



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

GOVERNANCE IN RURAL AREAS



MAP IDRA, INNOVACIÓN EN DESARROLLO RURAL DE ARAGÓN (SPAIN)

The MAP covers the Aragón region in northeastern Spain. The group consists of researchers, and representatives from the regional government and civil society.

The structure of Aragón's government is decentralised with a multi-level administrative organisation. While this structure allows public services to be closer to the needs of citizens, it also poses a challenge for its governance. Local Action Groups (LAGs) play a role in the governance of rural areas in Aragón; there are 20 LAGs in Aragón funded by programme LEADER, that promote activities and provide services in rural areas, being key feature for multilevel governance for territorial development and the empowerment of local actors.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Future rural policy

- Require consideration of LAGs local development strategies at higher government levels.
- Move LAGs' policy responsibility to a cross-sectoral department for better coordination.
- Improve and simplify the multi-fund tools to diversify financing sources of LAGs.
- Redesign the activity plan of LAGs by reducing burden and selecting projects
 - Improve feedback to civil society during and after public consultations
 - Maintain physical and digital consultations for public participation.

Future rural research

- Review rural governance structure and cooperation mechanisms
- Examine bottlenecks in vertical and horizontal coordination
- Assess social impact of public policies and compare sectoral vs multisectoral approaches
- Determine the optimal level for decision-making in rural areas and address conflicts between citizen perspectives.
- Develop methods to measure the quality of economic growth using happiness economics
- Explore strategies to strengthen social capital in rural areas

KEY STRENGTHS

- Regional administration is willing to be closer to rural citizens's needs and has a commitment to transparency and accountability.
- There are many local actors in Aragón committed to empowering and give voice to rural communities.
- Bottom-up approaches to policy desinging are gaining relevance in Aragón.
- There is an increasing experience and regulatioins in public consultations at local and regional levels.

KEY NEEDS

- Strengthen horizontal coordination mechanisms with incentives, long-term planning and a clear framework.
- Rebuild trust and accountability among administrative stakeholders.
- Improve vertical coordination in rural areas with better alignment of initiatives and training for local administration
- Address discrepancies in decision-making between rural and urban stakeholders
- Greater policy competencies, budget, and confidence for LAGs to take on a greater role in coordination
- Restoring confidence in public consultations and encouraging youth to participate
- Better preparation, training and follow-up of public consultations



EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

Open Aragon

The Aragon government has launched the "Open Aragon" initiative to promote transparency, open data, volunteering and public participation. Open Aragon also provides information on local legislation to regulate public participation. Local governments are required by law to promote citizen participation and some have even approved citizen participation regulations to provide legal certainty and adapt to new regulatory trends.

