern mountain of Cáceres, such as La Vera, Valle del Jerte, Hurdes, Trasierra-Cáparra, Sierra de Gata y Montánchez-Tamuja, show the best results, which have exploited their rich landscapes in many cases. However, these groups have a weak business fabric at the same time. In this way, betting on tourism is not serving to achieve to keep young people in rural areas where aging and migratory processes are still worrisome. Local Action Groups that focus their efforts on tourist projects are the same groups that have still high values of old-age index (above 30 %) and a negative population growth. Nevertheless, without these aids, the effects of aging and depopulation would have been more damaging in the rural areas of Extremadura, because LEADER has enabled the creation of a major regional identity, which has also been exploited as a tourist resource in many cases, as well as numerous businesses with much of the rural population has seen their incomes increased. Large amount of projects implemented had not been launched without the economic contributions of European funds.

It is important that an integral and quality tourism is promoted in the newly LEADER programming period, with which more tourists could be attracted. Finally, association, marketing and internationalisation are still pending issues whose development is essential for better results in the tourist sector.