

## Article

# Who Decides and Who Invests? The Role of the Public, Private and Third Sectors in Rural Development according to Geographical Contexts: The LEADER Approach in Andalusia, 2007–2015

Eugenio Cejudo-García \*, Francisco Navarro-Valverde  and José Antonio Cañete-Pérez 

Department of Human Geography, University of Granada, 18011 Granada, Spain; favalver@ugr.es (F.N.-V.); joseaca@ugr.es (J.A.C.-P.)

\* Correspondence: cejudo@ugr.es

**Abstract:** In general, the LEADER programme has had a positive impact, although it has also negative aspects. In this paper, we analyse the role of the three main stakeholders (public sector, private sector and third sector) within the LEADER local action groups (LAGs) in the decision-making process and final execution of the projects, to discover whether there is any relation between those taking the decisions and those carrying out the projects, according to the degree of rurality of the different areas. Our primary source was the files for all the successfully implemented LEADER projects in Andalusia between 2007 and 2015. Relevant findings are: although the public sector plays a leading role in the LAGs and in the decision-making process, most of the projects, as measured by total investment, are carried out by the private sector; the degree of rurality is an important factor, in that private sector investors tend to invest in peri-urban spaces, while public bodies, and especially local councils, invest in remote rural areas. The LAGs play a strategic role, in terms of making up for the almost negligible input from the third sector.

**Keywords:** neo-endogenous rural development; classification and types of rural areas; local action groups; decision-making; strategic planning; Andalusia



**Citation:** Cejudo-García, E.; Navarro-Valverde, F.; Cañete-Pérez, J.A. Who Decides and Who Invests? The Role of the Public, Private and Third Sectors in Rural Development according to Geographical Contexts: The LEADER Approach in Andalusia, 2007–2015. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 3853. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14073853>

Academic Editor: Antonio Boggia

Received: 8 March 2022

Accepted: 23 March 2022

Published: 24 March 2022

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Rural territories across the European Union (EU) are widely influenced by the application of the LEADER programme. One of the main objectives of this rural development initiative is to encourage innovation and a bottom up approach. Initially established as a European Economic Community (EEC) Initiative (1991–2006) implemented through local action groups (LAGs) made up of private entrepreneurs, public institutions and the third sector (which is made up of non-profit associations (NGOs) including associations and foundations; LAG; civil societies; and congregations and religious institutions), it was later integrated (since 2007) into the national and regional rural development programmes of each member state. During the 2014–2020 programming period, the LEADER approach ceased to be an “axis” of the rural development programmes, and instead became just another measure (no. 19) within the rural development strategy, which was implemented under the broad title of “Participatory Local Development”. This system allows for multi-fund financing.

The LAGs are legally constituted entities and nonprofit associations that have a participatory and democratic structure in which both public and private actors share decisions. “The LAG has the task of preparing and implementing a local development strategy (LDS)” [1] (2006, p. 10). People become active partners and drivers of their area’s local development. In addition, each LAG has its own specificities and members, but all of these are integrated by the public, private and civil societies. At the decision-making level, no one sector can represent more than 49% of the composition.

In the LAGs, there are two fundamental governing bodies when it comes to designing, elaborating and implementing different rural development strategies. On the one hand is the general assembly, which is the body that brings together all the partners that make up the association and that can decide on its future to the extent that, among other functions, it elects the management body that is in charge of executing the different strategies. On the other hand, the board committee, the LAG's management body, whose number of members varies from one to another, must meet the condition that private partners account for at least 51% of the total. Furthermore, without being part of the organizational structure of the LAGs, the technician team who work in them also play a role to be considered.

This new approach to neo-endogenous rural development [2] is based on four essential elements: institutional, social, and territorial identity; innovation; and economic diversification. It is the first of them that we refer to in this work. We refer to the establishment of governance as a fundamental principle for territorial management, where the local public administration does not monopolise public action. The participation of local actors in decision-making is one of the basic pillars, to the extent that it favours self-government and partnership, allowing the better government of the territory: "territorial governance" [3]. This means promoting horizontal relations, of parity, between a plurality of public and private actors, without forgetting that this necessarily implies the confrontation of interests and values that allow the justification of the decisions made [4].

In this article, we study whether there are direct relationships between local decision-making in planning processes and the control of financing and investments made by the three main actors in rural society: local authorities, private companies and the third sector. Additionally, if these relationships vary according to the different geographical contexts established in this work.

Our initial hypotheses are that local authorities, in general, play a determining role in local decision-making and control the implementation of local development LEADER strategies, through the corresponding action plans, and that it should, therefore, be expected to find a clear, close relationship between those that take the decisions within the LAGs and those that later implement the projects. Secondly, we propose that the participation of these three types of actors in decision-making and planning varies according to the degree of rurality, with the public sector playing a more significant role in deep rural areas, and private investors dominating in peri-urban areas.

In this sense, our main objective is to prove if there is a relationship between the investments made by private companies, municipalities and the third sector; the distribution of roles observed among the different actors, and particular interests, that make up the decision-making bodies of the LAGs; as well as if this varies according to the social and economic characteristics of rural areas. In addition, the specific objectives are: quantify, analyse and assess the distribution of the investments made by these different actors in the Andalusian region between 2007–2013 (+2) according to these different territorial typologies; map and assess whether the spatial distribution of investments creates significant nuances in the analysis; and finally to identify and assess the level of participation, involvement and leadership of the three main groups within the LAGs (local authorities, private enterprises and third sector) in the following key processes: local decision-making (LAG boards); definition of aims/objectives within local development strategies; and the drafting/selection of the corresponding action plans.

The research is structured in five sections. The first is the Introduction, which serves to frame the work to be developed. The second is the Theoretical framework, into which our study is inserted among the most relevant references. The third, Sources, Methodology and Study Area, allows us to highlight both the sources of the data used in the research and the methodology used in it; and, also, the characterization of the analysed study area is carried out. The fourth, Results, offers the reader the most relevant data obtained about three fundamental aspects: the role of stakeholders in decision-making and planning, the investments made by the different actors, and their geographical distribution in Andalusia.

Finally, in the last section, the results obtained with the data provided in other studies are discussed, and the conclusions obtained are discussed.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Previous researchers have also argued the case for LEADER as one of the most active territorial approaches to rural development. Davoudi et al. [5] define territorial governance as a *modus operandi*: a form of “territorial collective action” based on an open, transparent process, involving cooperation/coordination between stakeholders (horizontally and vertically), and on a framework of more or less explicit subsidiarity. Their view is that territorial governance depends on four key pillars: vertical coordination, horizontal coordination, the participation and involvement of civil society and organized interests, and territorialized action [6]. Territorial partnerships in the form of LAGs implement a model of the “tripartite representation” of public, private (business) and third (civil society) sector actors. These different partners are themselves made up, for example, of professional organizations (representing farmers; other professionals and small businesses) and trade unions; trade associations; citizens, residents and their local organizations; local political representatives; environmental associations; cultural and community service providers, including the media; and women’s associations and youth groups [7]. Public sector representatives must not exceed a maximum threshold of 49% of the total membership of LAG decision-making committees [8]. This maximum value for the public sector, applicable in Spain, is considerably higher than the one-third maximum applicable in Finnish LAGs [9]. In Spain, during the early years of LEADER [10] (2003, p. 96), it was noted: “LEADER is an instrument of political, social and economic power. (. . . ) different groups of actors attempt to legitimate part of their policies or performances through their participation in it”. More recently, in France, [11] showed that geographical context plays an important role in the mobilization of key actors and the design of projects, directing public actions. The same can be said of the importance of the agricultural sector in relation to rural development programs through the measures and actions that are implemented, as pointed out by [12] for the Italian and Spanish case. It is also clear that the experience and the social learning acquired by the LAGs over, in some cases, almost thirty years, has equipped them to participate in the design of strategies and projects. According to [13], the LAGs in Italy have contributed to building social capital, while at the same time creating social innovation processes and projects. In Poland, by contrast, [14] (2010, p. 52) pointed out that: “. . . partnerships are frequently subject to elite domination by local authorities and hence fail to fully engage a range of community and private sector actors”. Accordingly, the extent to which LEADER has been truly inclusive and accountable has been challenged, not least by elected members of local government who claim to have a greater democratic mandate.

Although the setting up of partnership and collaboration networks among stakeholders and consultations with the local population are crucial drivers of the LEADER approach, it also has various weaknesses, such as overly bureaucratic funding rules and a lack of decision-making capacity at a local level in the implementation of development strategies [15]. These weaknesses may be due to the integration of the LEADER approach into rural development programmes—at a regional level, in our case—, which has reduced and limited the autonomy of LAGs when it comes to their decision-making capacities [16].

The stakeholders involved in the decision-making process within the LAGs also play a leading role in defining the objectives and the main strategic lines of action that should be followed, and, later, in the approval and implementation of specific projects. In addition, the “different attributes of functional interest groups, such as material resources, knowledge, competencies, capacities to act and interact, and tendencies towards entrepreneurship are associated with the “success” of some functional interest groups and the “failure” of others” [17]. The different forms of participation in the decision-making process are also affected by the geographic situation of each LAG [18]. In some cases, local elites, local council leaders and other politicians use LEADER funds as instruments of power and as a means of engaging in clientelism [17]. It is also important to remember that, in lowly

populated rural areas, local councils are often the only bodies capable of carrying out development projects and tend to act as the representatives of small municipalities in larger-scale entities, such as LAGs. This leads to a “local logic of appropriateness” within these LAGs, in which local councils and local authorities often have unanimous control over decision-making [7] and the private sector is rarely involved. Although one of the conditions for establishing a LAG is that less than 50% of the members should come from public administrations, mayors often play an essential role in planning [19], concretely, the elaboration of local development strategies (LDSs). However, this does not necessarily result in the better social distribution of funds or greater engagement of local people.

### 3. Sources, Methodology and Study Area

The main source we used was the list of the 6255 projects funded under the LEADER programme between 2007 and 2015. This information was provided by the Department of Agriculture, Fishing and Rural Development of the Regional Government of Andalusia. The results of the statistical analysis were input into a geographic information system, ARCGIS 10.6, which produced graphic outputs in the form of vectorial plans that were exported to jpg format. In this way, we mapped the contribution made by the three key actors—the public sector, the third sector and private entrepreneurs—to find out if these groups acted differently in the different types of geographical area. Within the final group, we also differentiated between individual entrepreneurs and private companies. Our analysis was conducted at municipal or local scale and did not include the projects promoted by the LAGs themselves, which normally affected the whole area covered by the LAG, rather than individual municipalities.

Each of these variables was calculated for the three types of rural area (deep, intermediate and peri-urban).

In order to assess the role of the three main stakeholders (public sector, private sector and third sector) within the LEADER local action groups in the various stages of the decision-making process, we assessed data from the files for each project in relation to the following variables: (a) the membership of the LAG decision-making bodies; (b) those who took part in the decisions to establish the objectives of the local development strategies; (c) those who took part in drafting the action plan; and (d) those who carried out the projects (as measured in terms of total investment).

For this purpose, we selected two representative LAGs for each type or degree of rurality: for deep rural areas, we selected the Sierra de Segura and Alpujarras-Sierra Nevada de Granada LAGs; for intermediate rural areas, the Condado de Huelva and Poniente Granadino LAGs; and for peri-urban areas, the Vega-Sierra Elvira and Campiña y Alcores de Sevilla LAGs.

The first task was to classify the towns and villages in Andalusia covered by the LAGs according to their degree of rurality. There are considerable difficulties in establishing a typology of rural areas in Spain [20] or in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [21,22]. The Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE) uses the total population as a defining variable, establishing the following classification: rural municipalities (up to 2000 inhabitants), medium sized (2000–10,000), and urban (over 10,000). Although this classification is widely used [23], it does not always adapt well to the peculiarities of the territorial structure. Thus, in the Andalusian region, there are many quite large towns, also known as “agri-cities” [24], in the middle of the countryside, which play a significant role in the socioeconomic fabric of rural areas and do not fit into the INE classification.

Several researchers have developed compound indices of rurality using a principal components analysis of demographic variables, employment in agriculture, and housing conditions, in order to quantify the degree of rurality in Spain. Molinero [25] established a typology of rural areas in which population density was the central focus. However, the application of this classification could also be problematic in Andalusia due, as before, to the important role played by agri-cities. Finally, [26] proposed a geographical typology

based on spatial and demographic vulnerability using cartographic sources available in a GIS format.

The England rural classification system, introduced in 2004 and still used for statistical purposes, categorised according to settlement size plus population density in the surrounding area [27]. In addition, Prieto-Lara and Ocaña-Riola [28] also used a similar methodology, in which the variables used to determine the degree of rurality were employment in agriculture and the ageing of the population. Territorial characterization studies have also been used internationally for a variety of purposes. These include, for example, studies conducted in rural areas in England and Wales to help design public policy [29]; studies of the urbanization process and its relationship with land use in Italy [30] and the United States [31]; or health inequalities in the Auckland and Northland regions of New Zealand [32]. We could also mention studies that have tried to measure inequality and socio-territorial vulnerability in Spain [33], in England [34], in New Zealand [35] (Exeter et al., 2016), or inside the EU [36], among many others.

This research uses the methodology proposed by Reig et al. (pp. 83–100, [37]) for Spanish rural areas, calculating the accessibility of rural spaces in terms of distance and time, taking each of the 111 high density urban agglomerations as a destination reference. These are understood as those municipalities, or groups of adjoining urban municipalities, with more than 50,000 inhabitants and where more than 50% of the population lives in their urban centres. The calculation of the travel time is established following the road network represented in the National Topographic Database at a scale of 1:100,000, Topographic National Base TNB100 (Geographical National Institute—GNI—2014), according to the following formula:

$$\text{Travel time} = \frac{\text{Length of the section (meters)}}{\text{Estimated speed (km/h)} \times 1000/60} \quad (1)$$

The estimated speed is obtained as the result of the theoretical speed of the road weighted by a slope coefficient and a congestion coefficient.

On the other hand, Reig et al. [37], divided rural spaces according to their accessibility into two categories, remote and accessible, taking as a reference a 45 min journey.

In this paper, we divided rural areas into “near rural”—those less than 45 min away from a city—, “remote rural”—between 45 and 60 min—, and “deep rural”—60 or more min away (Figure 1). We believe that this is the classification that best captures the real situation of the Andalusia region, following the distribution of time frequencies calculated and verified at the municipal level.

The differentiation established by Reig et al. [37], between closed and open urban areas, is based on land uses (percentage of built surface or not). In our study, only one municipality is classified as closed urban, so, in the map below, types 1 and 2 (closed and open urban) are represented in a single typology: urban; and, also, the main focus in this research is on rural areas.

Once we had classified the different municipalities in Andalusia according to the different typologies, we gathered data for various sociodemographic indicators in the different types of rural area. This data is presented in Table 1. The table was drawn up using data from 2011, because this year falls halfway through the study programming period (2007–2013 + 2 years of prorogation) and because it was a census year for which a large amount of local information was readily available.

Andalusia has an area of 87,599 km<sup>2</sup>, i.e., 17% of the area of Spain and 2% of the EU. It is larger in size and population (8.4 million inhabitants in 2011) than 15 EU countries, a fact that explains its vast diversity in physical and natural characteristics. The 52 LAGs established in the region covered 51% of the population and 93.5% of the total area.

In the year 2011, only 5.9% of the municipalities in Andalusia were urban areas. These covered 6.7% of the total surface area and were home to almost 50% of the population. By contrast, 66.1% of the municipalities are classified as rural. These cover 52.7% of the territory. Over the period 2007–2015, although there were gains in the rural areas nearest to

service centres (Type 5, Table 1), the overall population of rural municipalities fell by 1825 inhabitants, with the most significant losses taking place in the remote areas (Types 6 and 7 of Table 1). The figures for affiliation to the social security system reflect the predominance of the farming sector, as can also be seen from the number of temporary farmworkers receiving benefits in Andalusia [38].

For their part, the intermediate municipalities accounted for 27.9% of the total, 40.6% of the surface area and 38.4% of the inhabitants. Most of the municipalities in this category are agri-cities, located at some distance from the main cities (on average, 45 min away), which act as economic hubs for their respective subregions. The high concentration of population in these towns creates urban settlements in which farming plays an essential role in the productive structure. As [39] notes: “the mix of urban and rural features gives rise to a shocking hybrid: the agri-cities, which is neither a town in its true sense, nor, of course, a rural settlement”.

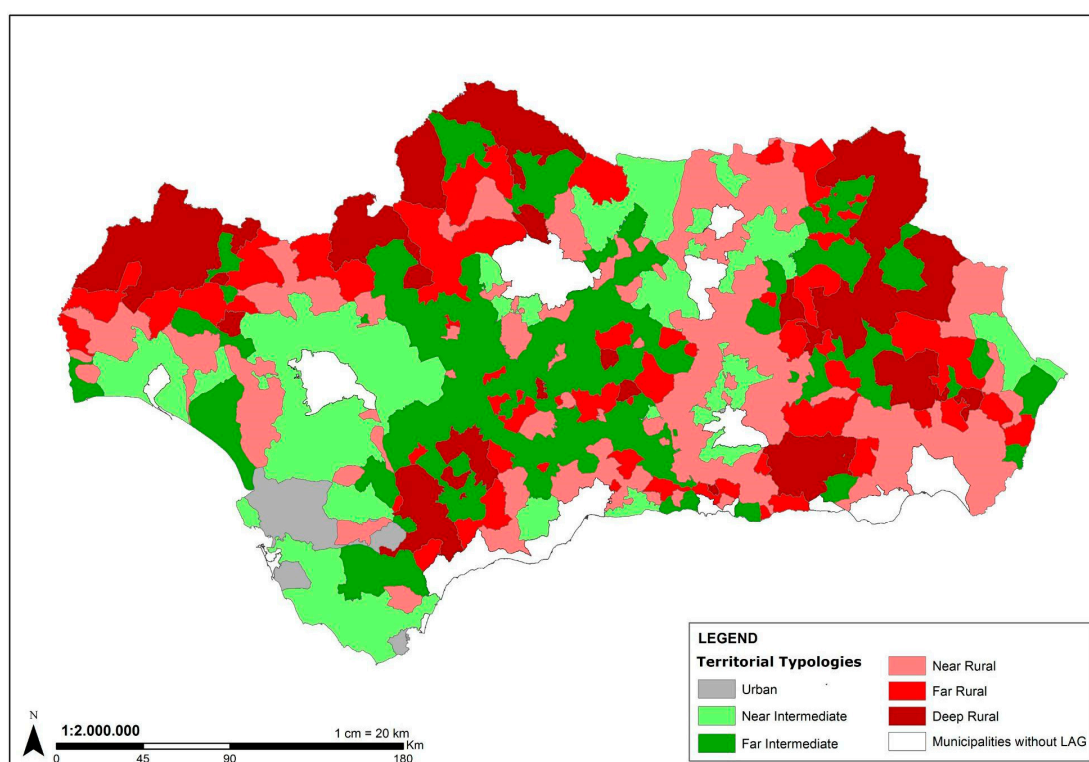


Figure 1. Geographical typologies of Andalusia (Reig et al.) [37], adapted by the authors.

Table 1. Socioeconomic indicators according to spatial typologies.

Variables	Urban		Intermediate		Rural			Total
	Closed	Open	Near	Remote	Near	Remote	Deep	
	Type_1	Type_2	Type_3	Type_4	Type_5	Type_6	Type_7	
No. of municipalities	28	18	125	91	228	132	151	773
Area km <sup>2</sup>	826	5071	16,500	19,170	18,895	12,138	15,186	87,786
Population 2011 (thousands)	2,086,485	2,071,715	1,997,533	1,225,614	555,114	238,687	214,696	8,389,844
Density 2011 (inhab./km <sup>2</sup> )	2.527	409	121	64	29	20	14	96
Travel time (minutes)	3.8	3.4	17.3	45.0	30.3	51.7	73.3	40.4
Altitude (m)	256	264	267	381	518	631	718	504
Women (%)	51.7	51.3	49.4	50.1	49.0	49.3	49.3	50.5
Men (%)	48.3	48.7	50.6	49.9	51.0	50.7	50.7	49.5
Inhab./Municipality	74,517	115,095	15,980	13,468	2435	1808	1422	10,854
Real Growth 2007–2015	88,402	80,538	182,781	2659	20,825	−8123	−14,527	352,555
Real Growth 1961–2011	43.3	41.9	36.7	1.3	−6.6	−7.1	−9.6	100.0

Table 1. Cont.

Variables	Urban		Intermediate		Rural			Total
	Closed	Open	Near	Remote	Near	Remote	Deep	
	Type_1	Type_2	Type_3	Type_4	Type_5	Type_6	Type_7	
Age 0–14 (%)	15.9	16.8	17.8	16.0	14.5	12.8	12.6	16.3
Age 15–64 (%)	68.9	68.9	69.6	67.5	66.7	65.4	64.2	68.5
Age ≥ 65 (%)	15.2	14.3	12.6	16.5	18.9	21.8	23.2	15.2
Ageing Index	95.7	85.4	71.1	103.3	130.3	171.0	183.3	93.3
Average age (mean age)	37.9	37.7	38.1	40.4	43.3	45.7	46.0	42.7
Affiliated General Regime *	81.0	78.8	50.3	40.8	30.0	29.8	28.3	62.7
Affiliated Agrarian Regime *	1.2	3.6	26.5	37.4	51.1	50.3	49.2	17.7

\* In the Spanish social security system, there are separate sections or regimes for general workers and agricultural workers. Source: developed by the authors on the base of data of Andalusia Statistics Institute.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. The Role of the Stakeholders in Decision-Making, Planning and Investments

At first glance, there does not seem to be a proportional relationship between the participation of the different kinds of stakeholders in the decision-making, planning and final execution of the projects in any of the different types of rural area (Table 2). In other words, the three different groups (local authorities, private sector and third sector) play a quite different role in the various aspects of the decision-making process than they do in the final implementation of the projects. However, specific common trends and patterns can be observed and not only based on the different types of rurality. However, this sectoral attribution is more complex than is reflected in Table 2, because of the dual roles often played by different key actors in these LAGs (e.g., a person who participated as a local councillor also sat on the board of a local association, or with a private business).

**Table 2.** Proportional input of the three main stakeholders into decision-making, planning and execution of the projects within the territories covered by the LAGs.

Types of Rural Areas	LAG. Decision-Making Bodies			LDS. Objectives				LDS. Action Plan				Investments			LAGs
	Public Sector	Private Sector	Third Sector	Pub. Sect.	Priv. Sect.	Third Sector	Others	Pub. Sect.	Priv. Sect.	Third Sector	Others	Public Sector	Priv. Sect.	Third Sector	
Deep	47.1	35.3	17.6	43.8	7.9	24.7	23.8	60.0	4.0	19.1	17.5	28.9	49.3	1.3	20.5
Intermediate	49.9	40.1	10.0	46.1	18.9	21.7	25.3	56.1	4.3	13.5	35.0	16.4	52.6	7.8	23.2
Periurban	47.3	38.4	14.4	36.4	13.8	34.5	15.4	26.9	19.2	23.1	30.8	1.7	69.5	9.8	19.0
Average	48.1	37.9	14.0	42.1	13.5	27.0	21.5	47.7	9.2	18.6	27.8	15.7	57.1	6.3	20.9

Source: developed by the authors on the base of data of Local development strategies of the LAGs and the regional government of Andalusia, Department of Agriculture, Fishing and Rural Development.

The first, most evident observation was the crucial influence of the public sector in decision-making and planning, i.e., in the membership of LAG decision-making bodies, in the identification of development objectives and in the establishment of the action plan (48%, 42% and 48%, respectively). The influence of the public sector was even greater in the LAGs in deep rural areas and was decisive in the establishment of the action plans (60% of participants), and in the subsequent materialization of investments, in that local authorities played a much greater role in the execution of projects in these areas (29%) compared to their average level of 15.7%.

The second group encompasses the private sector or businesspeople, whose most important function is in the execution of projects, as seen by their investments in all the different kinds of rural territories (57%), and, especially, in the peri-urban LAGs (70%). They make up a much smaller proportion of the members of the decision-making bodies (average of 37.9%) and, therefore, in the decision-making process, especially in deep rural areas, and play a merely symbolic role in the establishment of objectives and the drafting of the action plan in deep rural areas, in particular (less than 8%). Their role in these tasks is only really worthy of attention in intermediate and peri-urban areas (18.9% in the

establishment of objectives in intermediate areas and 19.2% in drafting the action plan in peri-urban areas).

As regards the third main stakeholder (the third sector), this group has a relatively minor role in all the different aspects analysed. Nongovernmental organisations carry out a limited number of projects (6.3% of total investment) and are proportionally most active in peri-urban areas (although even here they barely reach 10%). In contrast, they have a more important role in terms of membership of the LAG decision-making bodies (almost 18% in remote rural areas, the more relevant collective), and are particularly influential in planning questions, in the establishment of objectives and in the drafting of the action plan (34.5% participation in establishing objectives in peri-urban areas).

Their contribution is reflected to a certain extent in the “Others” category of LAGs project promoters, together with that of external consultants. As a result, their necessary participation in the drafting of the objectives and the action plan is, ultimately, also manifested in their involvement as promoters. We also observed, for example, that the LAGs played an important role in the design of the LDS in intermediate areas, which was also materialized in a wider involvement in investments. Despite this, the role played by LAGs in investment is quite limited, and mostly takes place at the LAG area level, rather than within a single municipality. This is because many of their projects seek to advance key strategic aspects of rural development for the entire LAG area. In this way, the LAGs and the technical staff they employ become important rural development actors, firstly, by deciding on the most appropriate strategy and later by implementing LAG projects that help meet the goals of this strategy. To some extent, the job of the LAGs is also to compensate for the almost negligible number of projects promoted by the third sector, while, at the same time, reducing the excessively high presence of private entrepreneurs and local authorities.

#### 4.2. Investment

The data on the amounts invested in successfully executed projects is summarized in Tables 3 and 4. The importance of private companies in LEADER related rural development in Andalusia (Table 2) is reinforced by the fact that they accounted for 53.7% of the investment made, 23 percentage points higher than the number of projects executed. These were followed at some distance by local authorities, with 19.2%, and individual entrepreneurs, with 18.3%, although, in both these cases, the percentage of total investment was 10 percentage points lower than the figure for the number of projects implemented. This shows that the investment per project was much higher in private companies (EUR 155,178) than in local councils and individual entrepreneurs, which had averages of EUR 57,306 and EUR 58,655 respectively. The average investment for Andalusia as a whole was EUR 87,153 (Table 3). Within private companies, the limited companies continued to be those that invested the most, with 36.4% of the total, compared to just 3.7% by PLCs, although their average investment per project was over EUR 250,000, a sum that was more than EUR 100,000 higher than that for limited companies. The importance of cooperatives was also much more noticeable, with 11.9% of total investment, almost twice the percentage for the number of projects, and an average investment per project of almost EUR 161,000. The LAGs were of less importance, with an investment of 2%, half that of the number of projects and the lowest average investment of all the promoters at EUR 40,800.

How was investment distributed across the different types of territory in Andalusia? Private companies were less important in the more rural categories, remote and deep rural, with values of up to 10 percentage points lower than near intermediate and 20 points lower than urban areas. The same pattern, in which rural, and especially remote and deep rural, areas are penalized, can be observed in cooperatives and in the third sector. No clear patterns can be observed in the behaviour of individual authorities, with near average values in all the different types of area. Finally, the role of local councils as important investors in the three most rural categories was especially evident, in that near rural areas



received 20.6% of their investment, while deep rural accounted for 28.9%. The opposite occurred in intermediate and urban areas.

**Table 3.** Distribution of investment across the different types of territory. Relative values.

Promoter	Urban		Intermediate		Rural			Total
	Closed	Open	Near	Remote	Near	Remote	Deep	
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 6	Type 7	
PLCs	0.0	4.1	5.4	2.3	4.1	0.0	4.6	3.7
Limited Companies	0.0	47.8	39.6	35.8	34.9	35.2	33.5	36.4
Business Partnerships	0.0	2.9	1.6	2.4	1.5	0.7	1.8	1.7
Cooperatives	0.0	14.7	12.4	12.1	13.9	8.7	9.4	11.9
Private enterprises	0.0	69.5	59.0	52.6	54.5	44.6	49.3	53.7
Individual Entrepreneurs	70.6	18.3	19.1	16.7	18.0	20.9	17.3	18.3
Private Sector	70.6	87.8	78.1	69.3	72.5	65.5	66.6	71.9
Local Councils	29.4	1.7	13.2	16.4	20.6	27.1	28.9	19.2
Public Bodies	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.3
Departments of Central and Regional Governments	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Public Sector	29.4	1.7	13.3	17.1	21.1	27.1	28.9	19.5
Associations and Foundations	0.0	9.8	3.6	7.8	2.1	3.5	1.3	4.0
LAGs	0.0	0.0	1.9	3.0	2.5	1.5	1.4	2.1
Civil Societies	0.0	0.3	1.8	0.5	1.0	0.7	0.1	0.9
Religious Congregations and Institutions	0.0	0.3	1.0	2.4	0.9	1.6	1.3	1.4
Third Sector	0.0	10.5	8.8	13.6	6.5	7.4	4.2	8.5
Others	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: developed by the authors on the base of data of Junta de Andalucía.

**Table 4.** Investment per project (€).

Promoter	Urban		Intermediate		Rural			Total
	Closed	Open	Near	Remote	Near	Remote	Deep	
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 6	Type 7	
PLCs	0	107,834	309,272	108,821	332,288	0	568,023	254,518
Limited Companies	0	172,507	133,028	134,801	177,291	159,747	196,729	151,876
Business Partnerships	0	76,061	94,045	98,688	115,309	39,410	123,222	96,389
Cooperatives	0	102,555	180,898	171,665	167,26	102,748	165,215	160,884
Private enterprises	0	139,935	147,277	137,823	178,187	138,414	197,246	155,178
Individual Entrepreneurs	110,884	27,052	56,945	55,773	67,189	56,181	68,189	58,655
Private Sector	110,884	74,775	106,049	101,684	126,307	94,289	132,199	109,432
Local Councils	138,625	34,815	72,152	70,900	41,795	49,145	69,123	57,306
Public Bodies	0	0	100,947	92,817	155,603	0	27,635	102,918
Departments of Central and Regional Governments	0	0	0	8431	0	0	0	8431
Public Sector	138,625	34,815	72,270	71,299	42,411	49,145	68,989	57,628
Associations and Foundations	0	60,464	52,624	69,074	44,872	49,321	23,46	54,146
LAGs	0	0	44,776	46,021	33,259	42,403	39,81	40,8
Civil Societies	0	18,035	76,506	51,963	83,969	54,306	21,901	66,995
Religious Congregations and Institutions	0	34,263	105,952	133,263	145,672	121,332	139,283	125,967
Third Sector	0	54,911	57,761	66,531	46,639	55,061	39,025	55,984
Others	0	0	244,101	0	0	0	240,886	242,494
Total	117,819	70,741	93,743	88,832	82,745	72,444	97,012	87,153

Source: developed by the authors on the base of data of Junta de Andalucía.

If we analyse the average investment per project (Table 4), two different trends can be observed. To some extent, these are contradictory, in that one might imagine that average investment per project would be lower in remote and deep rural areas due to the

more limited financial capacity of the potential investors and to the greater risks involved in projects established so far away from cities. In fact, however, the opposite was true. The lowest values were observed in urban and remote rural areas, with average investments of EUR 70,000 (EUR 70,741 and EUR 72,444, respectively), while much larger sums were invested in near intermediate (EUR 93,743) and deep rural (EUR 97,012) areas. If we exclude the closed urban category, which only contained one municipality, the deep rural areas received the highest investments per project of all the territorial categories. This same general behaviour can be observed in most of the different types of promoters. There are several reasons to explain why the highest levels of investment per project were made in deep rural areas: (i) the projects in these areas are often related with infrastructures, equipment and basic services promoted mainly by municipalities; (ii) the limited number of private companies willing to invest in these areas, which reduces the competition for funds, as compared to the situation in other types of rural area, where the grants have to be shared out among much larger numbers of beneficiaries.

Thus, even though our analysis was conducted at a municipality level, we also decided to analyse the rate of spending in two LAGs at different ends of the rurality scale. One was a deep rural area—Los Vélez LAG—and the other was a near intermediate—Vega-Sierra Elvira LAG. In the first LAG, an average of EUR 274,193 was invested in each project, almost three times higher than in the second LAG, where the sum was only EUR 99,935. Moreover, while in the deep rural LAG, only 10 projects were promoted by private companies, in the near intermediate LAG, there were 52.

In private companies, the highest average investments occurred in near rural and above all in deep rural areas with EUR 178,187 and EUR 197,246, respectively. This was due, above all, to the investments made by PLCs, who invested an average of over EUR 500,000 per project in deep rural areas (EUR 568,023) and EUR 332,288 in near rural areas, and by limited companies with EUR 196,629 and EUR 177,291, respectively. Individual entrepreneurs followed the same investment patterns, with the highest average investments in deep rural areas, with EUR 68,189, EUR 10,000 higher than the average for this type of promoter, followed by near rural, with EUR 67,189. By contrast, cooperatives chose a different route, with the highest amounts being invested in intermediate areas, as happened with the third sector and local authorities, in which more dynamic areas enjoyed more investment, more projects and higher average investment per project. This was thanks both to the grants received from the central government administration, which increased in line with population levels, and to their own capacity to generate financial resources, with average investments of EUR 72,152. It is important to point out that the deep rural areas received average investments of EUR 69,123 per project, a sum that was EUR 19,978 higher than remote rural areas and EUR 27,328 higher than near rural areas.

#### *4.3. Geographical Distribution across Andalusia*

In the mountain regions of Andalusia, located mainly in the East, most areas are classified as rural, while in western Andalusia, in which there is a large flat plain traversed by the River Guadalquivir, there are many more intermediate areas and even a few urban ones (Figure 1).

Private companies (see Figure 2) invested above all in the intermediate areas and in particular in near intermediate areas, with 29% of their total investment. This was followed by remote intermediate areas and, to a lesser extent, near rural. On the map, this is manifested in a concentration of investment in the Guadalquivir Valley, which is gradually diluted as we move towards the mountainous areas in the north and east of the region. The average investment per project oscillates between EUR 197,246 in deep rural areas and EUR 137,823 in remote intermediate areas.

As regards individual entrepreneurs (self-employed people), Figure 3 shows again that the most attractive spaces for investment are concentrated in the near intermediate areas, which are situated above all around the provincial capitals and their metropolitan areas. These areas are clearly influenced by urban dynamics and benefit from their proximity

to the cities. These are followed in importance by the remote intermediate spaces, which extend above all along the Guadalquivir Valley, and the near rural spaces in eastern Andalusia, such as the Alpujarra Almeriense and the Campiña de Jaén. The lowest values were recorded in general in the remote and deep rural areas, in each of which individual entrepreneurs invested less than 10% of their total investment.

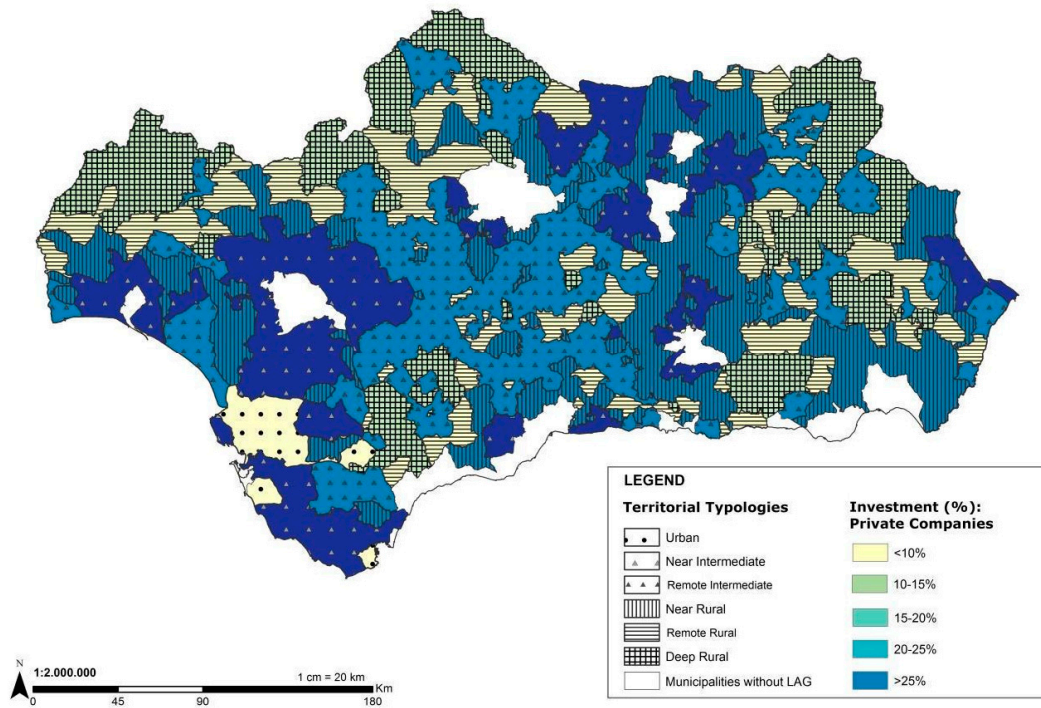


Figure 2. Investment made by private companies according to territorial typology (%). Source: developed by the authors on the base of data of Junta de Andalucía.

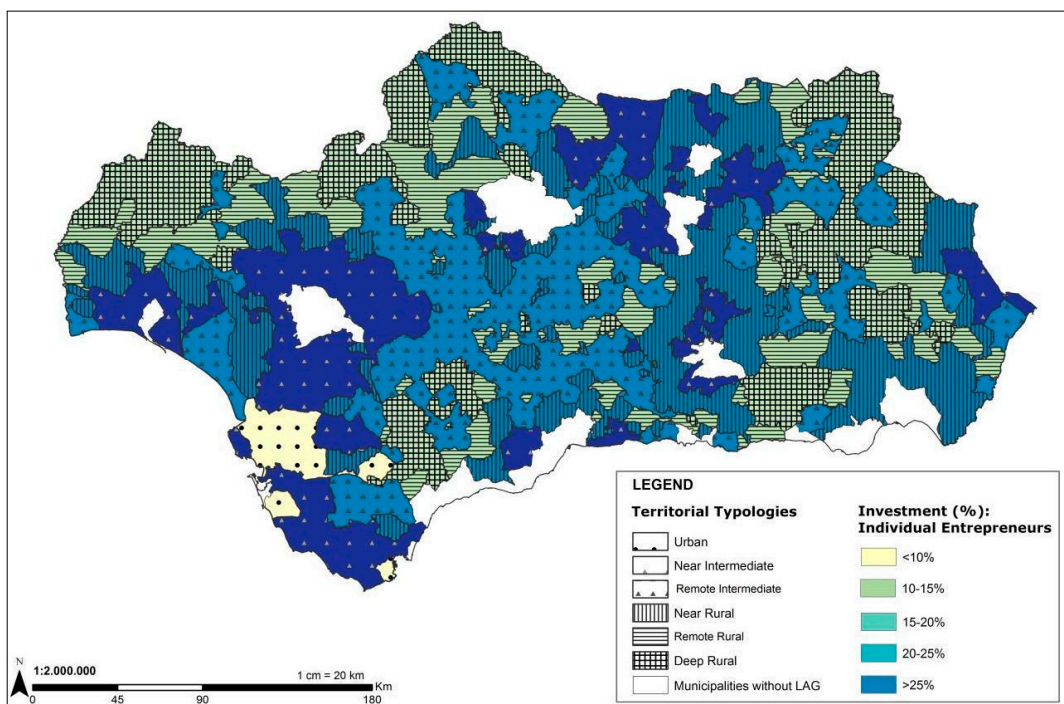
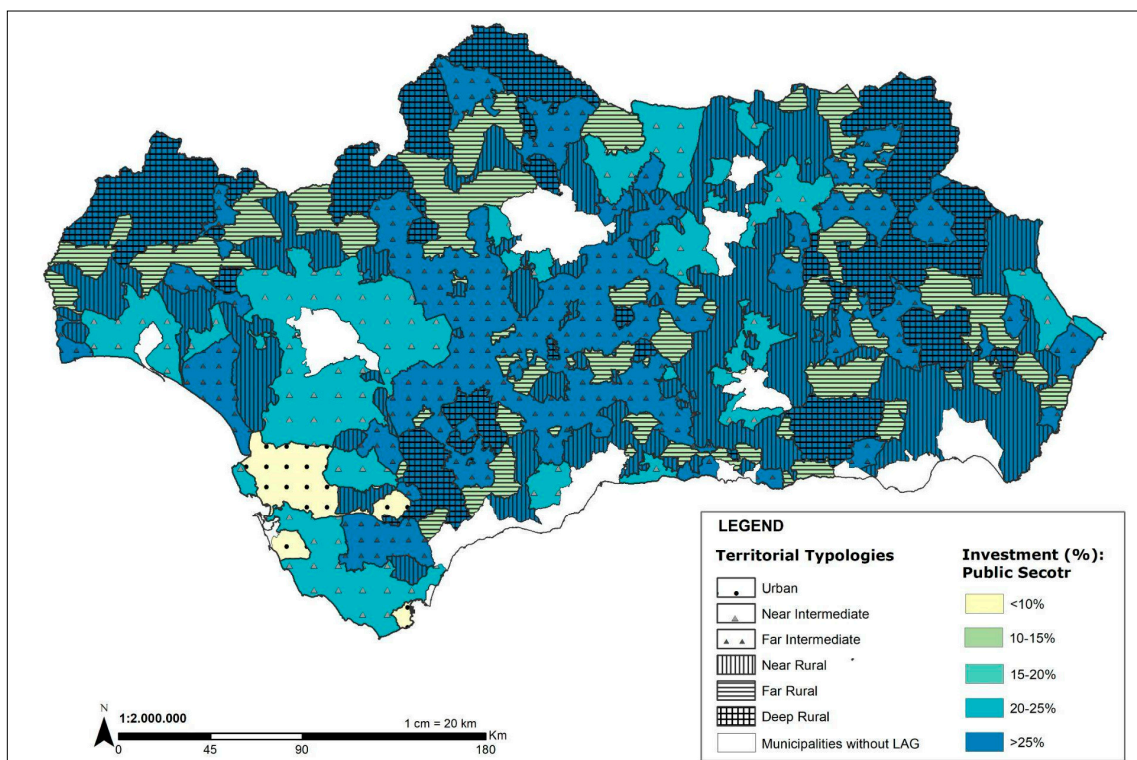


Figure 3. Investment made by individual entrepreneurs according to territorial typology (%). Source: developed by the authors on the base of data of Junta de Andalucía.

In the same way, the average sum invested per project by individual entrepreneurs was much lower than that invested by private companies, in that, if we exclude urban areas in which there were very few projects but with a very high average investment of EUR 110,884, the maximum average investment was EUR 68,189 per project in deep rural areas. These figures also show that the most economically dynamic areas were the most successful at attracting all kinds of private promoters, thus accentuating existing territorial imbalances.

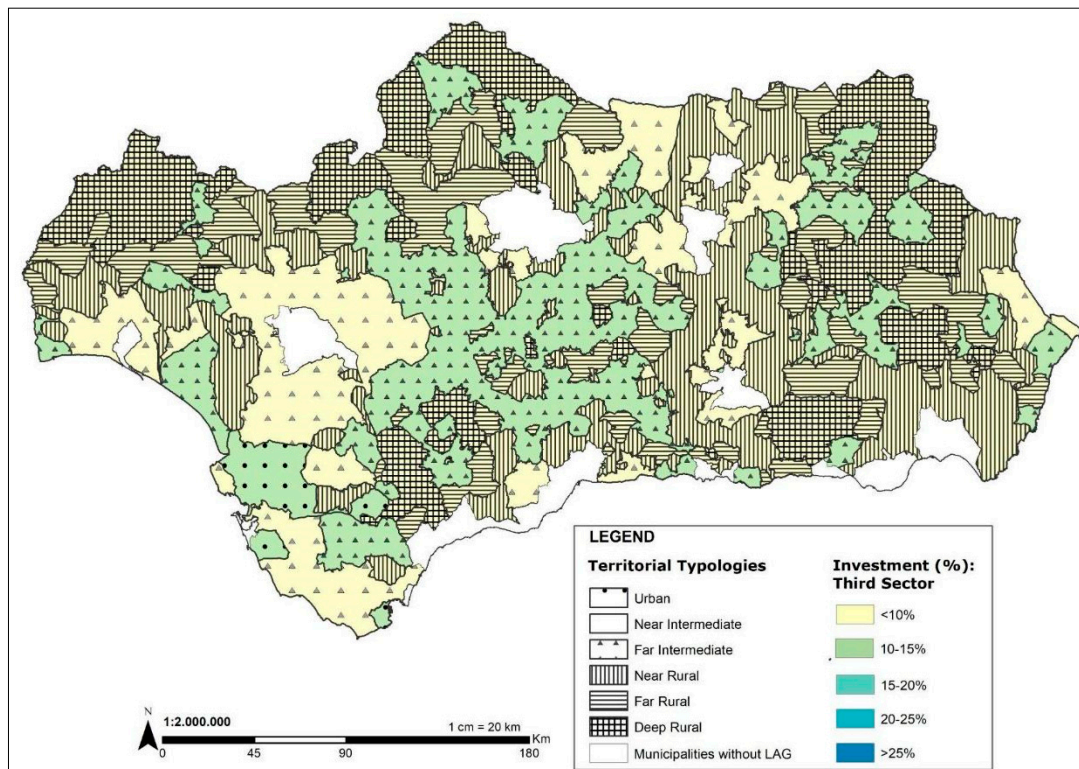
If we were asked to sum up in one word the role played by the public promoters and, more specifically, by local councils, perhaps the most appropriate term would be “balance”. With the exception of urban areas, in which the role of public promoters was almost negligible, the values oscillate within a range of 15–24%, which produces a very homogeneous map (Figure 4) in which most areas show average values. In addition to the urban areas mentioned earlier, it is important to highlight the very low investment in proportional terms made by local councils in remote rural areas located adjacent to deep rural areas, as seen, for example, in the area around Sierra Morena, as well as parts of the Alpujarras and the Sierra de Filabres in eastern Andalucía.



**Figure 4.** Investment made by the public sector according to territorial typology (%). Source: developed by the authors on the base of data of Junta de Andalucía.

Figure 5 maps the participation of the third sector in terms of investment, which with an average value of 8.5% was much lower than that of the other two sectors. This can be explained, to some extent, by the fact that this sector, by definition, is not seeking to make a profit. Average investments were similar to those of the public sector, at almost EUR 56,000. Its greatest territorial impact was in open urban areas and, above all, in the far intermediate area, in which the third sector had a share of over 10% of investment. The areas in which the third sector made the highest contribution are highlighted in green. They are located above all in the Guadalquivir Valley and tend to be quite far away from cities with populations of over 50,000. In many cases, they are adjacent to the foothills of the mountains surrounding the Guadalquivir Valley and form inland islets around the agri-cities. The lowest values

are found in the deep rural areas, where small ageing populations tend to reduce the participation of civil society in initiatives of this kind.



**Figure 5.** Investment made by the third sector according to territorial typology (%). Source: developed by the authors on the base of data of Junta de Andalucía.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Our initial hypothesis has been partially confirmed, to the extent that, although there is no strong relationship between the actors involved in the phases of planning, decision-making and implementation, we can observe specific roles. Thus, the functions played in the alliances, governance and implementation of the projects are distributed according to the interests, complementarities, qualities, components, needs, strengths, and weaknesses of both territories, key actors and LAGs. Thus, mechanisms of clientelism and power arise from the personal and collective interests of relevant local actors and elites, mainly businessmen and politicians, in the rural territories under LEADER [7,17]; promoting a “local logic of appropriation” and playing a determining role in the elaboration of LDSs and their subsequent implementation [40].

Firstly, the public sector, mainly municipalities, play a determining role in the local decision-making and implementation of LEADER through the corresponding action plans, so it is to be expected that a clear relationship will be found between those who make the decisions within the LAGs and those who implement the projects. The role of this public sector is minor in the areas closest to cities, and progressively increasing in the intermediate ones and, above all, in deep rural areas with investment percentages much higher than the average. The location of these municipalities, to a large extent, coincides with the interior and mountain areas. Therefore, their most significant investments in these deep rural territories work as spatial rebalancing. Now, are they sufficient? What type of projects are they carrying out, and what is their capacity to generate territorial dynamism? Are they the manifestation of the private sector’s lack of interest and presence when it comes to investing?

Public actors’ role in revitalising rural spaces is, in general, minimal, even more so in times of the “great recession” marked by the cuts in public spending suffered by

Spain. This is because of the legal impossibility of investing in productive projects with the capacity to generate activity and employment. In addition, these municipalities suffered financial limitations and low budgets from the austerity imposed from the EU after our financial rescue. However, their initiatives had an enormous impact on the quality of life of the inhabitants, both because of their comprehensive knowledge of the problems of their community and because they are the most involved in the areas where the private investments do not reach, which makes them actors that foster development and innovation, especially in medium and small municipalities [41,42]. However, there is still much room for improvement in this regard. The involvement with private companies of the public sector and its economic dynamization character must be extended in these marginal rural areas.

Secondly, the private sector becomes a determining factor at the level of investment in all of the territorial typologies analysed. However, its importance varies following the levels of participation in decision-making. Thus, the highest investment percentages are found in intermediate and peri-urban areas. In many cases, peri-urban areas coincide with those territories in which private companies have greater participation in decision-making inside the LAGs. We are not talking of deep rural areas, where this private sector has less involvement in the different phases of the process of development and implementation of actions. In Andalusia, the municipalities where the private sector acquires maximum investment relevance and participation in the LAGs are located in the Guadalquivir Valley and in the peri-urban areas of the cities that, to a large extent, correspond to the provincial capitals from Seville, Granada or Córdoba. There are many questions that we can ask ourselves in this regard. Is the LEADER philosophy fostering the dynamism of the territories with better starting conditions and, at the same time, penalising those that are not? Does proximity to urban spaces become a crucial element of development in rural areas and, in this case, of the LEADER approach? What factors explain the lack of attractiveness of deep rural areas?

Additionally, the analysis shows two relevant aspects. On the one hand, the proximity to urban spaces becomes a powerful vector of dynamism for rural spaces. On the other, the opposite occurs in the most remote and peripheral ones [43] (Dijkstra et al., 2015). The same happens when we verify that the most dynamic rural areas and better starting situations have a more relevant implementation of LEADER initiatives, as evidenced by Cañete et al. [44,45] for Andalusian rural areas, and for Extremadura by Cárdenas and Nieto [46]. LEADER's neoliberal philosophy requires the initial initiative of public or private actors, which, in the second case, is unequal territorially. This translated into its absence as an investor and as a participant in the decision-making and, not least, to the poor investment of this private sector in inner areas.

On the other hand, these higher investments per project in deep rural areas could be considered, in part, the result of higher costs, due to the lack of infrastructure and facilities. In the case of private companies, and especially large companies with easy access to finance, attractive opportunities in these areas could be the reason. Although some costs could be lower (administrative licences, land, etc.), the distance to cities and business hubs could generate additional costs in terms of the transport of equipment, furniture, machinery, etc., and of staff; higher investments might also be required to ensure proper broadband connections in areas with serious deficiencies in this regard. All these factors could explain why much higher average investments are required than in other, more dynamic, areas.

A differentiation in the behaviour of private entrepreneurs according to sex and age has also been confirmed in other studies. Women tend to start businesses, especially if they are young, below their demographic relevance [47], in dynamic rural areas that are better connected, innovative, and industrial and residential places [48]. This, despite persisting gender roles [49,50], distances them from deeper rural spaces [51] in which mature women gain importance as LEADER entrepreneurs [52].

Additionally, the participation as an entrepreneur of young collectives is much lower than its demographic significance; especially when it is male, its presence is highlighted in distant and deep rural areas with projects linked, to a large extent, to the agricultural sector.

LEADER's implementation during this period has been marked by the economic and financial crisis, which emerged in 2008. Thus, the difficulties of finding a job in sectors with a strong demand for labour, such as construction or tourism (hotels or restaurants), during the "great recession" [53], and the increasingly more flexible labour market, led to workers, in some cases, and those who were facing a job for the first time, in others, to become an "entrepreneur by necessity" [54,55]. Starting a business in these circumstances leads to high levels of failure in these projects [56] and a decrease in the jobs generated. In the case of self-employment, the creation of new a business prevails [57], being a way to face the crisis [58,59].

In this context, the participation of groups such as women and youth is threatened, due in many cases to apathy and lack of interest within the local community, their inability to participate in these processes and the interests of the elite local communities to control the LAGs. This unequal participation in the decision-making of the LAGs has already been highlighted in different works: Thuesen [60] for Denmark; farmers in the Czech Republic [61]; or Spain, with the design of LDSs and their implementation [40] or [62].

Thirdly, the reduced leadership of the third sector is evident in all phases, except perhaps in planning, in which its influence was somewhat more significant. This third sector is essential for the success of rural development policies; thus, Olmedo and O'Shaughnessy [63] noted the relevance of the participation of third sector organisations, such as social enterprises, in the neo-endogenous development practices for rural areas. However, its importance increases in peri-urban areas and decreases in inner rural areas. The third sector played a minimum role as promoters, far from the public sector and, above all, from the private sector. In deep rural areas, their investments are the lowest, by far. In this sense, as was the case of private entrepreneurs, the territories where this actor has the most significant presence and investment are located in the Guadalquivir Valley and agri-cities. We ask ourselves several questions in this regard: can the importance of this actor in development processes be measured only in terms of investment? What role does it play in the development of the rural areas? What types of NGOs are behind these actions? Does their lower presence in decision-making and investment bodies reflect lower social capital? Is there a social perception of their lower level of legitimacy as a territorial actor? Does this constitute a limitation to its power of intervention?

Additionally, this collective has in common, beyond its legal form, the fact that they are nonprofit organisations [64], being the third way between the approaches of social democracy and neoliberalism [65]. This is so to the extent that their actions do not seek economic benefit but focus on interventions that, clearly, should be carried out by public actors. Its growing importance shows both the limitations of the welfare state [66] and its ability to complement the public sector with the management of wellbeing state [67], being even seen as a barrier to the penetration of neoliberal policies through a clear commitment to equal and social justice [68].

Another aspect that is, in our opinion, more relevant, is the social repercussions of their actions in the strengthening and resilience of the territories [69], not only because of the issues, groups and needs to which their actions are directed (caring for the most vulnerable groups or the protection of the natural and cultural heritage) but for promoting a new formula for leading rural development, a more holistic and inclusive—vitality policy—, based on the conception of the place as a space for life [70], far from the prevailing competitiveness and business benefit. The third sector must play an increasingly social, political, and even economic role, which LAGs must promote. In addition, it should be taken into account that these collectives form an intermediate point between private companies and public administrations that can serve as a catalyst for nonprofit initiatives, but that undoubtedly help to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of these zones, and, in addition to serving as a channel for public awareness, of the LEADER initiative itself.

This vital role in the development of rural areas is not reflected in the leadership that these actors have in LAGs' decision-making. Its small representativeness and lack of leadership, the deficiencies in terms of social capital that increase in the deep rural areas,

the fact of not being democratically elected, meaning a poor legitimacy, are explanatory factors of this behaviour [17].

Finally, the LAGs participate in elaborating LDSs and their implementation, acting as a balancing agent between the interests of the private sector and municipalities, creating spaces for learning, exchange and discussion [71]. Reinforcing, in this way, the following consideration of Pinilla and Sáez [72]: LDSs have to be transversal and demand the joint responsibility of all of the stakeholders. Once again, the need to provide further prominence and funds to LAGs in the planning and management of European rural development is confirmed. It is in the intermediate spaces where its importance is most significant, coinciding with the highest levels of investment, although significantly reduced, in any case. It is relevant to note that a part of its actions, having a supra-municipal scope of involvement, is not considered in this study. Even so, it is surprising to verify the low level of the general investment of this actor, explained in part by the limitations on the actions that LAGs can foster, without also forgetting the aforementioned supra-municipal nature. This is especially evident in remote and deep rural areas, which most require the support of public or semi-public agents, and in the absence of the private sector. Have the LAGs lost their capacity to revitalise rural spaces? What role do the technical teams play within the LAGs? Are they a “shadow” power? Do they have the financial capacity and autonomy to design and implement LDSs?

In fact, the processes of bureaucratization and low citizen participation, especially of women and young people, were noted by Viladomiu et al. [73,74]; and by other authors, the interference that occurs from regional instances [62], limiting both the basic principle of subsidiarity [75] and the fieldwork of technicians to promote and foster new projects [76], etc.

It is also important not to forget the role of the LAGs themselves, and in particular of their expert technical teams, in the planning phase. The knowledge of the philosophy of the LEADER approach, the bureaucratic procedures, the rural and regional development programmes, the local resources, and its experience in the issues related to elaboration of LDSs and their implementation; give them a significant influence. Thus, the vision and orientation of these LDSs are highly influenced by these teams of technicians, having the members of the association a “comparsa role”. In fact, Dargan and Schucksmith [77] called them a “project class”, giving to technicians a high relevance. In addition, the promotion of social innovation, one of the key pillars of the LEADER methodology, and the values such as dignity, distinction, dialogue, democracy, and even delight, is under the responsibility of the LAGs [78], giving to these public–private partnerships a very significant leadership role.

Apart from the mentioned actors, we cannot forget the role of external actors; LEADER is a model of mixed exogenous and endogenous actors, written and unwritten rules, and external and internal development [79]. At the beginning of these projects, foreigners act as promoters but also transmit scientific knowledge, and as facilitators and collaborators, in a certain way, of these initiatives, and whose support is also transcendental [80]. As Dargan and Schucksmith [77] mentioned, innovation often comes from outsiders.

Three more questions deserve to be mentioned. On the one hand, the methodology used based on time distances adjusted to the Andalusian regional reality is a powerful tool for establishing dynamics and behaviours between the different territories that escape municipal analyses. In addition, maintaining the municipal scale of the study allows a spatial study and introduces important details that escape the results obtained according to territorial categories. On the other hand, the most relevant limitations that our research presents are related to the lack of qualitative information that allows us to identify the role that the different actors involved in rural development processes play or believe they play. Finally, and based on the above, following research will focus on a more qualitative approach to the problem analysed, using in depth interviews with key actors both in the decision-making (LAGs) and in the entrepreneurs who decide to develop their projects in the rural areas under the LEADER approach.



**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, E.C.-G. and F.N.-V.; methodology, E.C.-G., F.N.-V. and J.A.C.-P.; investigation, E.C.-G., F.N.-V. and J.A.C.-P.; cartography J.A.C.-P.; writing—original draft preparation, E.C.-G. and F.N.-V.; writing—review and editing, E.C.-G., F.N.-V. and J.A.C.-P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This study was carried out as part of the research project entitled “Successes and failures in the practice of neo-endogenous rural development in the European Union (1991–2014)” funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness within its Excellence Programme, CSO2017-89657-P. Additionally, this research is part of the project “El vaciamiento del campo andaluz. Prácticas y propuestas para ocuparlo”, funded by the Andalusian Regional Government, concretely the Centre of Andalusian Studies, PRY112/19. Finally, the publication of this work has been funded by the European Union project “Education, Agriculture and Resources for Territories and Heritage”, 598839-EPP-1-2018-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP (2018–2022).

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

**Acknowledgments:** Our special thanks to Nigel Walkington for his extremely in depth English revision of the text; Enrique Fernández Seguí for his exceptionally thorough work formatting the text; various managers of Local Action Groups for sharing their information/knowledge about the projects; and the Regional Government of Andalusia for the data. We would also like to thank Ernest Reig, Francisco Goerlich and Ignacio Cantarino, for their support in defining the different types of rural area.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

## References

1. European Communities. *The Leader Approach. A Basic Guide*; Office for Official Publications: Luxembourg, 2006.
2. Cejudo García, E.; Navarro Valverde, F. *Neoendogenous Development in European Rural Areas. Results and Lessons*; Springer International Publishing: Cham, Switzerland, 2020; pp. 1–304.
3. Delamaza, G.; Thayer, L.E. Percepciones políticas y prácticas de participación como instrumento para la gobernanza de los territorios. *EURE* **2016**, *42*, 137–158. Available online: <http://www.eure.cl/index.php/eure/article/view/1741/919> (accessed on 25 January 2022). [[CrossRef](#)]
4. Scott, M. Reflecting on theory and practice. *Plan. Theory Pract.* **2019**, *20*, 3–7. [[CrossRef](#)]
5. Davoudi, S.; Evans, N.; Governa, F.; Santangelo, M. Territorial governance in the making. Approaches, methodologies, practices. *Boletín Asoc. Geógrafos Españoles* **2008**, *2008*, 33–52.
6. Esparcia, J.; Escribano, J.; Buciega, A. A perspective of LEADER Method in Spain based on the Analysis of Local Action Groups. In *Evaluating the LEADER Approach to Rural Development. Grass-Roots Experiences of the Leader Programme*; Routledge: Abingdon-on-Thames, UK, 2015; pp. 33–51.
7. Pawlowska, A. Territorial partnerships in rural Regions-Neo-institutional perspective. *Pol. Sociol. Rev.* **2017**, *197*, 95–108. Available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26383069> (accessed on 1 January 2022).
8. European Commission Guidance on Community-Led Local Development in European Structural and Investment Funds (v2 May 2014). 2014. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/guidance\\_community\\_local\\_development.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/guidance_community_local_development.pdf) (accessed on 1 January 2022).
9. European Commission. *Guía de Desarrollo Local Participativo para Actores Locales*; Publications Office: Luxembourg, 2014; p. 121.
10. Noguera, J.; Esparcia, J.; Pitarch, M.D. Leader en España: Desarrollo rural, poder, legitimación, aprendizaje y nuevas estructuras. *Documents d’Anàlisi Geogràfica* **2003**, *37*, 95–113.
11. Lacquement, G.; Chevalier, P.; Navarro, F.; Cejudo, E. Public Action and Territorial Development: The Leader Approach in the Recomposition of Rural Spaces in Languedoc-Roussillon (France) and Andalusia (Spain). In *Neoendogenous Development in European Rural Areas: Results and Lessons*; Cejudo García, E., Navarro Valverde, F., Eds.; Springer International Publishing: Cham, Switzerland, 2020; pp. 63–86.
12. Belliggiano, A.; Cejudo, E.; De Rubertis, S. The Role of Agriculture in Rural Development in Spain and Italy within the Framework of the LEADER 2007–2013 Programming Period. In *Neoendogenous Development in European Rural Areas. Results and Lesson*; Cejudo, E., Navarro, F., Eds.; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2020; pp. 149–180.

13. Labianca, M.; De Rubertis, S.; Belligiano, A.; Salento, A.; Navarro, F. Social Innovation, Territorial Capital and Leader Experiences in Andalusia (Spain) and in Molise (Italy). In *Neoendogenous Development in European Rural Areas: Results and Lessons*; Cejudo García, E., Navarro Valverde, F., Eds.; Springer International Publishing: Cham, Switzerland, 2020; pp. 111–131.
14. Furmankiewicz, M.; Thompson, N.; Zielińska, M. Area-based Partnerships in Rural Poland: The Post-accession Experience. *J. Rural Stud.* **2010**, *26*, 52–62. [CrossRef]
15. Chmielinski, P.; Faccilongo, N.; Fiore, M.; La Sala, P. Design and implementation of the Local Development Strategy: A case study of Polish and Italian Local Action Groups in 2007–2013. *Stud. Agric. Econ.* **2018**, *120*, 25–31. [CrossRef]
16. European Court of Auditors. *Implementation of the Leader Approach for Rural Development*; Special Report No 5; Publications Office: Luxembourg, 2010; p. 108.
17. Furmankiewicz, M.; Macken-Walsh, Á. Government within governance? Polish rural development partnerships through the lens of functional representation. *J. Rural Stud.* **2016**, *46*, 12–22. Available online: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0743016716300663> (accessed on 5 January 2022). [CrossRef]
18. Konečný, O. The Leader Approach Across the European Union: One Method of Rural Development, Many Forms of Implementation. *Eur. Countrys.* **2019**, *11*, 1–16. [CrossRef]
19. Saradin, P.; Sulak, T. Local Action Groups and Participation. *Contemp. Eur. Stud.* **2015**, *2*, 25–31. Available online: <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=964253> (accessed on 15 January 2022).
20. Esparcia Pérez, J.; Escribano Pizarro, J.; Sánchez Aguilera, D. Los territorios rurales. In *Geografía Humana de España*; Romero, J., Ed.; Tirant lo Blanch, Universitat de València: Valencia, Spain, 2017; pp. 367–488.
21. OECD. *Innovation and Modernising the Rural Economy*; OECD Publishing: Paris, France, 2014; p. 151.
22. Fadic, M.; Garcilazo, J.E.; Monroy, A.M.; Veneri, P. *Classifying Small (TL3) Regions Based on Metropolitan Population, Low Density and Remoteness*; OECD Publishing: Paris, France, 2019; p. 28.
23. Sancho Comíns, J.; Reinoso Moreno, D. La delimitación del ámbito rural: Una cuestión clave en los programas de desarrollo rural. *Estud. Geográficos* **2012**, *73*, 599–624. Available online: <http://estudiosgeograficos.revistas.csic.es/index.php/estudiosgeograficos/article/view/384> (accessed on 12 January 2022). [CrossRef]
24. Sánchez Escolano, L. Las redes de ciudades medias en la provincia de Granada: Transformaciones recientes y nuevas tipologías (1950–2008). *Cuad. Geográficos* **2010**, *46*, 111–138. [CrossRef]
25. Molinero Hernando, F. El espacio rural de España: Evolución, delimitación y clasificación. *Cuad. Geográficos* **2019**, *58*, 19–56. Available online: <https://revistaseug.ugr.es/index.php/cuadgeo/article/view/8643> (accessed on 12 January 2022). [CrossRef]
26. De Cos Guerra, O.; Reques Velasco, P. Vulnerabilidad territorial y demográfica en España. Posibilidades del análisis multicriterio y la lógica difusa para la definición de patrones espaciales. *J. Reg. Res. Investig. Reg.* **2019**, *45*, 201–225. Available online: <https://investigacionesregionales.org/es/article/vulnerabilidad-territorial-y-demografica-en-espana-posibilidades-del-analisis-multicriterio-y-la-logica-difusa-para-la-definicion-de-patrones-espaciales/> (accessed on 25 January 2022).
27. United Kingdom Government. *Defining Rural Areas*; United Kingdom Government: London, UK, 2017; p. 5.
28. Prieto-Lara, E.; Ocaña-Riola, R. Updating Rurality Index for Small Areas in Spain. *Soc. Indic. Res.* **2010**, *95*, 267–280. [CrossRef]
29. Bibby, P.; Brindley, P. *Urban and Rural Area Definitions for Policy Purposes in England and Wales: Methodology (v1.0)*; Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs. Department for Communities and Local Government. Welsh Government: London, UK, 2013; p. 36.
30. Guastella, G.; Pareglio, S. Urban Systems, Urbanization Dynamics and Land Use in Italy: Evidence from a Spatial Analysis. *Curr. Urban Stud.* **2014**, *2*, 291–297. [CrossRef]
31. Ratcliffe, M.; Burd, C.; Holder, K.; Fields, A. *Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey and Geography Brief*; Census Bureau: Washington, DC, USA, 2016.
32. Zhao, J.; Ameratunga, S.; Lee, A.; Browne, M.; Exeter, D. Developing a New Index of Rurality for Exploring Variations in Health Outcomes in Auckland and Northland. *Soc. Indic. Res.* **2019**, *144*, 955–980. Available online: <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2170092424> (accessed on 13 January 2022). [CrossRef]
33. Rodero-Cosano, M.L.; Garcia-Alonso, C.R.; Salinas-Pérez, J.A. A Deprivation Analysis for Andalusia (Spain): An Approach Based on Structural Equations. *Soc. Indic. Res.* **2014**, *115*, 751–765. [CrossRef]
34. Smith, T.; Noble, M.; Noble, S.; Wright, G.; Mclennan, D.; Plunkett, E. *The English Indices of Deprivation 2015: Research Report*; Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government: London, UK, 2015; p. 94.
35. Exeter, D.; Zhao, J.; Browne, M.; Lee, A. Towards a new Index of Multiple Area-Level Deprivation for Auckland, New Zealand. *N. Z. Geogr.* **2016**, *72*, 92–106. [CrossRef]
36. Eurostat; European Commission. *Income Poverty and Material Deprivation in European Countries*; Publications Office: Luxembourg, 2010; p. 64.
37. Reig Martínez, E.; Goerlich Gisbert, F.J.; Cantarino Martí, I. *Delimitación de Áreas Rurales y Urbanas a Nivel Local: Demografía, Coberturas del Suelo y Accesibilidad*; Fundación BBVA: Bilbao, Spain, 2016; p. 131.
38. Cejudo García, E.; Navarro Valverde, F.; Cañete Pérez, J.A. Evolución y distribución territorial de los trabajadores eventuales agrarios subsidiados en Andalucía. *Boletín Asociación Geógrafos Españoles* **2016**, *72*, 117–147. [CrossRef]
39. López Ontiveros, A. La agrocuidad andaluza: Caracterización, estructura y problemática. *Rev. Estud. Reg.* **1994**, *39*, 59–91. Available online: <http://www.revistaestudiosregionales.com/documentos/articulos/pdf443.pdf> (accessed on 5 January 2022).

40. Esparcia, J.; Escribano, J.; Serrano, J. From development to power relations and territorial governance: Increasing the leadership role of Leader Local Action Groups in Spain. *J. Rural Stud.* **2015**, *42*, 29–42. [CrossRef]
41. OECD. *The New Rural Paradigm: Policies and Governance*; OECD Publishing: Paris, France, 2006; p. 168.
42. Neumeier, S. Social innovation in rural development: Identifying the key factors of success. *Geogr. J.* **2017**, *183*, 1–27. [CrossRef]
43. Dijkstra, L.; Garcilazo, E.; McCann, P. The effects of the global financial crisis on European regions and cities. *J. Econ. Geogr.* **2015**, *15*, 935–949. Available online: <https://academic.oup.com/joeg/article-pdf/15/5/935/3648785/lbv032.pdf> (accessed on 7 January 2022). [CrossRef]
44. Cañete, J.A.; Nieto, A.; Cejudo, E.; Cárdenas, G. Territorial Distribution of Projects Within the LEADER Approach (2007–2013) in Extremadura and Andalusia. In *Neoendogenous Development in European Rural Areas: Results and Lessons*; Cejudo, E., Navarro, F., Eds.; Springer International Publishing: Cham, Switzerland, 2020; pp. 87–109.
45. Cañete, J.; Navarro, F.; Cejudo, E. Territorially unequal rural development: The cases of the LEADER Initiative and the PRODER Programme in Andalusia (Spain). *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2018**, *26*, 726–744. [CrossRef]
46. Cárdenas Alonso, G.; Nieto Masot, A. Towards Rural Sustainable Development? Contributions of the EAFRD 2007–2013 in Low Demographic Density Territories: The Case of Extremadura (SW Spain). *Sustainability* **2017**, *9*, 1173. [CrossRef]
47. Cejudo García, E.; Cañete Pérez, J.A.; Navarro Valverde, F.; Capote Lama, A. Fracaso en la implementación de los proyectos Leader en el rural profundo de Andalucía (España): Juventud y mujer. *J. Depopul. Rural Dev. Stud.* **2021**, *33*, 267–293. Available online: <http://ruralager.org/wp-content/uploads/10-Ager-33-Cejudo-01.pdf> (accessed on 15 January 2022). [CrossRef]
48. Salamaña, I.; Baylina, M.; Ramon, M.D.; Porto, A.M.; Villarino, M. Dones, trajectòries de vida i noves ruralitats. *Doc. D'anàlisi Geogràfica* **2016**, *62*, 661–681. Available online: <https://dag.revista.uab.es/article/download/v62-n3-salamaña-baylina-garcia-etal/403-pdf-ca> (accessed on 25 January 2022). [CrossRef]
49. Baylina, M.; Villarino, M.; Garcia Ramon, M.D.; Mosteiro, M.J.; Porto, A.M.; Salamaña, I. Género e innovación en los nuevos procesos de re-ruralización en España. *Finisterra Rev. Port. Geogr.* **2019**, *54*, 75–91. [CrossRef]
50. Vercher Savall, N.; Escribano Pizarro, J.; Valero, D.E. Models de vida femenins en el medi rural. Un cas d'estudi a la Sierra del Segura (Albacete). *Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica* **2019**, *65*, 139–161. Available online: <https://dag.revista.uab.cat/article/view/v65-n1-vercher-escribano-valero> (accessed on 5 January 2022). [CrossRef]
51. Cejudo, E.; Navarro, F.; Cañete, J.A. Young and women entrepreneurs in neo-endogenous development. In *Neoendogenous Development in European Rural Areas. Results and Lessons*; Cejudo, E., Navarro, F., Eds.; Springer International Publishing: Cham, Switzerland, 2020; pp. 209–234.
52. Alario Trigueros, M.; Morales Prieto, E. Iniciativas de las mujeres: Emprendimiento y oportunidades en el espacio rural de Castilla y León. *Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica* **2016**, *62*, 613–637. Available online: <https://doaj.org/article/617d8e63a0544319882ec07c9f804e05> (accessed on 15 January 2022). [CrossRef]
53. Martín, M.P.M.; de Castro, P.C.; Gómez, D.C. Welfare Citizenship in the Shadow of the Recession in Spain: The Case of Households in Hardship. *Rev. Española Investig. Sociológicas* **2020**, *169*, 85–102. [CrossRef]
54. Alvarez-Sousa, A. Emprendedores por necesidad. Factores determinantes. *Rev. Española Investig. Sociológicas* **2019**, *166*, 3–24. Available online: [https://reis.cis.es/REIS/PDF/REIS\\_166\\_011547120128092.pdf](https://reis.cis.es/REIS/PDF/REIS_166_011547120128092.pdf) (accessed on 12 January 2022). [CrossRef]
55. Martín, P.; Tovar, F.J. Desmontando la seguridad en las políticas de empleo: La propuesta europea de flexiguridad. *Rev. Int. Sociol.* **2019**, *77*, e124. [CrossRef]
56. Cejudo García, E.; Cañete Pérez, J.A.; Navarro Valverde, F.; Ruiz Moya, N. Entrepreneurs and Territorial Diversity: Success and Failure in Andalusia 2007–2015. *Land* **2020**, *9*, 262. [CrossRef]
57. Cejudo García, E.; Cañete Pérez, J.A.; Navarro Valverde, F.; Ruiz Moya, N. Empleo rural y LEADER: Actores, territorios y beneficiarios en Andalucía (2007–2015). *Boletín Asociación Geógrafos Españoles* **2022**, *92*, 1–49. [CrossRef]
58. Rodríguez Molina, M.; Sánchez Escolano, L.M.; Cejudo García, E.; Camacho Ballesta, J.A. Variety in local development strategies and employment: LEADER programme in Andalusia. *Agric. Econ.* **2019**, *65*, 43–50. [CrossRef]
59. Comité Económico y Social Europeo. *Evaluación ex Post de Los Programas de Desarrollo Rural 2007–2013*; Comité Económico y Social Europeo: Brussels, Belgium, 2017; p. 26.
60. Thuesen, A.A. Is Leader Elitist or Inclusive? Composition of Danish LAG Boards in the 2007–2013 Rural Development and Fisheries Programmes. *Sociol. Rural* **2010**, *50*, 31–45. Available online: <https://api.istex.fr/ark:/67375/WNG-DSHT85TH-X/fulltext.pdf> (accessed on 11 January 2022). [CrossRef]
61. Delin, M. The role of farmers in Local Action Groups: The case of the national network of the Local Action Groups in the Czech Republic. *Agric. Econ.* **2012**, *58*, 433–442. [CrossRef]
62. Navarro, F.; Woods, M.; Cejudo, E. The LEADER Initiative has been a Victim of Its Own Success. The Decline of the Bottom-Up Approach in Rural Development Programmes. The Cases of Wales and Andalusia. *Sociol. Rural* **2016**, *56*, 270–288. [CrossRef]
63. Olmedo, L.; O'Shaughnessy, M. A Substantive View of Social Enterprises as Neo-endogenous Rural Development Actors. *Voluntas Int. J. Volunt. Nonprofit Organ.* **2022**, *33*, 1–13. [CrossRef]
64. Bidet, E.; Eum, H. Une analyse socio-économique de la trajectoire institutionnelle de l'entreprise sociale: Le cas de la Corée du Sud. *Ann. Public Coop. Econ.* **2022**, *93*, 229–247. [CrossRef]
65. Hahn, S.; McCabe, A. Welfare-to-work and the emerging third sector in South Korea: Korea's third way? *Int. J. Soc. Welf.* **2006**, *15*, 314–320. [CrossRef]

66. Pestoff, V. Towards a paradigm of democratic participation: Citizen participation and co-production of personal social services in Sweden. *Ann. Public Coop. Econ.* **2009**, *80*, 197–224. [CrossRef]
67. Chaney, P.; Wincott, D. Envisioning the Third Sector's Welfare Role: Critical Discourse Analysis of 'Post-Devolution' Public Policy in the UK 1998–2012. *Soc. Policy Adm.* **2014**, *48*, 757–781. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
68. Darby, S. Dynamic Resistance: Third-Sector Processes for Transforming Neoliberalization. *Antipode* **2016**, *48*, 977–999. Available online: <https://api.istex.fr/ark:/67375/WNG-5T0SV456-S/fulltext.pdf> (accessed on 12 January 2022). [CrossRef]
69. Cejudo-García, E.; Navarro-Valverde, F.; Cañete-Pérez, J.A.; Ruiz-Moya, N. The Third Sector: The "Other" Actors of Rural Development, Andalusia 2000–2015. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 13976. [CrossRef]
70. Makkonen, T.; Kahila, P. Vitality policy as a tool for rural development in peripheral Finland. *Growth Change* **2021**, *52*, 706–726. Available online: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338841673\\_Vitality\\_policy\\_as\\_a\\_tool\\_for\\_rural\\_development\\_in\\_peripheral\\_Finland](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338841673_Vitality_policy_as_a_tool_for_rural_development_in_peripheral_Finland) (accessed on 13 January 2022). [CrossRef]
71. Chen, H.; Knierim, A.; Bock, B.B. The emergence of social innovation in rural revitalisation practices: A comparative case study from Taiwan. *J. Rural Stud.* **2022**, *90*, 134–146. Available online: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0743016722000250> (accessed on 25 January 2022). [CrossRef]
72. Pinilla, V.; Sáez, L.A. What Do Public Policies Teach us About Rural Depopulation: The Case Study of Spain. *Eur. Countrys.* **2021**, *13*, 330–351. [CrossRef]
73. Viladomiu Canela, L.; Rosell Foxà, J.; Francès Tudel, G. Factores determinantes de la participación de la mujer como promotoras de proyectos Leader+. *Rev. Española Estud. Agrosoc. Y Pesq.* **2010**, *226*, 177–206. Available online: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/ags/spreea/186260.html> (accessed on 11 January 2022).
74. Augustyn, A.M.; Nemes, G. Catching up with the West? Europeanisation of Rural Policies in Hungary and Poland. *Stud. Agric. Econ.* **2014**, *116*, 114–121. Available online: <https://studies.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2152.pdf> (accessed on 20 January 2022). [CrossRef]
75. Tirado Ballesteros, J.G.; Hernández, M.H. Promoting tourism through the EU LEADER programme: Understanding Local Action Group governance. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2019**, *27*, 396–414. [CrossRef]
76. Sacristán López, H.; Martínez Arroyo, F.; Yagüe Blanco, J.L. Los órganos de decisión de los grupos de acción local en el periodo 2007–2013 en España: Relaciones entre los actores del medio rural. *Rev. Española Estud. Agrosoc. Y Pesq.* **2016**, *245*, 47–66. Available online: [https://www.mapa.gob.es/app/publicaciones/art\\_datos\\_art.asp?articuloid=1426&codrevista=REEAP](https://www.mapa.gob.es/app/publicaciones/art_datos_art.asp?articuloid=1426&codrevista=REEAP) (accessed on 25 January 2022).
77. Dargan, L.; Shucksmith, M. Leader and Innovation. *Sociol. Rural* **2008**, *48*, 274–291. [CrossRef]
78. Lukesch, R. Leader Reloaded. In Proceedings of the ELARD conference on the heartbeat of the Leader community, Évora, Portugal, 26–28 September 2018; pp. 1–23.
79. Furmankiewicz, M.; Janc, K.; Macken-Walsh, Á. Implementation of the EU LEADER programme at member-state level: Written and unwritten rules of local project selection in rural Poland. *J. Rural Stud.* **2021**, *86*, 357–365. [CrossRef]
80. Esparcia, J. Innovation and networks in rural areas. An analysis from European innovative projects. *J. Rural Stud.* **2014**, *34*, 1–14. Available online: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0743016713000995> (accessed on 5 January 2022). [CrossRef]