

Balancing between bureaucracy and progress. On niche actors and Rural Development in Galicia, Spain

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Balancing between bureaucracy and progress

- Exploring sustainable rural development dynamics in an increasingly depopulating European rural area: the Comarca de Verín in Galicia, a region in the North West of Spain
- Sustainable rural development based on incorporating (local) natural resource management and knowledge and learning processes.



Where?

- The Comarca de Verín is one of the case studies in the European project DERREG
- DERREG: researchers analyse interfaces between rural development initiatives, the knowledge infrastructure and policies and how to face the challenge of globalisation processes
- Social interface being ‘*a critical point of intersection between different lifeworlds, social fields or levels of social organization, where social discontinuities based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledges and power*’



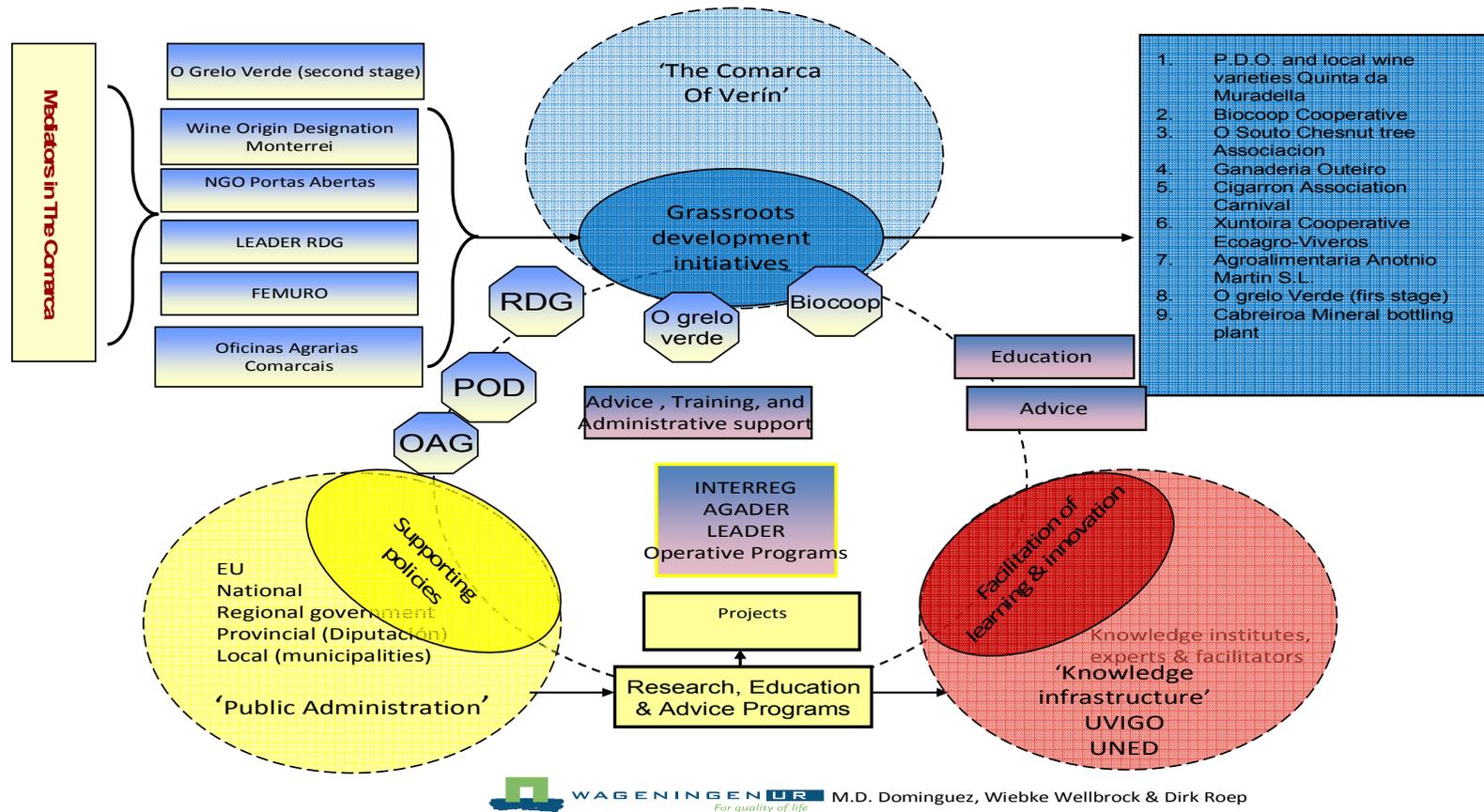
How?

- Grassroots development initiatives carry the potential of fostering the rural economy
 - delivery rooms for policy making and guide of processes of regional learning more in general.

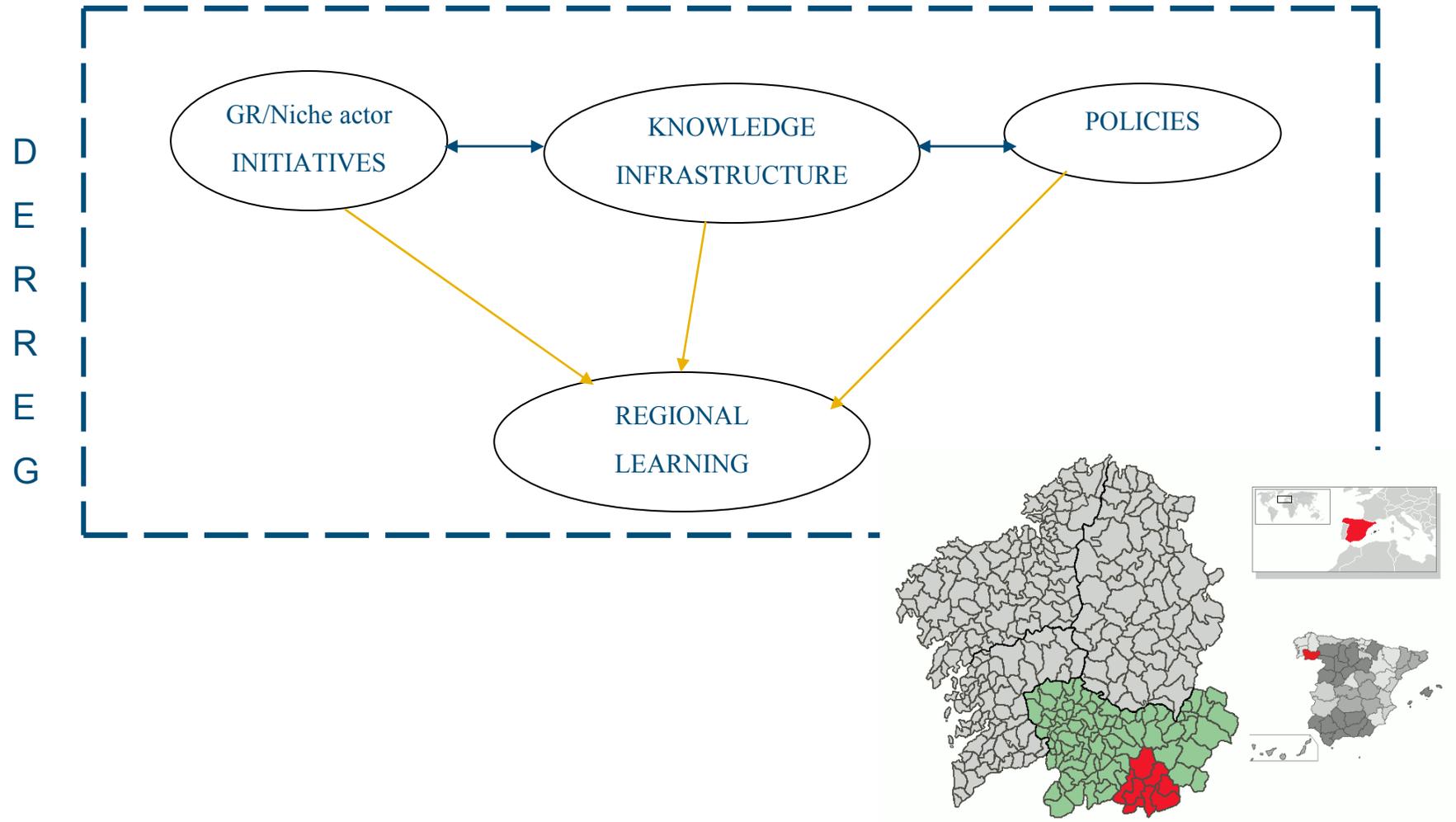
- Four grassroots development activities and assess how regional learning and capacity building is arranged by the niche-actors who initiated them.
 - How those initiatives have developed and to what extent they incorporate the local natural resource base in the case study area.
 - How those niche-actors perceive the role of knowledge structure and policies and their role in promoting or jeopardising the successful development of the initiatives.
 - Role of niche-actors as knowledge brokers in sustaining rural development.



From theory to practice



From theory to practice



Theoretical scope

■ Learning region

- learning region' describes regions with an institutional environment that encourages private and social learning by individual workers, firms and government bodies
- In case study area local actors besides users of knowledge, they are *producers and disseminators of knowledge*.
- *Regional learning* is also seen as the process of bringing people together and stimulating collaboration in the interest of the local community *accompanied by* putting into value otherwise abandoned resources and linking these to new consumer networks



Theoretical scope

- *Sustainable rural development*
 - rural development in which natural local resource management is incorporated, are sustainable only *when they allow for processes of change that are able to last in the long-term.*
 - systems' capacity to adapt: *'open (co)evolutionary process of improving the management of social-ecological systems'.*
 - core objective of any program on sustainable rural development should be re-connecting nature and society



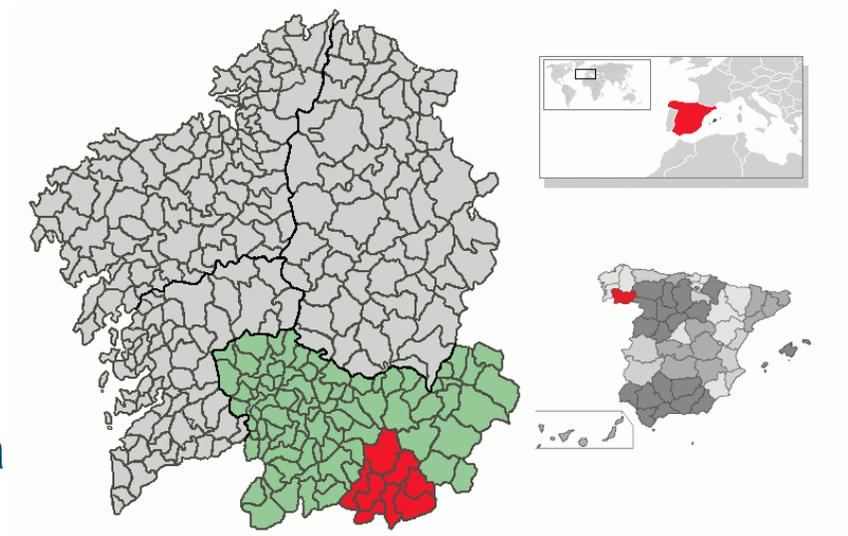
Theoretical scope

- Grassroots development activities can be understood as new promising practices that may function as ‘protected spaces’ or ‘niches’ in which ideas and new patterns or configurations can ripen
- Niche-actors *might act* as knowledge brokers



Case Study area Comarca de Verín (spain)

- Population: 28.000 of which 14.000 in Verín (town)
- 8 municipalities
- 175 singular entities
- max altitude +/-1500m
- 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)



Comarca de Verín

■ Socio-economic features:

Table 1 Singular Entities and Population in The Comarca

	Singular Entities	Population (2008)		
		Total	Men	Women
Castrelo do Val	16	1240	625	615
Cualedro	20	2092	1028	1064
Laza	23	1627	805	822
Monterrei	17	3067	1530	1537
Oimbra	17	1923	975	948
Ríós	35	1973	970	1003
Verín	18	14237	7019	7218
Vilardevós	29	2382	1193	1189
Total	175	28541	14145	14396

Source: INE (Nomenclator)

Table 2 Unemployment and activity rates in The Comarca

	1991			2001		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Activity rate	39,5	57,4	22,2	39,6	49,4	30,2
Working rate	31,9	46,2	18,1	33,3	41,9	24,9
Unemployment rate	19,3	19,6	18,5	16,1	15,1	17,5

Source: IGE (www.ige.es, see comarcal analysis)

Table 3 Employment per sector within the Comarca (December 2007)

	Verin municipality	Comarca without Verin	Comarcal Average
Agriculture	2.2	22.9	8.5
Industry	14.1	17.6	15.2
Construction	14.1	16.8	14.9
Services	69.6	42.8	61.4

Source: Estudio socio-económico Plan de Actuación Verin 2009-2014

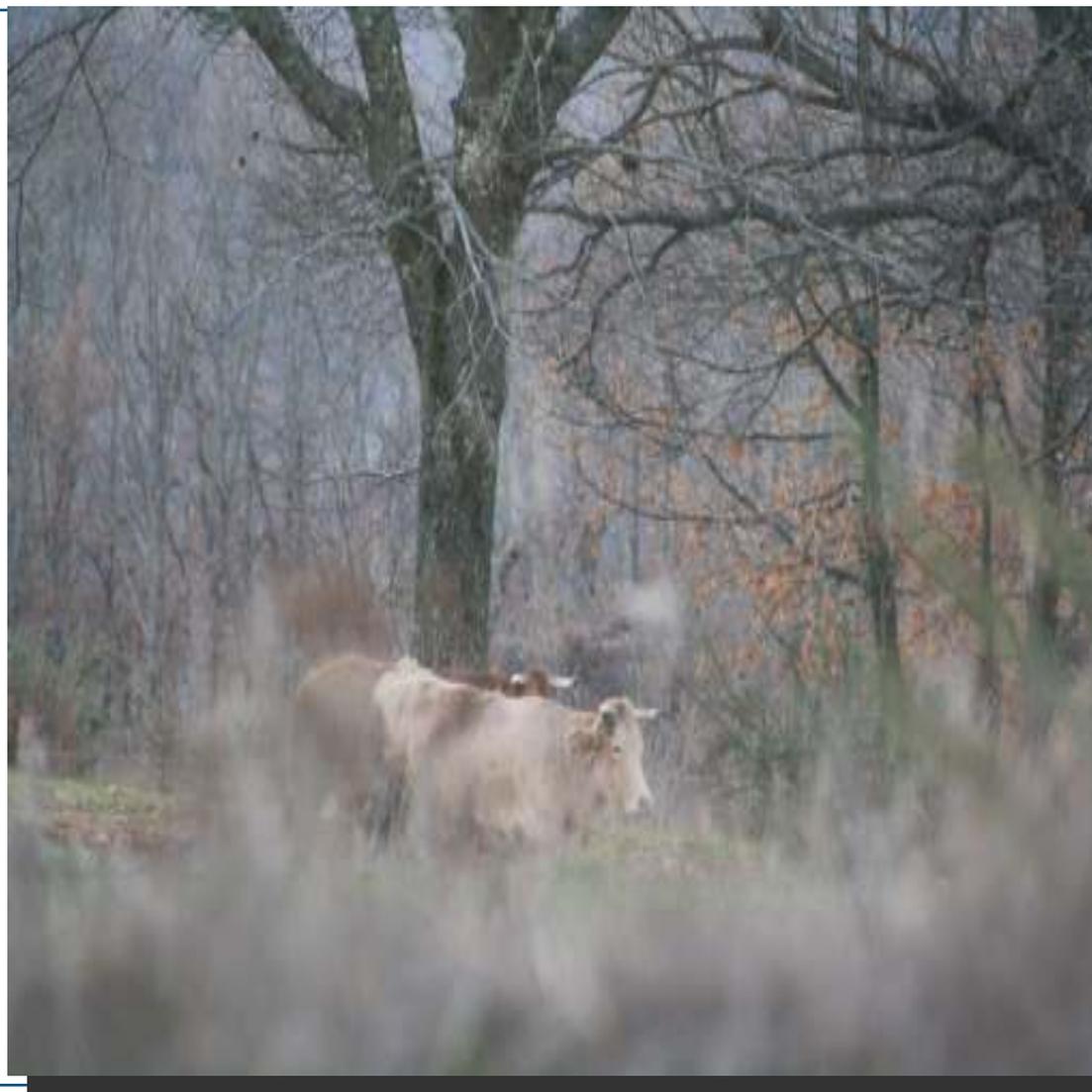
Biocoop: “United we stand”

■ **Services:**

- provision of organic fodder
- management advice on organic production
- transport of the animals to the slaughter house.
- administrative support for applying to agro-environmental subsidies and fulfilling the Galician organic council regulation (CRAEGA)

■ **Present:**

- Biocoop delivers meat within 48 hours directly to consumers and supermarkets and to specialized butchers, all over Spain.



Biocoop: “United we stand”



■ Difficulties:

- Neither in the Comarca de Verín nor in the province of Ourense something similar existed.
- Knowledge on converting conventional dairy into organic beef production, looking for possibilities to sell organic meat demanded for going beyond farmers' environment
- Hard job to get conventional farmers involved in his innovative initiative.

■ Niche-actor, *formal* and *informal* support

- Institutional support for organic farming through funding, certification and training:
“(...) without subsidies organic but also conventional farming would not be possible. In fact subsidies subsidise consumers” (Jose Luis Vaz).
- B farmers had to look for “their own solutions and support” within private, informal networks



A Xuntoira: a village cooperative

- *Early 1980s, Isaac Barreira started a family enterprise: a small wood factory located in the small mountainous village of Berrande (municipality of Vilardevós) on the border with Portugal*
- *That family enterprise has developed into A Xuntoira, increasing progressively the number of members (5-7-13-60)*
- *From general carpentry and even houses to specialisation: wooden kitchen doors, manufactured in the factory and exported to various countries*
- **Goal**
 - *A Xuntoira wanted to be and has become a driving force in fostering rural economic development in general, and the economic development of the village in particular*
 - *Maximized the use of local wood resources (not achieved) Xuntoira*



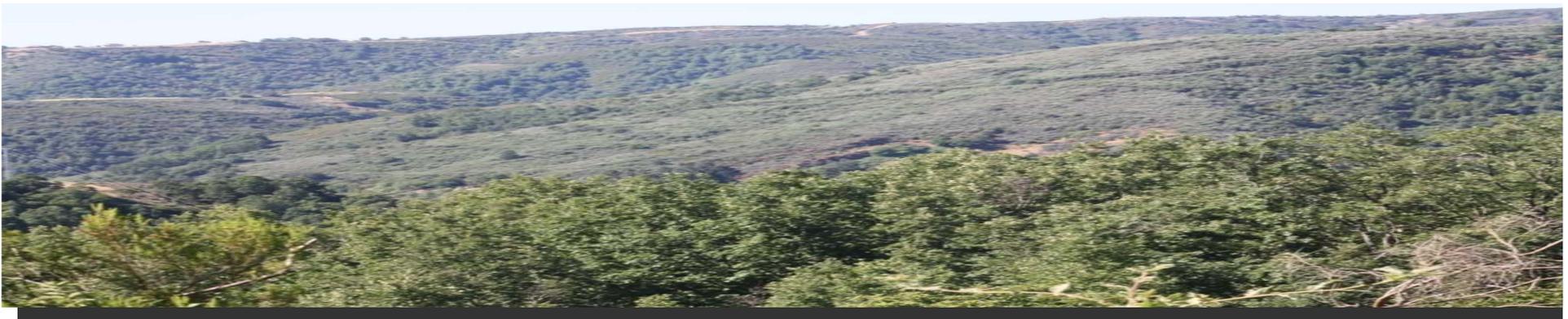
A Xuntoira: a village cooperative

■ Institutional support

- Subsidies for infrastructure, machinery, technology and training.
- First support came from LEADER programmes, followed by other European funds that subsidized up-to-the-minute technology.

■ Difficulties

- Lack of economic infrastructure and enterprises in the area
- Lack of the mobilisation of land, and hence, difficult access to *monte* as productive forestall area (raw materials come from France, Scandinavian countries, Russia, USA and Canada): major pitfall and great loss of the growth of the rural economy
- Failure of land consolidation in the area:
- Abandonment of productive *monte*, mostly under common property
- The lack of a good rural development plan that has to be related to different domains.



O Souto chestnut tree association

- 1980's Idea to start a chestnut tree association
- 2000 civil association *O Souto is funded*
- Participants in O Souto are the owners of chestnut trees in the municipality, located at the boarder of Portugal in the mountains surrounding Verín.
- Around 60% of the owners and around 40,000 units out of a total of 100,000 trees are incorporated in the association.



O Souto chestnut tree association

■ Goal.

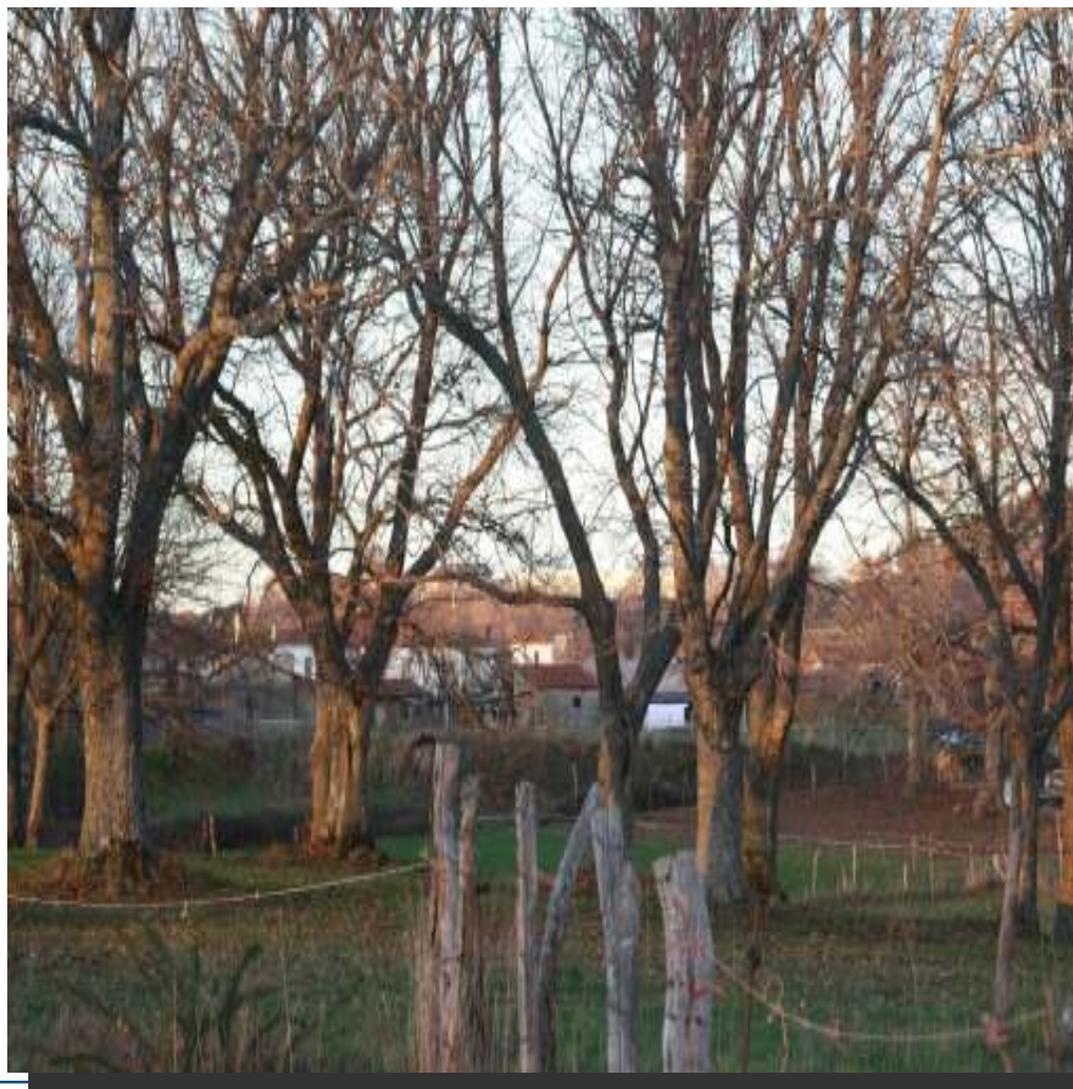
- organize chestnut tree owners in a formal association in order to improve the returns of chestnut gathering (a local traditional activity) and maintenance of chestnut tree fields (*soutos* in Galician).
- Economic significance of chestnuts for livelihoods in the in the area: returns of chestnut gathering are over half of the monetary household income on yearly basis.
- Chestnut trees plantation and its maintenance generates and improves the biodiversity, conserves the landscape structure, would avoid fires and results in CO2 sequestration.



O Souto chestnut tree association O Souto

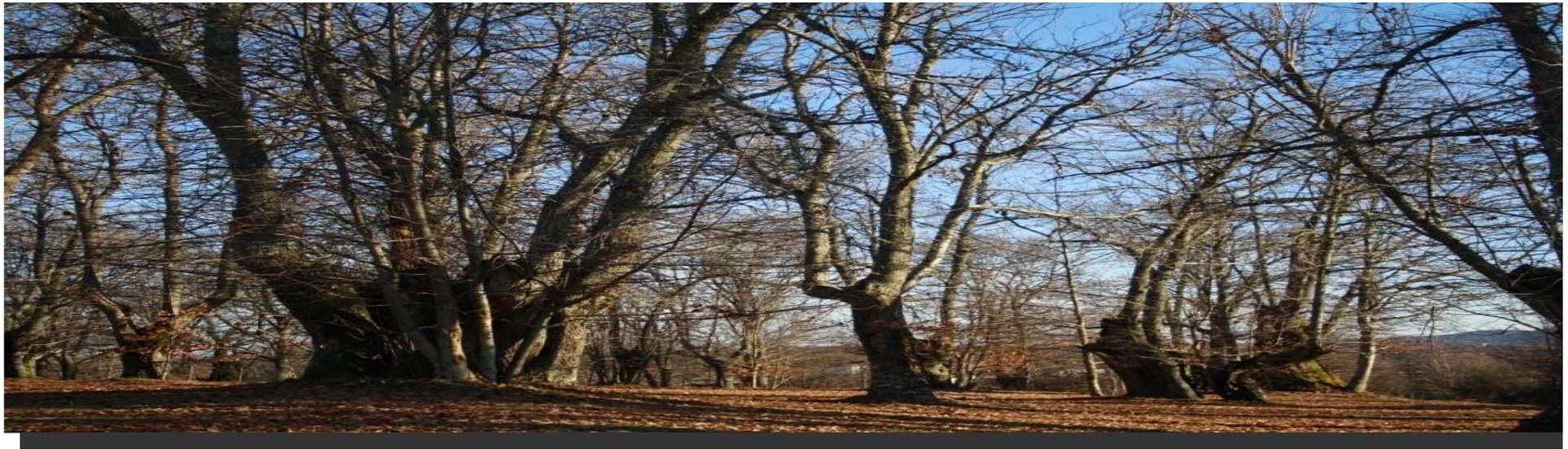
■ Difficulties

- Further growth is constrained by the difficulty to convince people to associate.
- Difficulties for Land consolidation plan
- Quota payment
- Local political struggles



O Souto

- Institutional support has been rather limited.
 - Year 2001: the regional government started to pay attention to this initiative and to recognise chestnut socio-economic and environmental importance.
 - Since 2001, the association demands for land consolidation in the area.
 - 2007, a plan for land consolidation in eight villages (three parishes) was approved. It took about seven to eight years to get the proposal accepted, it will take another seven years to implement and benefit from it.
 - 2010, A small victory: Geographical Protected Designation of the Galician chestnut was approved.



Quinta da Muradella: exclusivity is in the variety

- End of the 1980s, Jose Luis Mateo decided to get into wine production.
- 1991, small wine cellar *Quinta da Muradella* is created (2-5 workers)
- **Goal**
 - produce wine by recovering and using as much as possible local varieties.
 - study of wine history in the Comarca in order to facilitate the recovery of endangered local varieties and traditional knowledge in making wine.

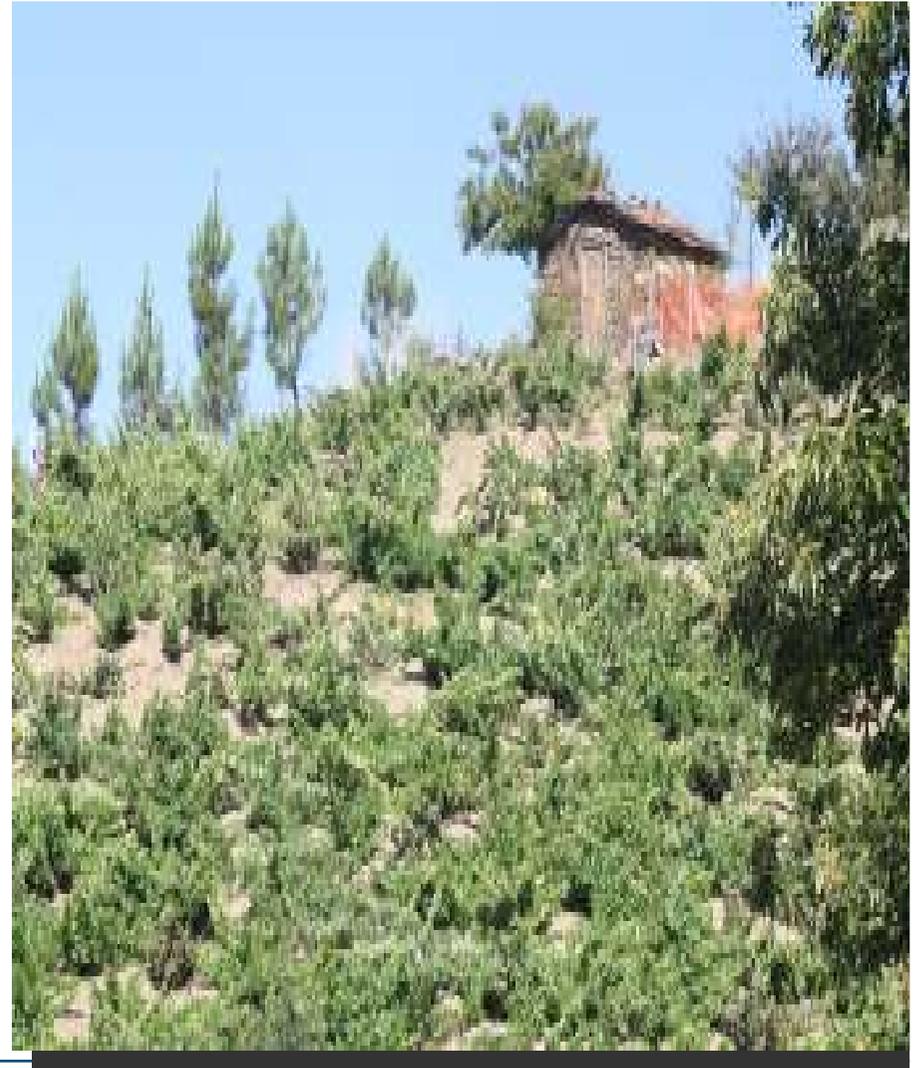


Quinta da Muradella: exclusivity is in the variety

■ Present

- Internationally recognised.
- His best wines result from the recovery of old ancient vine stocks.
- Many of the vineyards of his most exclusive wines, are located in otherwise abandoned *montes* and were close to definitive destruction had he not recovered them.
- He learned from wine producers, who due to their age were no longer able to both maintaining the vineyards and searching new opportunities to sell wine.

“I am lucky because I learn from old people who taught me without giving lessons... what these people do is pure ecology, they maintain the balance of the soil” (Jose Luis Mateo).

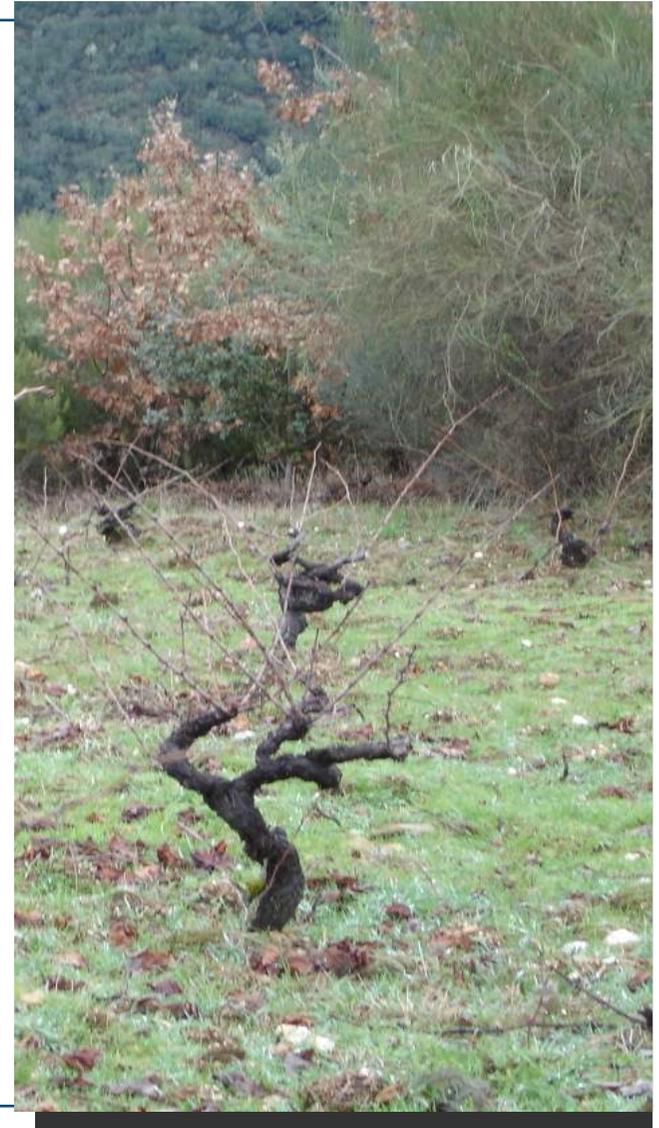


Quinta da Muradella: exclusivity is in the variety

■ Institutional support

- Mateo highlighted the support and information from national and local public organisms as well as from different European and national funding: ERDF or EAGGF funds and specific programmes like LEADER II and INTERREG; OAC.
- Knowledge: masters by private organisms and public universities (University of Vigo)
- Need of institutions facilitating and not impeding or slowing down development activities.
- Regulations, although necessary, can also limit success

“...here the exclusivity is not in the area but in the variety. In this respect the POD also contributes to the loss of the tradition. For example varieties like Zamarrita, Verdello Tinto, Tinto Merodio, Monstruosa de monterrei, Torrentes, are not included within the POD.”



Institutional support /Positive

- Although individual actors drive the process of sustainable rural development, different forms of support and facilitation are needed to set up their projects, broaden the scope of their activities and to enlarge scale.
- The Comarca grassroots development initiatives get direct support from public administration: positive evaluation to the start of the initiatives
- Some public organisms highly valorised: Agrarian Extension Service (nowadays OAC). However, due to a restructuring of functions, OAC is not any longer providing help to projects linked to agricultural activities.

Institutional support/ lacking

- 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 structure of the land, being this a limiting factor in the area (and most of the Galician region).
- Public administration provides good and clear communication about their requirements to give out subsidies. Provision is however 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.

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.
- These initiators 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.
- While balancing between bureaucracies and building a new rural world, the initiators of the new and often promising practices book progress as knowledge and network brokers. However, as institutional support depends on politics, 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.

General conclusion

- In Galicia progress often is booked in practice: by individual stakeholders who manage structural limitations,
- Informal regional learning process and sustainment of rural development and the rural economy should be fostered by an adequate policy framework.



Thank you for your attention

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