

The rural areas making strides!



**Rural Proofing as a tool to
bring the rural areas to the
mainstream at the national
and international**

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Introduction

Rural Proofing: the methodology that seeks to reverse the trend of depopulation in Spain

Spain is one of the countries whose municipalities have the highest risk of depopulation in the European Union (EU). This entails significant economic, social and environmental risks for the future.

Rural Proofing, has emerged as a methodology to reverse the trend of depopulation, by promoting the revision of regulations and policies from a rural perspective. In order to achieve the correct **implementation** thereof, we need to be aware of and familiar with the application thereof and also be cognizant of its importance. With this document from the **Spanish Network for Rural Development (REDR for its Spanish acronym)**, we want to bring this concept to public and spaces, and civil society to facilitate its implementation in a practical manner.



In the **first part** of the document, the origin of the concept is briefly summarised, and we analyse how Spain has aligned with Rural Proofing thanks to its inclusion in **Law 27/2022, of 20 December, on the institutionalisation of evaluating public policies in the General State Administration**.

With the objective of raising awareness about the current scarce legislative deference toward the rural areas, in the **second part**, we've examined the number of mentions of the term "rural" in a small sample of **ten national laws**. Despite the fact that this sample is not a reflection of the Spanish regulatory system, it does constitute a part of it that can offer us an approximate idea of the situation we are in.

Additionally, in order to raise awareness to a greater extent about the repercussions of **not adapting the regulations to the rural reality**, we wanted to include the testimonies of people who live in rural areas and have been affected by it. Listening to the voices of the rural population is key when it comes to bringing the concept of Rural Proofing down to earth, making it more familiar and less abstract than it has been until now. If we want it to be applied, we must have it be understood. We've tried to convey this through the **life stories** of **Guadalupe Vada** and **Juan Carlos Duarte**.

In the **third part**, we analyse the role that different agents can play in implementing this methodology, with the objective of promoting a coordinated effort. The public administration, companies, third-sector organisations and civil society are fundamental so that Rural Proofing is something beyond a simple declaration of interests. Thus, in this regard, at REDR we have prepared a list of recommendations and suggestions to be transformed into action.

Finally, in the **fourth point**, we've attempted to summarise our demands, suggestions and proposals in our "**Positioning for the effective implementation of Rural Proofing in Spain**". With this document, we call upon all actors to join this position so that we can work together to achieve a living, cohesive and sustainable rural areas.

The rural area does not have time for intermediate solutions. We need a commitment on the part of all kinds of actors that will allow us to bring the rural areas to the mainstream in our actions and policies.





Rural Proofing: origins and application

Rural Proofing against depopulation and ethnocentrism

According to data from the General Secretariat for the Challenge Demographic (2019), 8 out of 10 municipalities with fewer than 5,000 residents have declined in population in the last decade. When we refer to municipalities with fewer than 1,000 residents, the percentage of depopulation reaches 86%.

One of the many reasons that has led us to this situation is that, as a society, we are still holding onto an **ethnocentric vision of what happens in rural areas and the future of their policies**.

The Royal Spanish Academy (RAE for its acronym in Spanish) defines 'ethnocentrism' as the "emotional tendency that makes one's own culture the exclusive criterion for interpreting the behaviour of other groups, races or societies". A culture based on an urban vision will shape our actions according to these criteria and priorities.



Within this epistemological framework, you could say that the legislation has taken into account the object (the rural areas), without considering the subject (the rural population) and the relationship between the two. This has been transformed into policies that are designed more to **compensate** or **indemnify** these territories, rather than take advantage of their full potential to turn them into or return them into being better developed and competitive areas.

The methodology of Rural Proofing emerged in this context as a practical tool to analyse the regulations and fight against depopulation making the rural population into the protagonist.

Rural Proofing means something more than just verifying the potential impact of public policies and legislation. It ensures that all national, regional and local regulations are adapted to the different rural needs and demands, whether environmental, cultural, social or economic.

For **Phil Hogan** (2018), former European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, this methodology refers to the **design of new programmes and strategies** that incorporate the **needs and perspectives of rural communities** and recognise the potential of rural areas to provide innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions. In other words, applying this guarantee mechanism to the rural population is not just the same as asking ourselves about the effects that a certain regulation can have on the people who live in small municipalities. It also means moving away from the urban-centric vision that governs our historical imagination and ask ourselves how we can incorporate the vision of the rural population into new actions. To do this, it is essential to **place the rural population as the protagonist** and develop effective mechanisms of active listening.

Rural Proofing must place the rural population as a subject when creating legislation and public policies

Territory-sensitive policies are those designed, executed and examined from the local needs, in which its inhabitants have a voice and a vote, from a bottom-up perspective. Public policies must provide valid tools that allow the population to break this vicious cycle and begin to develop their full potential.

Therefore, the implementation of Rural Proofing seeks to create territory-sensitive policies. All these characteristics could be applied to the **LEADER/CLLD community-led local development approach**, a methodology that for over three decades has demonstrated that it is possible to give territories the key to their future and prosper in a sustainable and effective way.



Rural Proofing and LEADER

LEADER emerged in 1991 with the aim of facilitating greater participation, promoting governance and committing to a paradigm shift in the way in which public policies are implemented in rural areas.

The LEADER methodology has demonstrated for over three decades that it is possible to count on the rural population to implement sustainable rural development and achieve territorial cohesion hand-in-hand with the Local Action Groups (LAG).

The Local Action Groups are rooted throughout the Spanish rural territory, with a presence in **over 7,000 municipalities**. Therefore, this extensive network of local entities is qualified to become that tool that watches over the interests of rural territories and enforce compliance with rural development policies. The LAGs are the only proven relevant and effective public-private territorial harmonisation tool. They are an important, active and influential part of the **toolbox** for achieving integral and territorial development and social cohesion in rural areas. We have been pioneering in highlighting the assets of the rural areas, which has helped and continues to help to give a solid foundation to territorial policies.

Since their creation, the Local Action Groups/LEADER Groups/Rural Development Groups have launched several projects and programmes with the aim of **diversifying the economy of rural areas** and generating added value.

Discover the Local Action Group that represents your territory here!



Thanks to their actions, attempts have been made to alleviate the effects of those policies and regulations that have historically ignored the rural perspective, by facilitating entrepreneurship and providing quality services, among other issues.

For all these reasons, it is essential that when starting this Rural Proofing Mechanism, the LEADER and the Local Action Groups maintain a **leading** role so that the actions carried out have a greater measured and coordinated impact.



Spain and its commitment to Rural Proofing

Rural Proofing is mentioned for the first time at the European level in 2016, at the Cork 2.0 European Conference on Rural Development. The declaration states the following:

The rural potential to deliver innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions for current and future societal challenges such as economic prosperity, food security, climate change, resource management, social inclusion, and integration of migrants should be better recognised. A rural proofing mechanism should ensure this is reflected in Union policies and strategies. (Cork Declaration, 2016).

De Since then, Rural Proofing has come to form part of the political discourse and many European agendas. However, its implementation lacks any mandatory clause, and thus depends on the will of each Member State.

In 2021, the European Commission invited Member States to implement it in its "Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA)".

What is the LTVRA or Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas?

The "Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas" defines the challenges and concerns faced by rural populations and shares the main opportunities available.

The LTVRA is based on the real priorities and needs of a broad social base that was consulted on several occasions during the process of its formulation by the European Commission.

In addition to the registration of contributions during the Roadmap launched by the European Commission, a broad public consultation launched in 2020 was opened, which registered over 2,300 contributions. Of all of them, the majority (378) came from Spain, representing 16% of the total comments sent. This data is an important indicator of our **country's commitment to the health and prosperity of rural areas**.

This consultation featured the participation of members of civil society (62%), public authorities (9%), companies and associations (9%), academies and research institutions (5%), NGOs (7%) and Rural Development Networks (5%).

The lack of connectivity, the challenge of generational change and the lack of job opportunities are some of the issues that must be addressed in order to achieve true territorial cohesion and a more sustainable future. Specifically, the LTVRA wants to work on a

stronger, more connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas.

The LTVRA urges the implementation of **Rural Proofing at a European and national level**, in order to have a better understanding of the impact of regulations on rural areas. In addition, it also advanced the creation of the **Rural Observatory**, focused on the collection of data from the European rural areas.

The LTVRA proposes the **Rural Pact** as one of the **tools** to achieve the correct application of Rural Proofing and to facilitate the dialogue between the public authorities, companies, civil society and academia.

The **Rural Pact** has **3 objectives**:

- **To amplify rural voices in order to elevate them to the political agenda**
- **Structure and facilitate collaboration and mutual learning between members of the Pact**
- **Promote and monitor the voluntary commitment to act by the members of the Pact**



Do you want to join the Rural Pact Community?



Want to know more about LTVRA?



Go here to the Rural Observatory





Spain has set a precedent at the **European level** by incorporating Rural Proofing into **Law 27/2022, 20 December, on the institutionalisation of evaluating public policies in the General State Administration.**

This Public Policy Evaluation Law, approved in December 2022, includes an additional provision, which contains the promotion that the Government will offer to **implement Rural Proofing.**

Sixth additional provision. Rural Guarantee Mechanism

1. The Government will promote a Rural Guarantee Mechanism, ensuring the participation of stakeholders in its design and application
2. In any case, said Mechanism will include:
 - a. The incorporation of the evaluation of the effect of public policies on territories, the environment and rural society, in accordance with the provisions of article 2.1. of this law.
 - b. The development of a specific evaluation methodology that takes into account the principles, recommendations and tools proposed by the European Union in this field.

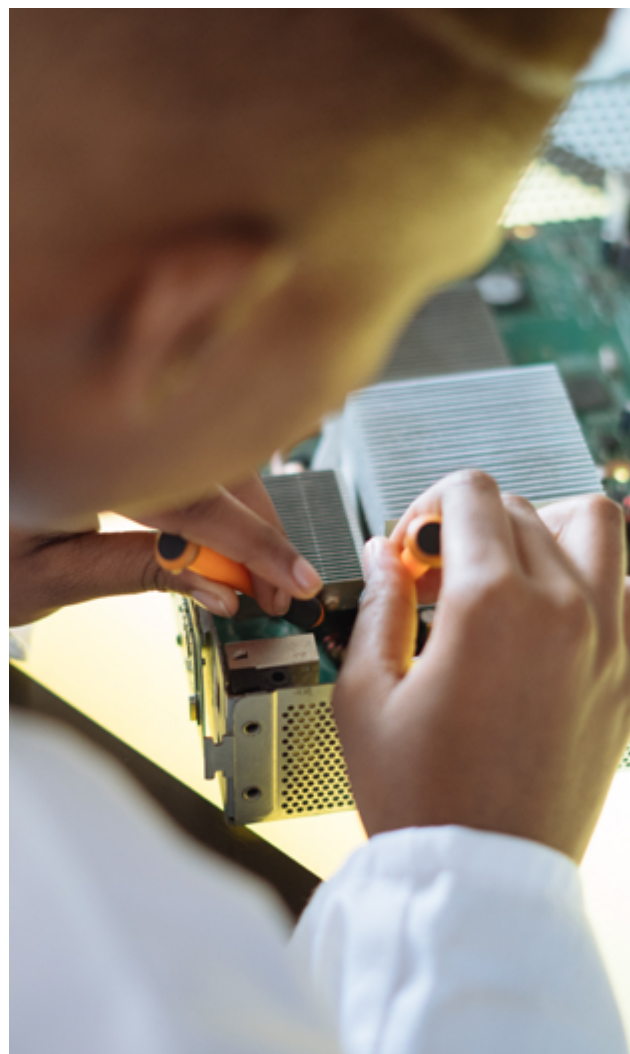
In this way, even though at the European level, Rural Proofing remains just a recommended policy, in Spain it has become mandatory to comply with. However, we now have one of the most arduous paths ahead to achieve its implementation throughout the territory and at all levels.

First of all, it is essential to commit to an **awareness raising policy** about Rural Proofing as well as raising awareness about its implementation. It is essential to know the norm to be able to apply it.

Second of all, this outreach work must be accompanied by dialogue and the **sharing of experiences**, both at a national, European and international level. There are many cases in which similar tools have been applied and have had verifiable success. To this point, the **lessons learned** play a **key role** when it comes to implementing a tool adapted to our reality and consistent with the future model that we want to build.

Thirdly, it is necessary to commit to the **creation of practical material** that collects all the advances and establishes an adapted guide for its real implementation by city halls, councils, ministries, autonomies and other administrative bodies.

Fourth, all this will have no impact unless the implementation includes figures that enforce compliance, carry out a follow-up of the actions and to which all parties are accountable. It is important that this body functions independently, so that it can effectively evaluate the actions of all the departments involved, regardless of legislative priorities or political signs. To guarantee its temporary stability and its capillarity, it is essential that the central government be the one to facilitate its implementation.



Bringing Rural Proofing down to Earth: why is it so important?

On many occasions, we are not aware of the repercussions entailed by not incorporating a rural perspective into the generation and application of laws.

That which is not named, does not exist. Therefore, its effects are also not known, which makes it impossible to measure and correct.

Below are some examples of national laws where the number of references to "rural" during the drafting process has been analysed¹.

1. Mentions of the term "rural" have been searched for in a total of 10 national laws. Despite the fact that it is a small sample of national legislation, it constitutes a useful exercise to get an idea of the scenario in which we currently find ourselves.

Law 7/2021, of 20 May, on climate change and energy transition.

6 mentions

PREAMBLE

The common agricultural policy, **rural** development and forestry policy are keys to achieving the goal of climate neutrality.

Along the same lines, it includes the need to encourage the participation of public and private owners and managers in increasing the CO2 capture capacity of terrestrial and marine carbon sinks, especially those of the agricultural and forestry sector. For this, together with its identification, evaluation and follow-up, its co-benefits will be promoted as a motor for the development of **rural** areas.

The transition to a decarbonised economy also requires measures that facilitate a fair transition for the most vulnerable groups and geographical areas, including **rural** areas. Thus, for the transition towards a more ecological production model to be socially beneficial, in a country with high unemployment rates like Spain, it must be the engine of new jobs and generate quality job opportunities.

Article 25. **Rural development: agricultural policy, forestry policy and renewable energy.**

The Government will incorporate measures aimed at reducing the vulnerability to climate change among agricultural, mountain and forest soils. In addition, it will incorporate the preservation of these soils into the application of the Common Agricultural Policy, and other strategies, plans and programmes regarding agricultural policy and **rural** development, as well as in the Spanish Forestry Plan. This includes the preparation of a vulnerability map, as well as the evaluation and promotion of agricultural systems and sustainable forest management practices to increase their resilience against climate change, which will in any case promote synergies with the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in these ecosystems. The deployment of renewable energies must be carried out in a manner that is compatible with the conservation of the natural heritage and proper territorial planning. To do this, it will pursue reversing part of the wealth it generates in the territory where the aforementioned deployment is carried out to activate its economy and combat demographic decline.

Artículo 26. **Fomento de la capacidad de absorción de los sumideros de carbono.**

1. For the purposes indicated in the previous sections, actions that highlight the positive externalities provided by terrestrial



and marine carbon sinks will be promoted, especially those provided by the agricultural and forestry sector, as well as the use of biomass of primary origin as a source of materials, forest products from mountains as raw materials with an optimal life cycle, ecosystem services and energy from renewable and sustainable sources. To this end, the promotion action indicated will be carried out within the framework of the necessary support for the bioeconomy as a motor for the development of **rural** areas, and adapted to the obligations related to air quality.

Law 18/2022, of 28 September, on the creation and growth of companies.

0 mentions

Law 10/2015, of 26 May, for the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

0 menciones

Law 15/2022, of 12 July, comprehensive for equal treatment and non-discrimination.

0 mentions

Law 39/2022, of 30 December, on Sport

3 mentions

PREAMBLE

This concept of sport as an instrument to facilitate the social and territorial cohesion of the country represents an added value in the most depopulated areas of the **rural** areas, which have greater difficulties in establishing and strengthening social and proximity ties. In this sense of facilitating social cohesion, for over a decade, there has been a clear need to create structured channels for the participation of organised fans in clubs and sports governing bodies in which there are organised fans and high levels of sentimental community identification between sports entities and fans.

Article 8. **Older people and people who live in rural areas or in areas with special demographic difficulties.**

1. The General State Administration, in collaboration with the rest of the competent Public Administrations, in accordance with the provisions of article 50 of the Spanish Constitution, will promote specific public policies that encourage practising sports among the elderly that are oriented to improve their quality of life and well-being.
2. The General State Administration will promote, in collaboration with the rest of the competent Public Administrations, the promotion of practising sport in **rural** areas, with a view to improving the physical conditions of people, their quality of life.

Law 42/2007, of 13 December, on the Natural Heritage and Biodiversity.

0 mentions



Law 9/2022, of 14 June, on Quality of Architecture.

6 mentions

PREAMBLE

Commintting to architectural quality, both in urban and rural, environments, means recognising, first of all, the cult intellectual, artistic and professional contribution, of a discipline that has a transversal impact on multiple aspects of sustainability. Therefore, it is important to highlight the fundamental role that architecture can have for reactivating areas in demographic decline, improving the habitability of rural areas and strengthening the socioeconomic fabric in these environments. This is achieved through improving infrastructures and equipment. This Architecture Quality Law is proposed as a necessary legislative instrument to consolidate a new model of economic, energetic and ecological transition that promotes greater inclusion and social cohesion. Not in vain, it is included as Reform Number 4 in the Recovery, Transformation and Residence Plan approved by the Government of Spain to deal with the crisis caused by COVID-19, within the Lever 1 Policy, which is entitled "Urban and rural agenda, fight against depopulation and development of agriculture", and specifically in Component 2, which

focuses on the promotion of actions to rehabilitate and improve the building stock, both in urban and rural areas.

It is also aligned with the European initiatives that seek to conserve Europe's cultural heritage, both in urban and rural areas, and shape its future, such as the European Union's New Bauhaus, as well as others that seek to promote transformative policies of the cities and rural areas. This includes actions developed within the framework of the European Green Deal to achieve a transition towards a clean and circular economy, reduce pollution and emissions and protect biodiversity (...).

Organic Law 3/2022, of 31 March, on the organisation and integration of Vocational Training.

11 mentions

PREAMBLE

At the same time, it contributes to strengthening the country's competitiveness and the productive fabric based on knowledge, for a better position in the new economy, based on the satisfaction of training needs as they occur, and s for the improvement in the qualification of the human capital of the companies, the increase

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of the entrepreneurial culture, and the reduction of the structural imbalances typical of rural areas and areas in demographic decline.

Regardless of their place of residence, and the whole territory, taking into account the unique circumstances and the specific needs of rural areas and areas in demographic decline.

Article 3. General principles.

- 1. The Vocational Training System in developed in accordance with the principles of:
- b. Satisfaction of the training needs of people of working age who are of high value for the productive system and employment, the economic strengthening of the country and its productive fabric, with special attention to the specific needs of rural areas and areas in demographic decline, and the positioning of companies in the market.

Article 6. Goals. They are objectives of the Vocational Training System.

- 7. The promotion of the dual dimension of vocational training and its links with the productive system in a framework of public-private collaboration between administrations, centres, companies or equivalent bodies, business and trade union organisations, entities and the third sector for the joint creation of value, the alignment of common strategic objectives and projects, overcoming the urban/rural gap through adequate territorial adaptation, and the effective use of resources in training and professional environments.
- 10. The provision of professional guidance that makes it easier for people, throughout their lives, to make decisions in choosing and managing their training and professional careers, combating gender stereotypes, those related to disability or the specific needs of educational support, collaborating in the construction of a professional identity that motivates future learning and adaptations to the evolution of production processes and social change, and promoting knowledge of existing or emerging opportunities mergentes in rural areas and areas in demographic decline.

Article 56. Purposes of the training phase in the company or equivalent body

- b. Be aware of the reality of the labour environment of the productive or reference servicies, which allows decision-making on future training and professional itineraries, paying special attention to existing or emerging employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in rural areas and areas in demographic decline.



Article 57. Organisation of the training.

c. The organisation of the training phase in a company or equivalent organisation will address the specificities of the productive sectors, companies or equivalent organisations that demand a differentiated design due to the type of activities and tasks to be carried out, as well as **rural** areas and areas in demographic decline.

Article 69. Grade C, D and E training offer.

4. The offer of complete or modular vocational training degrees in **rural** areas and in areas in demographic decline will be favoured, creating the necessary adaptations to meet the specific conditions and needs of the territory, facilitating access to these training modalities.

Article 77. Centres of the Vocational Training System.

3. The competent administrations will promote the existence of a network of vocational training centres that guarantee access to this training for the population in **rural** areas with social and economic development needs.

Article 95. Mission and purposes.

h. Support for local, regional and state economies through the development and adaptation of working people to economic demands and changing productive circumstances, with special attention to **rural** areas and areas in demographic decline.

Article 104. Entrepreneurship.

3. In order to regenerate, modernise and expand the productive fabric of the environment, the administrations with competence in the matter should encourage vocational training centres to participate in the development of business projects and the creation, in various sectors, as well as in **rural** areas and areas in demographic decline, of companies that incorporate the values of innovation, sustainability and social commitment.

Law 14/1986, of 25 April, on General Health.

0 mentions



We listen to the rural population

On many occasions, some more theoretical concepts, such as Rural Proofing can invoke a feeling of distance with respect to its application. In addition, many times we are unaware of the importance of putting it into operation because we do not understand how it may be affecting us in our daily life. For this reason, in this section we have considered it relevant to offer **two real cases** that explain how the legislation **negatively impacts the rural areas**.

Testimony of Guadalupe Vada Sánchez

“As a farmer and mother, I think that adapting the legislation to the rural area is essential to make it easier for people to stay in small municipalities”.

Climbing on top of a rock to send a WhatsApp message

In our working life, they give us the option of managing our animal movement guides for traceability, making appointments at the agricultural extension office, contacting the veterinarians, receiving notifications, controlling the movement of cattle on the mountain at all times, the births in the stables without stressing the animals from home, uploading our products to the networks, making 'online' sales or everyday things such as requesting a medical appointment... But of course, all this implies having access to minimum coverage. While 5G is being talked about in the cities, here we are standing on a rock looking for one bar of service in order to send a WhatsApp message.



Bejes, Picos de Europa National Park, Cantabria.

English classes worth 80 km

I am the mother of a boy who is in his 2nd year of high school in Potes (Cantabria). Something as simple as having my son attend a private English class is practically impossible when you don't have stable Internet access. We did our best until autumn/winter arrived and we could no longer stand on the rock where we get coverage to receive the class. Since then, my son has left the house at 7 a.m. and we return at 7 p.m. If we take something to eat in the car, we travel 40 km. If we go back to eat at home, we travel 80 km, to be able to attend those extracurricular classes.

A CAP that is scarcely adapted to extensive livestock farming in northern Spain

Currently the criteria to give Common agricultural policy (CAP) subsidies is being unified, when the reality of our geography leads

us to have different cattle herds and different types of livestock.

The criteria for giving aid and subsidies to areas of Castilla y León, Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha, Catalonia... should be totally different from those of a reality like Cantabria, where I live, in the Picos de Europa National Park. And that is not taken into account. It is much more difficult for us to work or herd cattle than for a farmer in Castilla; not only because of the mountains, but also because of the wild fauna. We have to be a lot more careful, work a lot more hours and invest more to keep the cattle safe. In my case, I am an extensive farmer and to collect the help from the CAP, they demand the same from me as from a farmer from Castilla. We need many hectares to receive this aid. And the hectares where my sheep graze and spend six months of the year are not worth it, because when you take an aerial photo you cannot see what is under the bush.

Testimony of Juan Carlos Duarte

“The same requirements are required to open a bar or social centre in a small municipality of 35 inhabitants as in a large city”.

In 2019, we decided to start a bar/social centre to boost social life in our municipality. To do this, we had to follow the common requirements of the specific hospitality regulations, which is exactly what we did.

Some of the requirements were necessary to guarantee the health and hygiene of the place, such as the installation of closed doors, an extractor hood and pantry in the kitchens, and instructions in Braille for the bathrooms and access to the interior of the enclosure. However, I think that other requirements, such as the need to build a changing room for the workers, may be slightly excessive. This is because our number of clients will never be as exorbitant as in bars in larger municipalities and this could never pose a risk to the hygiene or health of the diners. Even still, the building was made in accordance with all of the standards in force.

Facilities for the construction of new homes and entrepreneurship initiatives

From the City Hall, we have implemented a series of measures to facilitate the permanence in Leza de Río Leza and the arrival of new inhabitants. Thus, for example, we have decided not to charge for building permits. This can be an important incentive for an individual; and on the contrary, it does not entail a great loss for the coffers of the City Hall. Thus, in recent years, six young families have started works to build new homes.



Juan Carlos Duarte, mayor of the municipality of Leza de Río Leza, a municipality of 35 inhabitants in southeastern La Rioja



Interior of the bar/social centre of Leza de Río Leza.

An updated figure of the sheriff to take care of the inhabitants of small municipalities

I think villages are like people; if you get depressed, you can come to believe that you are the worst in the world. For this reason, the town halls and the Local Action Groups must work to invigorate life in the towns in processes that, of course, put the town population as the protagonist. The bar and the school are two fundamental factors for towns to survive. However, here I would also add the figure of the sheriff, something that can be promoted

through regulations adapted to the reality of the rural areas. A figure of the sheriff, or “caretaker of the town” who not only guarantees safety according to the old definition of the word, but also takes care of its neighbours. He is someone who knows that, if one of our neighbours does not show up at one of her most common meeting places, he will stop by her house to check that everything is okay. It must be taken into account that our populations are increasingly ageing and improving the care network is essential to guarantee the collective well-being.

From theory to action: What can we do to achieve the implementation of Rural Proofing?

What can be done from the public administration at the national level?

1. Sharing of good practices and lessons learned

Several countries, such as Canada, Japan and Korea, have already come a long way in the implementation of Rural Proofing, making rural development a cross-disciplinary issue in the action agendas of public administrations at all levels.

Sharing experiences and knowledge with similar institutions from other countries can facilitate an implementation strategy adapted to the reality of each country.

2. Involvement of all administrative levels

Despite the fact that Rural Proofing has been more traditionally linked to the work carried out by the presidency, ministries, delegations and national commissions, achieving the collaboration of regional and local entities is essential. The autonomous communities, ministries, councils and town halls play a key role, not only to adapt their actions to the rural areas, but also to measure the impact of the legislation and/or regulations in force in the territories.

3. Creation of the Rural Proofing Observatory

It is necessary to guarantee the measurement of the impact in terms of Rural Proofing through a specific team dedicated to analysing its application, making recommendations and carrying out advocacy work that allows the scope to be expanded. This must be materialised through a shared web platform, where progress in regulations and legislation can be updated, as well as the planned actions and the information material created. It is essential that this new figure be independent, so that the evaluations and recommendations are as far as possible from the interests of political parties. In addition, it must have as many arms and representations as there are ministries within the government.

What can be done from the public administration at the regional and local level?

1. Promote days to raise awareness on Rural Proofing

In order for Rural Proofing to have an effective implementation at all levels, it is essential that all actors in the rural areas and civil society are aware of what it implies for them in their day-to-day life. Therefore, it is



crucial to implement workshops and awareness-raising activities through outreach campaigns.

2. Advocate on the importance of expediting the procedures for the affective implementation of Rural Proofing

Local actors should propose a more direct contact with national authorities so that their proposals and suggestions form part of the actions that are launched. Rural Proofing cannot ignore the priorities of the local territories, in order to not miss out on social support and so that the measures are not inconsistent with the demands of the local population. For this, meetings and working groups are good tools to achieve it.

3. Emphasise, through testimonies and real cases, the effects of not reviewing the regulations and legislation

Many times, concepts such as Rural Proofing can alienate a large part of the population from feeling involved with it for linguistic reasons or simply because they do not understand how this can affect them in their day-to-day lives.

For this reason, policies such as Rural Proofing



must be accompanied by a process with which the concept and its implications are brought down to Earth through examples and practical cases. Why does Guadalupe, a resident from the Saja Nansa region (Cantabria), have to travel 80 kilometres every day for her son to go to extracurricular classes? Revising the legislation would make it possible to correct how it affects the standard for the **minimum number of inhabitants/km²** to install health and educational services. Therefore, it is important that everyone understands why it is necessary to remain committed to Rural Proofing.

What can be done from companies?

1. Share the negative effects of not reviewing laws and regulations

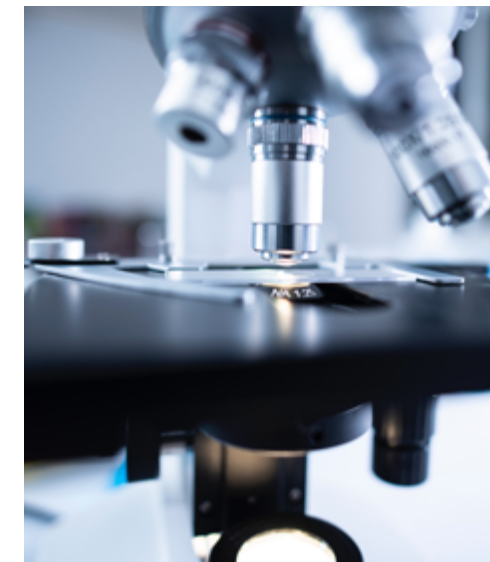
This is especially relevant in relation to the role played by rural companies in this regard. Companies that are located in rural areas are one of the actors most affected by depopulation derived from the absence of a shared commitment to the rural areas. In addition, based on the procedures what they must implement. on numerous occasions they are



forced to follow regulations designed for large cities. Currently, if an entrepreneur decides to open a small bar in their home town, they must meet the same requirements as if they had decided to open it in a large capital city.

For this reason, it is especially important that all these **companies and entrepreneurs make known all those obstacles** that they have had to face due to not revising the regulations and adapting them to the reality of small rural municipalities.

It is evident that the same permits cannot be requested for a business that is going to serve 1,000 customers a day, as for a person who is going to individually serve an average of 20 customers a day.



2. Involvement of the private sector with rural development

Rural Proofing was designed to ensure proper implementation of regulations and legislation. However, the responsibility does not correspond solely to public administrations. Companies, as actors with a broad socio-economic impact, must incorporate the rural perspective into their actions.

In this case, it is imperative that they review how their operation can negatively affect those who live in rural areas. The commitment to the digitisation of banking services can leave behind a multitude of older people who live in small municipalities, often without Internet access or with minimal digital skills. Why not accompany this measure with citizen training?

What can be done from the third sector?

The third sector offers a framework for action from which actions can be carried out in favour of the population without paying attention to criteria related to economic profitability. All kinds of non-governmental and non-profit entities that work to achieve a better, fairer and more sustainable world collaborate in it.

For this reason, it is especially important that third sector entities get directly involved in the application of Rural Proofing and work to expand its application to other levels.

The third sector is one of the most relevant actors when it comes to implementing actions that avoid the negative externalities of the legislation. Due to its high rate of representation of the different social groups, it is essential that the different organisations form part of this strategy.

The third sector must elucidate the specific consequences caused by not reviewing and adapting the regulations from a rural perspective.

How does the digitisation policy of the public administration affect the older population of towns with minimal digital knowledge?

The third sector has direct contact with the traditionally most vulnerable groups, so their involvement is key.

2.Contact with international organisations

The third sector also has the capacity to carry out advocacy with great impact within international organisations related to their field of action.

Sharing their progress and recommendations on Rural Proofing with these entities can help expand its application within these organisations. These actions have direct effects on the population.

Compartir sus avances y recomendaciones sobre *Rural Proofing* con estas entidades puede ayudar a expandir su aplicación dentro de estos organismos, cuyas actuaciones cuentan con efectos directos sobre la población.

3. Monitoring and measurement of impact

Since the third sector has multitude of independent organisations, it is essential that they turn develop a task that allows for monitoring and measuring the impacts of their actions, as well as the measures implemented by other organisations.

What can I do as part of civil society?

1. Elucidate the real effects of not adapting the legislation from a rural perspective

Despite the fact that in this case the main

commitment must come from the state level, civil society will allow the actions implemented to be coherent and aligned with social demands.

For this reason, it is imperative to raise awareness among society so that people can express their complaints, concerns and proposals through participatory spaces for this purpose.

Since 2022, it has been mandatory for public administrations to apply Rural Proofing. Therefore, it is the duty of civil society to denounce any deviation that may take place, either through participatory spaces in their municipality or through social networks.

2. Being active in the consultation processes enabled by public and private entities

The implementation of Rural Proofing requires holding consultations with the population, especially through local entities. For this reason, civil society must get involved with these initiatives and participate in defining the strategies at the local and regional level.

At REDR we have begun the consultation process with the aim of compiling the priorities of the rural population so that they lay the foundations for our subsequent advocacy work.

Do you have any questions or concerns about Rural Proofing?

Have you suffered the negative impact of legislation in your municipality?

Are you aware of Rural Proofing and you are making any progress from your region?

Write to us at redr@redr.es and tell us your experience!



International organisations and Rural Proofing

In the international arena, international organisations complement the work of state third sector organisations, offering a broader framework for action, with rules that must be respected by countries that have decided to align themselves with their principles. In this way, they have a slightly more binding nature, since they have the sufficient international presence to put pressure on States to develop effective measures or modify their regulatory framework.

However, international organisations often lack the ability to permeate into the territories. In other words, as they are particularly large organisations, they have additional complexity when it comes to landing their actions. That is why they need the collaboration of local actors from the third sector when it comes to carrying out specific actions.

For this reason, it is extremely important to find the formula through which the large international organisations rely on the recommendations and proposals of these local entities, with the aim of expanding the scope, enriching their functions and avoiding possible adverse effects.

One of the elements that should form part of the strategies of international organisations and begin to be valued in their actions should be the reality of the rural areas. On many occasions, the projects developed and reports prepared correspond to a vision focused on the reality of the urban environment, and obviate certain specific characteristics that occur in rural areas.

Just as it is essential to carry out differentiated analyses based on the social groups to which the actions are to be directed, it should also be mandatory to assess the development of the territory in which they are to be implemented. This can only be achieved by establishing a space open to dialogue between international institutions and local actors.

The lack of a differentiated study can cause chronic ignorance of the inequalities that small municipalities face. In addition, the lack of adaptation to rural realities of many initiatives can cause unwanted negative externalities since the conditions, weaknesses and strengths of each territory vary from one place to another. Within Spain, the existing diversity between territories makes it practically impossible to exactly apply the projects developed from a certain territory to another with different characteristics; demographic, geographic, economic, etc.



For this reason, it is not feasible to adapt solutions designed for the urban environment to the rural areas, given that the rural areas requires specific solutions.

On the other hand, there are many goals that can be achieved by placing the rural areas as a recipient of initiatives from international organisations, since it would set a legitimate precedent for developing future public policies and focus on territorial cohesion. It is essential that the rural aspect becomes part of the strategies of international organisations and that it constitutes a cross-disciplinary element of their policies, measures and initiatives. Communication with agents in the territory is the only possible way for actions to incorporate this perspective.

Positioning of REDR. Join in!

Positioning for the effective implementation of Rural Proofing in Spain

PREAMBLE

CONSIDERING the territorial inequality between urban and rural areas;

RECALLING the negative demographic trend that defines our population;

AFFIRMING our concern for the brain drain between rural and urban areas;

RECOGNISING the value of the material and immaterial heritage of the rural areas that we must safeguard;

RECALLING the importance of fomenting online work between public and private entities, organisations of the third sector and civil society;

HIGHLIGHTING the relevance of the third sector to achieve a correct application of Rural Proofing at the national and international level;

DEDICATED to promote Rural Proofing in the other supranational entities, such as international organisations;

DESIRING to reduce the distance between decision-makers and rural actors;

RECOGNISING the importance of changing our story to promote an up-to-date image of the rural areas and liberated from stereotypes;

RESOLUTE in acting in line with the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to achieve a sustainable future with a

territorial focus;

INSPIRED in experiences from other countries where they have been able to successfully implement Rural Proofing listening to the rural communities;

RECALLING the commitment of the European Union and Spain to not leave anyone behind;

EMPHASISING this commitment by Spain to implement Rural Proofing;

TAKING NOTE of Spain's presidency of the European Union Council during the second half of 2023;

WE HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

(1) We demand the application of Rural Proofing at the national, regional and local level through all types of actors

(2) We urge the public administrations, companies and organisations of the third sector to implement a Rural Proofing mechanism that ensures that the policies implemented **do not have adverse effects on the rural areas.**

We request the **generation of alliances** between the actors involved to coordinate outreach and advocacy activities about Rural Proofing.

We request the start of conferences and round table meetings to work **generating tools** for the effective implementation of Rural Proofing at the national level. **We encourage the actors of the third sector to share their experiences with** other international organisations so that they adopt the different approaches and apply them at the same time.

We demand the creation of an **independent body** that serves as a tool to analyse, compare and measure the results of rural policies in the territory and guarantee that all public policies take rural areas into account and do not harm them.

We propose creating a parallel consultative mechanism with the rural population, so that they can send their complaints and concerns regarding the effects of policies/actions or legislation to the independent body.

We propose the creation of standardised guides and indicators to facilitate their

application in ministries and other regional and local delegations.

We request that Rural Proofing become an **obligatory tool** and there be penalties if an entity does not follow the implementation thereof.

We demand promoting from the start an **outreach campaign** that not only reaches the institutions, but civil society as well. We must not forget that this tool must be applied to prevent possible adverse effects from having an impact on the rural population. For this reason, the rural population must have an open way of participation where they can communicate possible unknown effects and even make proposals to improve certain measures.

We ask the Government of Spain to elevate the implementation of Rural Proofing to the European level during the Presidency of the EU Council in 2023, with the objective of **finding synergies** and **paths of joint growth**.



The rural areas making strides!

*Positioning of the Red Española de Desarrollo
Rural (REDR) on Rural Proofing*



Red Española de Desarrollo Rural

Website | redr.es

Email | redr@redr.es

Twitter | [@redespanola](https://twitter.com/redespanola)

Instagram | [@redespanola](https://www.instagram.com/redespanola)

Facebook | [RedEspanolaDesarrolloRural](https://www.facebook.com/RedEspanolaDesarrolloRural)