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Down to Earth

Good practices template

1 GP template

As explained above, each PP must complete the template below with potential GPs (3 or 4, at least, one template per GP) identified in its region.

[AXENCIA GALEGA DE DESENVOLVEMENTO RURAL – Galicia (Spain)]

1. General information

Author(s)	Jorge M. Blanco Jorge.manuel.blanco.ballon@xunta.gal
Project acronym	DOWN TO EARTH
Policy Instrument	Galician Act on the recovery of agrarian land (2021)
PI public authority	Axencia Galega de Desenvolvemento Rural
Version	1.0
Date	2023/12/23
GP Code ¹	GP-LP01-AGADER-01

2. GP basic information

Number and Title of the GP	1. Penedo Model-Village
Body responsible for the implementation	Xunta de Galicia. Galician Rural Development Agency. https://agader.xunta.gal/es/recuperacion-de-tierras/aldeas-modelo/penedo/
Thematic objective of the GP (multiple choice if needed)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Year 1. Environmental risks related with depopulation and aging population in rural areas. <input type="checkbox"/> Year 2. All-type of access barriers to young farmers in depopulated rural areas. <input type="checkbox"/> Year 3. Policy instruments to foster the role of farmers and land managers in fighting climate change and environmental risks.
Geographical scope of the GP	<input type="checkbox"/> National

¹ LP01-PP02 AGADER-FJDV / PP03 MoC / PP04 NMA / PP05 RVNA / PP06 UPatras / PP08 BSC.

	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regional <input type="checkbox"/> Local
Location of the GP	Spain – Galicia – Ourense - Boborás

3. GP detailed description

Summary of the GP	<p>A policy tool to promote sustainable land management of abandoned lands of high productive capacity located in or around an abandoned settlement. The objective is curbing depopulation, boosting economic activity and reducing the risk of fires.</p>
Detailed information on the GP	<p><i>What is the specific problem addressed and the context which triggered the introduction of the practice?</i></p> <p>Agricultural land abandonment is an increasingly important phenomenon in Galicia, with total land abandoned nearly matching the cultivated area. In the last 15 years, over 50,000 hectares have been abandoned. This fact, together with the new scenario of climate change, causes a growing risk of forest fires and large fires.</p> <p>In addition, many of the lands that are no longer used have good or very good agronomic conditions for cultivation, being therefore an asset capable of supplying quality food nearby, with a smaller ecological footprint. It is also an opportunity to generate employment, especially among young people.</p> <p>The causes of land abandonment are aggravated in Galicia due to difficulties in access to land, together with high fragmentation and a high number of owners, many of whom no longer live in the area, making access to land and land transfers difficult.</p> <p>One of the areas with the highest rate of abandonment in Galicia and, at the same time, with the highest risk of forest fires is the Council of Boborás, where the village of Penedo is located.</p> <p>• <i>How does the practice reach its objectives and how it is implemented?</i></p> <p>Model villages are a tool created by the Regional Act on the recovery of Galician agricultural land (2021). It is a voluntary instrument facilitating the implementation of integrated actions to put abandoned land back into productive use in Galician rural areas. It promotes sustainable, preferably ecological, economic activities linked to the primary sector in those lands while reducing the risk of forest fires. The actions may also include architectural rehabilitation and urban planning actions in the model village to improve the quality of life of its population and to attract population and hence promote demographic recovery. Public-private collaboration is a key part of its implementation to ensure the economic profitability of the agricultural initiatives promoted in the model villages, which is essential for their sustainability.</p> <p>The model village instrument can be implemented in villages affected by a high level of land abandonment but with good productive capacity. It is voluntary and it requires that land owners representing at least 70% of the total area agree to lease the land for at least 10 years. Owners do retain the ownership of the land though.</p> <p>The Penedo model village was one of the first model villages implemented. This tested the research methodology for the ownership of abandoned land and established the means of coordination with local public and private entities. One of the first "Agricultural production management projects" was carried out, so all this learning has been incorporated into the subsequent actions derived from this public policy.</p> <p>An extensive livestock production activity was established in Penedo and is currently being developed, focusing on the production of the indigenous pig breed "Porco Silleiro". It</p>

	<p>involves 131 owners of 665 plots reaching a total of 23.41 hectares that have been put back into productive use.</p> <p>The Penedo model village project allowed the application of a public policy on an abandoned rural area, acting pro-actively, and revitalizing local communities.</p> <p>The success of the initiative was to create the legal and political space to encourage the local agents of an abandoned village to recover those surrounding lands and put them back into productive use.</p> <p>The initiative was promoted by the regional administration, which provided the public funding for the technical management and the agricultural investment. The regional administration worked in coordination with the local administration, which played an essential role mobilising land owners.</p> <p>A network of 21 model villages is currently being created. These are expected to become "pilot projects" and learning spaces for other villages facing the same challenges.</p> <p><i>How does it contribute to the thematic objective(s)?</i></p> <p>Penedo model village has been recovered and abandoned lands have been put back into productive use. This contributes to the goal of curbing the risks of depopulation and aging in rural areas, managing to group together more than 600 abandoned plots of 131 land owners and putting them back to productive use.</p> <p>The initiative has attracted new people to set-up and work in an extensive livestock farm that serves as a fuelbreak to prevent fires in the village and allows for the generation of economic income.</p>
Resources needed	<p>The human resources involved in the initiative are difficult to calculate because it has been a long process over several years. Personnel involved included technical staff from the Galician Rural Development Agency, as well as other specialized entities participating as subcontractors. The Regional Administration covered the costs.</p> <p>Technical work included the identification of land owners, clearing and re-planting of the abandoned lands and related administrative procedures. A Guide for Agricultural Production Planning was also elaborated.</p> <p>In addition, there were direct investments made to allow the establishment of the extensive pig-rearing farm, such as locks and enclosures, facilities for handling and feeding the animals, auxiliary energy facilities, among others. The investment amounted to a total of 82,694 euros (around 3,600 euros/hectare).</p> <p>The entrepreneur managing the pig farm provided the animals and the workforce to run the business.</p>
Actors involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local administration: it initially started the process and ensured the involvement of land owners and neighbours still living in the village. • Galician Agency for Rural Development (regional administration): in charge of promoting the processes by involving its own technical staff in the development of the project and providing the necessary funding to carry out the implementation of the actions. • Owners of the abandoned land (131 people), who transferred their land to the public Land Bank, in exchange for an income, allowing it to be put back into productive use. • Residents of the model village (15 people), who have permanently helped with information and contacts to identify owners who no longer lived in the village, and who are delighted to see their village "alive" again. • The entrepreneur of the pig farm, direct beneficiary of the initiative.

Timescale

Penedo model village was one of the first five model villages in Galicia. It was launched before the Galician Agrarian Land Recovery Law was formally approved, so it served to test the methodology in a process that lasted 5 years.

After the approval of the Act, and thanks to the learning acquired and the creation of protocols and a methodology, the process was reduced by half (to two and a half years). The objective of the Galician Rural Development Agency is to keep improving the process so it takes less than 2 years from the beginning to the start of the economic activity.

Timeline of the Penedo model village:

- 2019: Launch of the process and selection of Penedo as a model village.
- 2021: Publication of the Guide for Agricultural Production Planning and launch of the open call to select an entrepreneur to set-up an economic activity in the model village.
- 2023: Start of the economic activity in Penedo,

4. Evidence of success and transferability

Evidence of success

The main evidence of success is that it has allowed the recovery of 23.41 hectares of abandoned land that is now back into productive use and therefore actively managed. This means it has been possible to reduce the biomass likely to cause or transmit these fires, and hence act as a fuelbreak for the people living in the village.

Since the implementation of the project actions, there have been no new forest fires in the area during the last two years.

The support provided for the establishment of an economic activity has created a direct employment in the within the agricultural sector. It has also led to the generation of income for the landowners through the leasing of their plots. Many people who own the land have been in favor of renting these lands, so the plots can be worked agriculturally and obtain income from it.

Beyond these figures, crucial evidence of success is that many municipalities in Galicia have started the procedures to declare additional model villages within their territories. The initiative has also raised interest among other Spanish regions. In November 2023, an official delegation from the Asturias regional government visited Galicia to learn more about the model villages.

Regional impact

The experience of the Penedo model village is being replicated in 21 model villages that have followed a similar procedure. The model villages that are currently in operation represent a total area of 228 ha recovered for agricultural production, distributed in 2,715 plots of land owned by 751 people. The recovery of these lands allowed for the establishment of new viable economic activities in the agricultural sector, including 8 extensive livestock farms, 6 of which are newly created. It has led to 7 young people entering the agricultural sector. The 8 farms are dedicated to extensive livestock rearing: four beef farms, three pig farms and one mixed farm including goats, sheep and cattle. All these farms work with indigenous breeds and breeds in danger of extinction.

The experience of the Penedo model village has demonstrated the compatibility of the recovery of agricultural production in the lands surrounding villages suffering demographic challenges with the **conservation of heritage and natural values**. In all cases, the extensive farming initiatives are respectful of the traditional plots and the heritage elements (traditional fences and alleys). These farms are mostly intended for organic production and they work with indigenous breeds, which were in many of the cases (four farms) in risk of extinction.

To the benefits derived from the **reduction of the risk of fire** and the **generation of economic activity** linked to agricultural production, we must add the contribution of this initiative to the fixation of population in the rural environment, and therefore, the fight against depopulation. The best proof of this is that all the farmers live in the villages or nearby.

The contribution of the model villages initiative to the development and establishment of activities in fire prone areas, leading to the creation of fuelbreaks around the villages, is also key for the **adaptation of rural areas to climate change** and prevention against serious environmental risks such as wild fires.

Potential for transferability (Overview)

The main difficulty for the transferability of this initiative is that it requires a legal framework that allows for the the Administration with competences in Rural Development to identify a village to start the work, covering the whole process.

The action methodology could be replicated in other territories with similar problems, achieving similar results.

Other than that, the proposed intervention methodology can be perfectly transferred to other regions facing similar challenges such as land abandonment, aging population, lack of economic dynamism, as well as high fragmentation of land ownership. All these factors, combined with the new scenario of global warming, are potential vectors of forest fires, so working on the underlying problems behind the abandonment of the rural areas is a sound strategy to adapt to environmental risks.

Rate of potential transferability

Rate this potential on a scale of 1-5, where 1 means low potential for transferability and 5 means high potential for transferability

1 2 3 4 5

5. GP methodological viability

Study visit: theoretical session

In your opinion, how likely will it be to have a theoretical session about the GP? (1 – very unlikely | 5 – very likely)

1 2 3 4 5

Dissemination materials explaining the basics of model villages are available, as well as information on the AGADER website. Explanatory videos will soon be available too.

The technical staff who have participated from the initial stages can explain the challenges faced, as well as the evolution that the entire project has had.

<https://agader.xunta.gal/es/recuperacion-de-tierras/aldeas-modelo>

Study visit: practical session

In your opinion, how likely will it be to visit the experience? (1 – extremely unlikely | 5 – extremely likely)

1 2 3 4 5

Add a short explanation of your rating [Max. 500 characters]

Study visits to this project have already been successfully organised. As a matter of fact, it is an objective of the initiative itself to increase the number of visits so it can work as a demonstrative experience. Visits are also warmly welcome by the inhabitants of the village, who feel part of an innovative project that attracts the attention of other European regions.

GP pictures

If possible, provide pictures of the initiative



