

Case Study 1: A Comarca de Verín *Re-localisers* balancing between practice and policy

WP4. Regional Learning and Rural Development

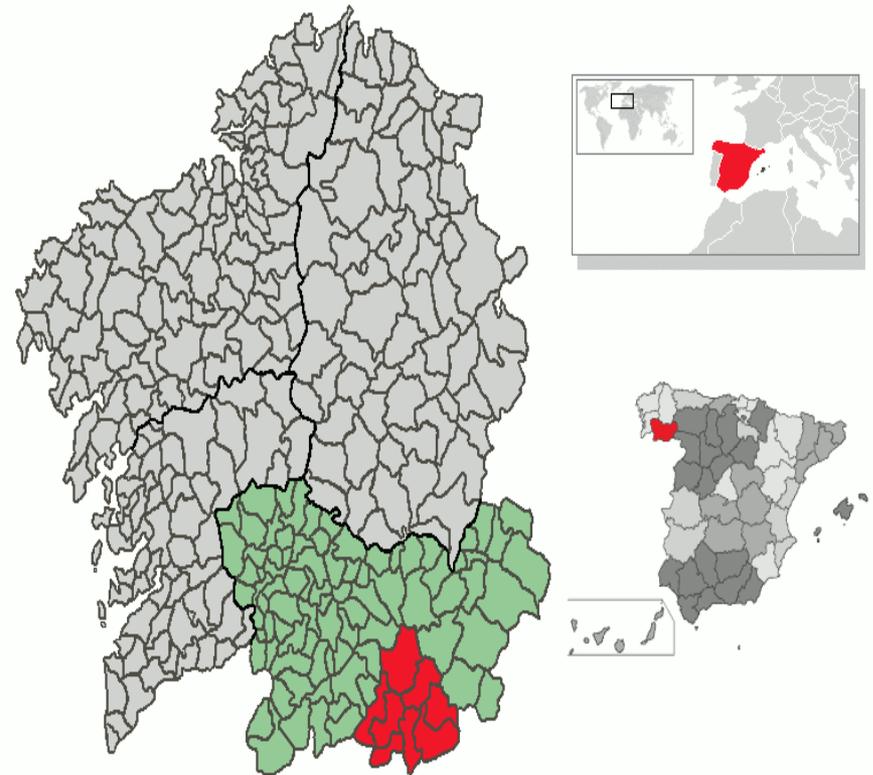
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Comarca de Verin in the context of globalisation

- The Comarca is on the interface of different global influences:
 - located in a cross roads
 - border area
 - strong waves of migration since the last of the 19th century
 - After 1986 European Union funding becoming a catalyser



Comarca de Verin in the context of rurality

- Population:
 - 8 municipalities
 - 175 singular entities
 - 28.000 of which 14.000 in Verín (town) in about 1000km²
 - Depopulation process: low natality, ageing

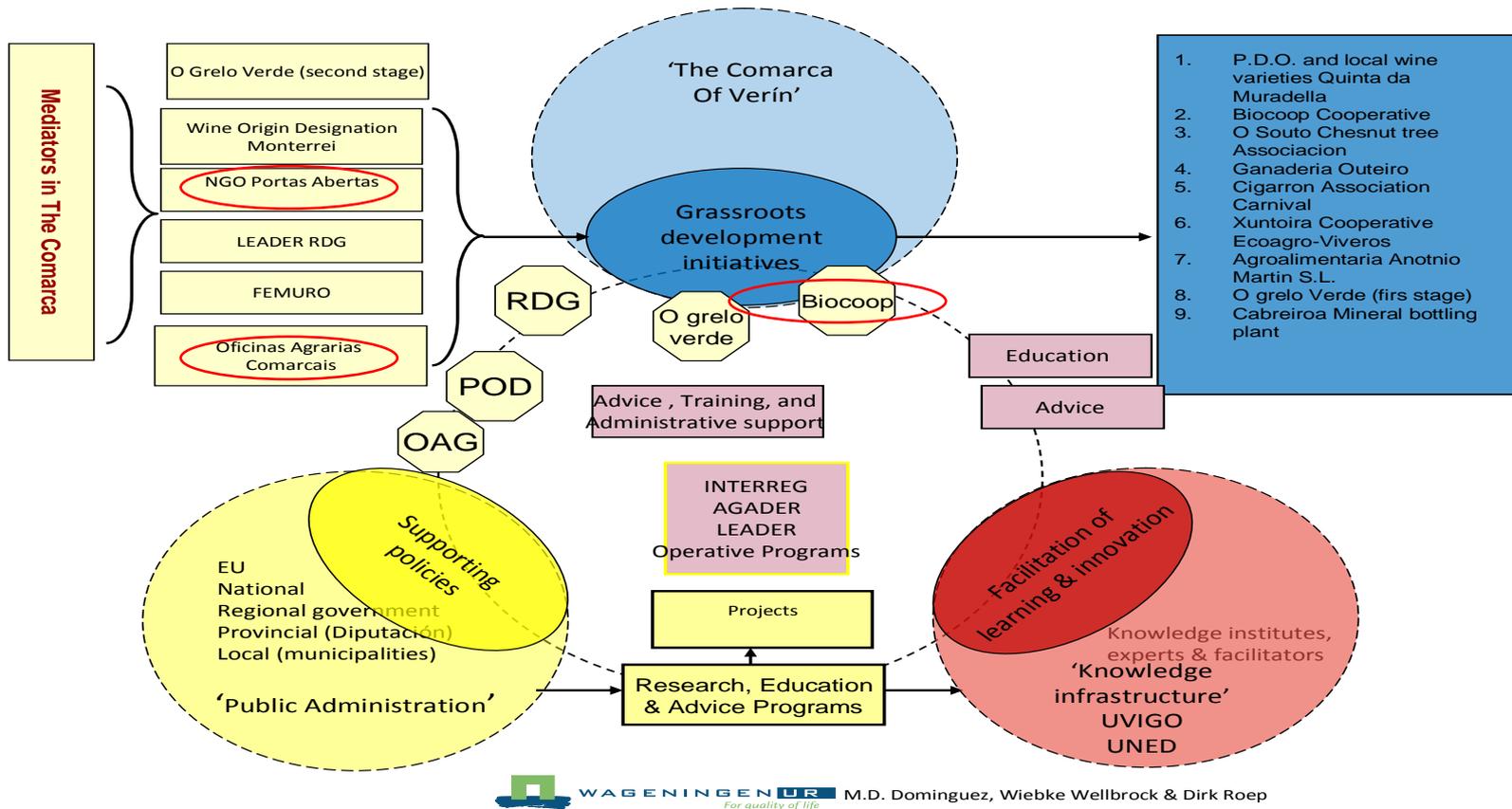
- working rate (33%)
 - 22.9% in agriculture, without Verín
 - 8.5% in agriculture whole Comarca

- Apparently urban, but rural in its character (eg abandoned Monte, scattered population)

CONTEXT

- *In the EU DERREG project, researchers from WP4 explore how the interfaces between rural development initiatives, knowledge infrastructure and policies do and can effectuate regional learning and capacity building*

Case Study Outcomes in The Comarca



INTERFACES IN THE COMARCA

- Interfaces can take a formalized organisational entity (OAC, LAG of LEADER, PDO Moneterrei)
- Interface also can take an informal, often veiled 'appearance, O Grelo Verde; NGOs-Portas Abertas)
- Being in between during the process: some GDIs are becoming mediators within the informal realm (Farmer cooperatives –Bioocop)

Oficinas Agrarias Comarcais (OAC)

- Former Extensive Agrarian Services 1960; OAC 2000
- The EAS was a programme created under the Plan Marshall oriented to promoters of rural development initiatives.
- OAC was created in 2000 but their responsibilities started to change before. In 1982, transference of the competences from the National Ministry of Agriculture to the Regional Ministry, and took responsibility of all of the rural bureaucracy.
- In 1986 European funding arrived and OAC started to manage all those related to agrarian activities until 1992, giving all sort of technical and administrative advice.
- 1992 onwards, competences reduced, although it kept helping individual farmers (no associations or cooperatives) on agronomic, economic and even social topics.
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- Nowadays OAC do all the applications related to rural aids and subsidies except for those of LEADER and AGADER (Galician rural development) programmes). It also provides advice in the starting phase

Oficinas Agrarias Comarcales (OAC)

- The role of the extensive services has been highlighted as one of the most dynamic actor in the promotion of development in the rural areas. The role of the OAC is also positively evaluated but it is criticized the limits imposed by administration that has restricted many of its past tasks
- Within the public administration OAC, despite being a public organism is stimulating informal networking opportunities by creating needs of cooperation:

we create the need, for example if somebody comes here saying that they cannot sell their tomatoes, we tell them that this and that person have the same problem and that they might create a cooperative to increase their possibilities of commercialisation, for example (Castor Gago, OAC director)

NGO Portas Abertas

- 1977-1990-nowadays
 - carrying out an integral programme of rural development through different projects. It has been supporting different grassroots development initiatives over the last three decades, providing ideas, training and technical support for subsidy applications

- Managing LEADER I and II and collaborator LEADER+. Now out!

- Portas Abertas significant role was highlighted by different interviews, in the promotion, and implementation of some of the GDIs and other arrangements studied in the area. Namely in helping with subsidy or project application, training, knowledge exchange to set up:
 - cooperatives Biocoop or A Xuntoira,
 - individual initiatives such as Quinta da Muradella,
 - or some mediators such as O Grelo Verde and Femuro
 - they have fostered the creation of neighbour associations and monte communities for a better and more sustainable management of the local available resources
 - <http://www.blogoteca.com/portasabertas/index.php>

Evaluation of formal interfaces

- The Comarca grassroots development initiatives get direct support from public administration: positive evaluation to the start of the initiatives
- Some public organisms highly valorised: AES (nowadays OAC). However, due to a restructuring of functions, OAC is not any longer providing help to projects linked to agricultural activities.
- LEADER I and II also LAG (GDRs)

Evaluation of interfaces at Institutional level

- A negative evaluation for the current way of public administration of understanding development processes: a consequence of the increasing power of local governments within the different programmes of development.
- Public support or the lack of it is criticised also regarding some policies related to the structural factors (land access, communication, roads)
- Public administration provides good and clear communication about their requirements to give out subsidies but provision is slow, especially in the current context of crisis *and the difficulties to get loans. In general the initiators are not defending a permanent flow of financial support, although they considered is needed in the beginning.*
- Knowledge infrastructure provides support and facilitation by expertise, seminars, training, and skill development. But weak relation between knowledge infrastructure and initiators.

Failing institutional *mediator*



Globalization and development in 'The Comarca' through practice

- GDI's have revealed to be good examples of what Woods (forthcoming) labels as *relocalizers, niche actors and global conservators*
 - Biocoop cooperative that bringing together beef organic farmers was formed to market products, creating -non-existing before- short and long commercialisation channels, and aiming to preserve heritage through regional cattle breeds.
 - O Souto is an association of chestnut tree owners that aims at fostering the traditional chestnut economy of the region, trying to add value to this natural local resource with great potential from the economic and environmental perspective.
 - The small winery Quinta da Muradella is using and recovering local ancient wine varieties to export a small production of selective wines all around the world.
 - A Xuntoira is a carpentry cooperative that produces distinctive wood kitchen doors by importing materials from different countries and exporting the final product also.
- As Woods (forthcoming) very clearly points, *all this initiatives are adding value to local resources by asserting local distinctiveness and local networks of production and consumption*

General Remarks

- In the Comarca de Verín, the interfaces between rural development initiatives, the knowledge infrastructure and policies have been mostly developed within informal networks of the niche-actors.
- Initiators and informal networks are relevant knowledge brokers in the region. Even with no formal role in fostering rural development, their personal interests and practices result in economic as well as socio-cultural progress.
- Progress is mainly booked in practice by Initiators and informal networks. However, as institutional support depends on policy, sustainable rural development in the Comarca remains limited.
- Local figures holding power limit the capacity to act of others. Patron-client relationships hamper the further unfolding of the relevant actor-networks for rural development. Local political struggles characterize the limited impact of new and old grassroots development initiatives.

Recommendations

- Informal regional learning process and sustainment of rural development and the rural economy should be fostered by an adequate policy framework.
- Foster Formal support for informal mediators and and relevant actors, agencies: study, research needed as well as developing the connection with knowledge infrastructure
- Good use of existing development centres
- Promotion of good practices that are sustainable and therefore long-lasting ones

Thank you for your attention

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