

SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS OF CUENCA, SPAIN

José María Díaz-Puente

Pablo Vidueira

Department of Projects and Rural Planning, Technical University of Madrid,

Francisco Gallego

Asociación Institución de Desarrollo Comunitario de Cuenca..

Abstract

Community development must be accompanied by a social involvement process which creates functional groups of citizens capable of taking responsibility for their own development. It is important that this process promotes the structuring of all population groups and provides the appropriate institutional and technical support. The present paper addresses these issues based on over 25 years of experience by the Association Instituto de Desarrollo Comunitario de Cuenca in revitalizing rural areas of the Spanish province of Cuenca. This paper analyses the social involvement process encouraged by this association, the relationships between public institutions and local associations, the role of these associations and the difficulties encountered in the rural areas. The long-term perspective of this experience provides some keys which can be used to successfully support the process of social involvement —such as information on its characteristics and methodological tools—, establish local associations and create sustainable partnerships that foster the growth of leadership within the community development process.

Keywords: *Community development; Social involvement; Social structuring; Partnership; Rural underpopulation.*

1. Introduction

Efforts to streamline the network of associations began within the context of community organization. This is understood as a process where the community strives to control its problems and reach solutions through its organizations and institutions (Lindeman, 1921). Therefore, the existence of organized groups of individuals acting together is essential (Sanderson and Polson, 1939). The role of external actors in collaborating with the community throughout this process is also crucial (Pettit, 1925).

Since 1948, these ideas have resulted in the evolution of the concept of community development. The United Nations (1953) and Murray (1955) define this as the process whereby community members identify their needs and objectives, establish an ordered hierarchy and develop practical cooperation and collaboration methods in order to address their needs and objectives.

This role for the community is dependent on the existence of functional citizens' groups within it that promote individual participation and activity, as well as the community's ability to be an active and responsible participant in this development (Ware, 1949). That is why the revitalization of the areas in question is so essential and must always play a key role in the process of community development. The goal is to open channels for participation through which individuals can identify and prioritize their needs, and to encourage the formulation of measures working to support community development (Porzecanski, 1983; Klsnerman, 1986).

However, the presence of this boost to encourage participation does not guarantee that a genuine process of community development will take place (Jessop, 1999). It is important that the process of revitalization is inclusive of all population groups. Numerous studies show the failure of development processes such as these to include only certain groups of people (Kovach, 2000; Shucksmith, 2000; Yarwood, 2002; Considine, 2003; Williams, 2003; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). Traditionally excluded groups are the most vulnerable, such as the retired or the unemployed.

Similarly, it is crucial to the success of this process that the community is provided with the appropriate technical support (Armstrong, 1993) and with the support of public institutions (Ware, 1954; Armstrong,

1993, Edwards et al., 2001) throughout the process of identification and prioritization of needs, as well as in creating development measures and in the analysis of resource availability.

Since the late nineties, within the framework of the LEADER Initiative, there has been a lot of research carried out regarding the changing role of public institutions and the processes targeting rural development (Goodwin, 1998; Murdoch and Abram, 1998, Ward and McNicholas, 1998; Woods, 1998; Storey, 1999, Jones and Little, 2000, Diaz-Puente et al., 2009). The gradual democratization of developed countries has led to a change in the perception of development from traditional top-down approaches to bottom-up approaches based on the direct use of national resources (Westholm, 1999; Ray, 2005; Furmankiewicz et al., 2010). This change is essential for the viability of developments in social structure and communities (MacKinnon, 2002; Diaz-Puente et al., 2008).

Similarly, the change in the governance models of liberal societies toward more decentralized systems has allowed non-state organizations—which have the ability to mobilize local potential (Furmankiewicz et al., 2010)—to take on a very important role as community partners in the development process. This role is especially important in terms of the organization within society (Rhodes, 1996; Hudson, 2002; Grochowski and Regulska, 2000) and even more so in areas with low population density, which can be characterised by intense isolation and rural exodus (Schejtman and Berdegué, 2004). The contribution made by these associations is needed in order to achieve a more inclusive and participatory form of development (Shucksmith, 2000; Kovacs Katona et al., 2006). Public institutions need to trust that these associations and local actors are able to carry out proper management of the development process (MacKinnon, 2002).

This article discusses the experience gained by the Institute of Community Development of Cuenca (hereafter IDC Cuenca) during over 25 years in the field of social involvement in rural underpopulated areas. Based on this long term perspective, the article discusses a process founded on social inclusion and the promotion of participation by all sectors of the population by providing encouragement and support, prioritizing its most pressing needs, and seeking innovative responses to these needs. It will thus provide some strategies to successfully accompany the development process, such as information on its characteristics and methodological tools; the strengthening of local partnerships, and the creation of sustainable partnerships promoting community leadership in the development process. It will also seek to provide solutions with regard to the relationship between public institutions and local associations and the role played by these associations in the development process. This issue is crucial in determining the effectiveness of development programmes. It concerns individuals, partnerships and policy makers alike (Armstrong, 1993; Borek et al., 2006).

2. Context for action

The IDC Cuenca and its field of operations are described below. IDC is a non-profit association founded in 1984 with the intention of promoting community development in depressed rural areas within the province of Cuenca, Spain.

2.1. Institutional Context: The IDC Cuenca

The association currently has a staff of 19 workers with a range of profiles covering areas such as business, social and environmental sciences, legal, artistic, administrative and engineering. For over 25 years, it has been working to achieve three main objectives. Its first objective is to upgrade human resources and the structure of society in order to encourage a process of development within a framework of equality that improves quality of life and avoids further depopulation of rural communities. Its second objective is to preserve and enhance the regional identity, rural culture and natural resources. Finally, the association attempts to build on current innovation and quality practices in agriculture and promote entrepreneurship through the incorporation of new techniques and technologies.

These objectives are achieved through a methodology founded on ensuring access to information, improving training opportunities and encouraging the creation of a dynamic body of actors. The IDC seeks to encourage the development of these processes through promotional strategies, a thorough knowledge of the reality of the situation within the region and the formation of links within the population. After 25 years, this methodology has been shown to be capable of responding both to the needs as perceived by the local population and the more specific and urgent needs of the development process,

reconciling both with the initial context of each individual community. Thus, the IDC has established itself as an association for the development of far-reaching growth within the territory and, as discussed below, has spearheaded numerous development processes within the Cuenca province.

2.2. Regional Background: The province of Cuenca

The province of Cuenca is located in the central-eastern portion of the Iberian Peninsula, in the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain. The province covers 17,141 km² (Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE], 2008a) and has 217,363 inhabitants (INE, 2009). The population density of the province is 12.68 inhabitants per km² (INE, 2009), well below the national average of 90.6 inhabitants per km² (INE, 2010) and the European Union average of 113.5 inhabitants per km² (INE, 2010). Of the 238 municipalities within the province, almost 80% (186 municipalities) have a population density of less than 10 inhabitants per km² and 111 municipalities have less than 4 persons per km² (INE, 2008b). Currently, the majority of the province is suffering the effects of depopulation, as demonstrated by the loss of 34,208 inhabitants (13%) since 1970 (INE, 1970), and it is classified as a disadvantaged area at risk of depopulation by the Spanish Agricultural White Paper (Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación [MAPA], 2003).

The area is characterized by a marked trend towards the predominance of agriculture, lack of training and service offerings, communication deficiencies —initially relating to poor road infrastructure and currently linked to deficits in information technology and communications— and social dislocation. IDC Cuenca is working to reverse these trends. In some cases, however, they continue to drive individuals away from the area.

These trends were reflected in Spain's Sustainable Rural Development Program for 2010-2014 (regulated by Law 45/2007), in which three of the five regions of Cuenca are among the rural areas identified as development targets due to low population density, the predominance of agricultural activity, low income levels, the significant extent of its geographic isolation and the difficulties of regional restructuring. The two remaining regions are classified as intermediate rural areas, which are areas that have low to medium population density, diversified employment, low to medium income levels and are geographically remote from major urban centres (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente Rural y Marino [MARM], 2010).

3. Methodology of the social development process

The IDC has promoted Cuenca over the course of the past 25 years, implementing a process of community development in its less populated rural areas and expending much of its effort in revitalizing the network of local associations and creating partnerships. This has primarily occurred in the form of locating and securing the cooperation of agencies and public and private entities in promoting the idea of development through potential synergies between endogenous and exogenous growth in the area (Díaz-Puente et al., 2008). This dynamic process, spearheaded by the IDC, has a number of distinctive features and methods. It is precisely these methods that have allowed this process to be ongoing today after 25 years.

Among these methods is the concept of social involvement as a process (Roseland, 2000; Clark et al., 2007) which begins as a set of successive, coherent phases of development. Another significant feature is the initiation of an established self-identity (Preston and Arthur, 1997; Andolina et al., 2005) which seeks to unite the local population through an appreciation of its region, reinforcing their involvement in the development process once it begins. The third methodological feature of this process is the establishment of links between the association and the local population through which a clear understanding of the initial situation of this population (strengths, weaknesses and needs) is established. Finally, this process places a strong emphasis on the analysis of social involvement and community development experiences in other areas. These can serve as the basis for the design of operational partnership models.

In addition to these methods, the IDC's work in the field of social involvement employs two main tools. The first is encouraging people to get involved in the process and, consequently, in their transformation into agents of change and growth within their own region (Charity, 2005). The second is the accompaniment of this process with technical assistance in resolving all of the existing needs through

training, planning methodologies and tools, and providing an accountability framework for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives (Diaz-Puente et al., 2009).

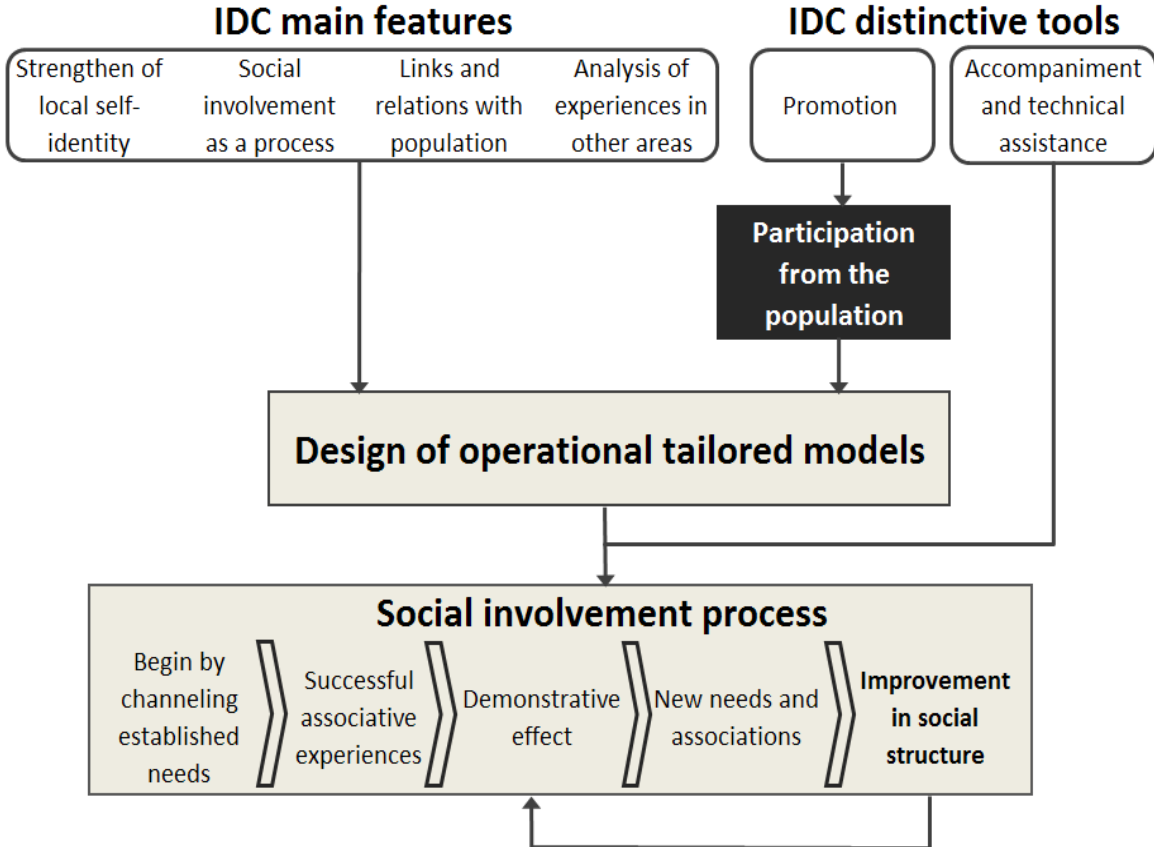
Driven by promotional activities, a series of operational models to guide the structure and functioning of these associations have been designed through the use of previous methodologies and participation from the population. These models should be flexible in order to respond to the situation and the needs identified by the specific local population.

The social development process begins by channeling the established needs of the population through tailored operative models. These early experiences will be deemed successful if they manage to address the needs expressed by the population. To this end, the IDC provides support in the form of technical assistance and collaboration with its local associations. Positive results are used as a source of inspiration and motivation for groups not yet firmly rooted in the social structuring process. This encourages the population to continue its development process. Responding to their needs through partnership projects leads to an improvement in social structure and provides increased stimulation for other groups. Figure 1 outlines the methodology of the social involvement process implemented by the IDC over the course of the past 25 years.

4. Results of the social development process

In this section, we focus on the results of social structuring as conducted by IDC Cuenca over the past 25 years by studying the relevant milestones and the context in which they were achieved. This process demonstrates the evolution of needs giving rise to the different experiences of various associations. The first experiments were intended to satisfy needs the local population identified as a priority, such as meeting places for neighbors or improving television reception in some municipalities. As these needs are met, new, sectoral needs arise, particularly in relation to agriculture. After this comes a final stage in which the associated networks, already loosely bound, become responsible for regional development processes and are supported by the IDC.

Figure 1: Methodology of social involvement process



4.1. Entering the region: the 'cultural caravan'

In 1984, the first initiative for the development of the rural areas of Cuenca was the cultural caravan, established as a result of the agreement between the County and the IDC. This initiative took the form of a series of cultural activities: itinerant theater workshops; traditional games and sports; workshops and local crafts shows; exhibitions showing bibliographical videos; and documentaries about the geography, heritage, cultural and economic history of the province. Music shows and festivals with parades, folk groups and bands completed the caravan in each village. The aim of these cultural caravans was to strengthen the cultural identity of communities and to involve individuals and institutions in the activities and in their design.

Even though they did not fall within the strict limits of social involvement, the cultural caravans achieved the goal of promoting the culture as a unifying element of society. This took place over the course of four years (1984-1987), reaching 93,000 people in 92 villages. As well as being responsible for promoting local culture and directing cultural caravans, the IDC performed important and informative diagnostic studies on each village by gathering data on demographics, the local economy, culture, education, professional activities and the types of associations already in place. These visits took IDC technicians to every village. Thus, the IDC began to keep an inventory of the primary activities in each local area with the potential of establishing a structure for community participation. In addition to gaining local knowledge, the IDC sought to establish links with the population during the caravan's stay. Because of the caravan and the cultural links established during its tour, the IDC became well known among the local population and was more readily accepted as it began related work in community development.

The success of cultural caravans was not solely due to the quality of the activities. A key factor in the methodology used by the IDC in the planning and development of activities was to encourage the local population's involvement, making it a participant in the project and giving it a role in suggesting future initiatives. The IDC sought to ensure that the population would also take on responsibilities for phases of the activities themselves so that they would be motivated and confident in their ability to assume such responsibilities. This had not happened previously. Nevertheless, attention should still be paid to the possible existence of elements within the population that question the suitability of measures aimed at promoting local culture rather than more 'productive' activities. It is essential that these elements also participate in this process of social involvement. For that participation to take place the public awareness programs are needed.

This activity strengthened the sense of identity and affiliation of the local population. As a result of this increased cohesion, the population began to become aware of their situation, as well as the possible future of their region. Above all, however, they became aware of the importance of their participation in any development process that might be initiated in the area. Similarly, the cultural caravan encouraged by the IDC, was also received positively after it arrived in the region. Thus, it is observed that cultural caravans —accompanied by the IDC— constituted the starting point of a process of endogenous development which continues to this day.

4.2. The beginning of association creation - From I to We

In this section we look at four related examples of initiating the process of social construction that occurred between 1985 and 1990.

4.2.1. The first partnership experience

Thanks to the progressive social cohesion generated in the wake of the cultural caravans, the time was right to begin implementing the principles and tools of community development and to encourage the development of new interests and perspectives within the population. A sufficient level of concern to intervene in the interest of improving their living conditions arose among some parts of the population.

This collective will was channeled by the IDC through an innovative partnership model: Rural Activity Centres (Centros de Animación Rural, CEAR). CEARs were local family associations representing all age groups within the population and therefore almost all of the area's interests. These groups managed to raise —for the first time— some of the issues affecting the region's various social groups. They also developed some proposals for steps that could be taken to develop local life. CEARs, therefore, became the structure for social participation and grew to be of great value and importance within the territory. They also offered the benefit of integrating groups traditionally which were traditionally displaced within

society, such as the retired or the unemployed. Thus, CEARs encouraged these groups to take on key roles in the development of their region. Consequently, these types of partnerships made considerable contributions to initiating the development process in the towns and villages where they were established.

The work done by CEARs increased the focus on promoting training for employment and on promoting business associations. For its part, the IDC supported this revitalization process by providing technical guidance and training to those responsible for the CEARs in order to equip the CEARs teams with the skills and tools which would allow these associations to develop.

The scope of the CEAR was significant locally, but also nationally because the 32 Cuenca CEARs joined the National Union of Rural Life Centres. This became a federation of over 200 CEARs around the country that were pursuing the promotion of development in rural areas. In addition to this, the methodological framework applied in the CEARs also extended to urban areas, with the establishment of a local entertainment center in one of the newly created districts in the city of Cuenca. This group came to have a very significant role in strengthening the social and cultural life of a neighborhood where spaces and activities were needed to promote social cohesion and the pursuit of common interests.

This partnership experience also encouraged increased public confidence, both in the communities themselves and in the IDC. However, despite the significant contribution of CEARs the area's development, its innovative character also precipitated the demise of these associations. The administrative context of 1985—the time when the CEARs were created—restricted access to any form of government grant to trade associations. The problem with financial upkeep of the CEARs—because of their plural nature—was a part of legislation. This lack of funding prompted the demise of these groups, although some of them were able to survive and become partnerships of various kinds.

This example highlights the importance of adaptability and innovation in generating responses tailored to the needs of the population, such as CEARs. Also noteworthy, however, is the importance of the ability of such innovative groups to respond to their situations within the context of the process. This is essential so that partnerships can both develop and endure. In this case it was observed that the discrepancy between the administrative situation and the principles of this type of association resulted in its disappearance, in spite of the fact that it played such a valuable role in the development of the region.

4.2.2. The inclusion of all

As mentioned above, there are numerous studies documenting the failure of social inclusion development programmes with regard to certain social groups within the process (Kovach, 2000; Yarwood, 2002; Considine, 2003; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). Therefore, it is important to note that the social development process used by the IDC (which began long before these studies) was not intended solely for those groups with the clear potential to lead community development, but also sought to respond to all of the area's needs. Examples of this important aspect are the case of CEARs (as analyzed above), and the campaign for seniors' clubs.

These campaigns were older cultural events dedicated to the greatest of all peoples, proposed by the IDC and supported by the Provincial Council, in response to the region's aging population. Upon its completion, the IDC held numerous meetings with older people to learn their customs in order to design activities that would encourage their participation and their subsequent involvement in the development of such activities. Furthermore, following the principles of community development, the IDC encouraged other sectors of the population to become involved in the development of these activities, thus achieving a climate of mutual and multi-generational exchange.

Elderly people gained confidence in their own abilities and a large number of the elderly wanted to continue to contribute to revitalizing their local areas. Thus, the Cuenca IDC led to the creation of an innovative partnership structure: Clubs for the Elderly. This partnership structure was a new space for participation and representation for a group which had traditionally been regarded as a passive agent of community life. Thus, older people became active and valuable agents of development. An example of this is the role that these people played in the formation of policies to assist the elderly, of which they had previously been mere recipients. This supports the findings of recent research on the role of older people in development processes, which suggests the existence of a substantial contribution by this group to the welfare of the community as a whole (Walshk and O'Shea, 2008).

4.2.3. Emergence of sectoral needs

As a result of the efforts of the IDC and local populations in relation to CEARs, this work continued to look deeper into the needs of the area. A new concern emerged, which was applicable to other territories as well: the situation of farming, which employed a large percentage of workers whose numbers were gradually diminishing despite the aid they received.

In this context, the IDC promoted the creation of a partnership structure composed of farmers and their families. This partnership structure, the Agricultural Development Enterprise Group (Grupo de Investigación y Desarrollo Agrario, GIDA), addressed both the specific problems affecting farmers' holdings and the possible solutions to their overall problems.

The operational structure of the GIDA was characterized by a small number of participants in each group (between 15 and 20). Each autonomous group worked within the framework of a defined work plan, dividing fixed and possible responsibilities among its members and establishing a roadmap for group sessions.

Based on the GIDA, a deep modernization of agricultural structures was carried out by promoting the use of new cultivation techniques (soilless culture, alternative crops, organic farming, etc.) and improving training for farmers, in growing techniques and project management skills. This structure allowed the farmers themselves, for the first time, to take on the role of agents of their own development. The new structure allowed them to be more aware of their situation and, above all, of the opportunities for upgrading the primary sector through working partnerships and community development approaches.

Technical support and promotional work provided by the IDC led to the consolidation of three GIDAs, comprised of nearly 60 professionals. The main lines of action were: (a) to promote active participation by farmers in the tasks of discussion and planning; (b) to introduce farmers to case studies of successful projects carried out in other rural areas of the European Union in order to provide new ideas and motivation for participants; (c) to establish, in conjunction with farmers, the main training needs and coordinate the programmes and methodologies to meet them; (d) to visit with farmers with success stories applicable to the region; (e) to provide the appropriate technical assistance to farmers for planning and implementation of projects, and; (f) to assist farmers in finding and locating additional sources of help.

The power of associations supported by the IDC can be seen from the example of the GIDAs. They were instrumental in designing an associative model that adapted to the situation; providing support and technical assistance to the association; and helping the farmers themselves to become the key actors in the development of agriculture and its territory.

4.2.4. Functional citizens' groups responsible for their own development

The work done by GIDAs enabled constituents to trust their own abilities. This experience served as an example to other areas of the population where the IDC boosted, through its encouragement, its commitment to community development by using an operational structure and activities similar to those of GIDA: Local Development Committees (Comisiones Locales de Desarrollo, CLDs).

These associations were a local structure open to those interested in community development planning. Their operating model, supported by the IDC, was based on participation and lifelong learning (as well as GIDA). The goals were established by the CLD study and analysis of the local situation. They included: assessing and prioritizing needs; uncovering the deepest aspirations of the population; and determining, ultimately, the potential actions or initiatives to be undertaken. Therefore, CLDs were an effective starting point that gave people a solid development framework for leading the process of community development planning.

In this context, the IDC promoted the formation of 12 CLDs which provided technical assistance in the defining small projects and finding methods of support and funding for their implementation. Examples of these projects are the study for the installation of a nursery which would facilitate the incorporation of women into the workplace, and an organization where several farmers' cooperatives would provide all citizens with trailers to improve the profitability of their holdings. The latter is an outstanding example of the prioritisation of the needs felt by the population in this process, as this project was carried out despite the lack of basic infrastructure in the municipality.

Thus, CLDs became the real actors of development at the local level and, as such, assumed leadership responsibilities by promoting new processes and improving the living conditions of those in the region.

4.3. Beyond the local region and confirmation of the LEADER program

However, the CLDs had a character that limited the territorial nature which initiatives could take, and, thus, impeded the progress of the development process. Therefore, the IDC initiated the establishment of contacts and collaborations between the CLD groups and other areas in order to share experiences and concerns and to explore the possibility of establishing a new partnership structure capable of continuing the development process beyond the local level. The IDC also carried out a process that reinforced the stakeholders' awareness of the importance of each one of them in the success of new development processes. It also reinforced that the area's development was a priority and a powerful link between stakeholders.

Thus, in 1991, the Association for the Integral Development of the Alcarria Conquense (Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de la Alcarria Conquense, ADINAC) was established as a structure to promote participation and action by local authorities to take the development process forward. Its 104 members included institutions, public and private actors from the region and natural and legal persons. This group provided the association with a thorough representation of the territory.

In parallel with this process, the European Commission began designing a new strategy for rural development in 1990 that was based on the promotion of local potential: the LEADER program. The origin and development of this initiative has been described in detail (Barke and Newton 1995; Moseley 1995; Cazorla, De los Ríos, and Díaz-Puente 2005). The IDC carried out continuous monitoring of all matters relating to the program through the Commission Briefing Papers. ADINAC used this information to analyze the possibility for participation by the association in this new community initiative. For this, the IDC provided technical assistance to the association in the form of an analysis of the needs and potential in the region and an analysis and proposal for strategic lines of intervention.

Thus, on July 1, 1991 the LEADER Programme promoted by ADINAC was approved. This was a moment of particular significance in the process being analyzed in this article because an association born within the region had become a player in a new community development process. This process had a scope far superior to previous examples—it affected 8751 people in 1180 km²— and managed to boost the economy and society through the development of new activities (rural tourism) and the creation of 93 new jobs. It also opened new avenues for the incorporation of women and youth in the workplace. Furthermore, the approval of this project confirmed all of the efforts and work carried out seven years earlier when the IDC used the process for social involvement and community development in the region.

At this time, the performance of the IDC was adapted to the needs of the management of the ADINAC LEADER Programme. In particular, the IDC was focused on strengthening the organizational capacity of the group; meeting their training needs for both management of the initiative and sectoral issues; supporting the spread of the program to encourage participation of the population; and meeting the needs specific actors in relation to the programme, including information on new investment sectors, specific training and planning support for their projects.

4.4. Consolidation of the process and its extension into other regions

Coinciding with the closure of the LEADER Programme in 1995, the European Commission launched the second round of the community initiative: LEADER II. The good results obtained through the implementation of the LEADER Initiative in the territory and the consolidation of ADINAC encouraged forecasts for the next call to be optimistic. The development process, which had just started, needed to continue to consolidate.

4.4.1. Continuity of the process in danger

In this context, the IDC continued to provide technical assistance to ADINAC. It highlighted two substantial amendments to be included in the recommendations for the LEADER II initiative and provided an opportunity for improvement and consolidation of the development process. First, it was expanded and the field of operations was restructured from 25 to 34 municipalities. These changes allowed a critical mass of proposed projects with more prospects and also made it possible to extend the potential positive

effects of the program to a larger population. ADINAC evolved into a new partnership structure based solely on the incorporation of legal persons, which increased the association's representative power. Thus, in April 1994 the new Association Center for Rural Development of Alcarria Conquense (Centro de Desarrollo Rural de la Alcarria Conquense, CEDER) was formed in partnership with ADINAC.

Following this evolutionary process, and with assistance from the IDC, the nomination submitted by the CEDER to LEADER II programme was dismissed, opening a period of confusion and concern within the group and the region due to the impossibility of continuing the process of development. In this context, during this year-long situation, the work of the IDC was very important in maintaining the motivation and cohesion of the association and of the whole population. The IDC also worked on finding new alternative resources for the maintenance of existing development processes initiated within the territory. A new call—published this time by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of Spain—was addressed to associations set up within the framework of the LEADER initiative, which had not been able to access the second call. It was the Operational Programme for Economic Diversification in Rural Areas (Programa Operativo de Diversificación Económica de las Zonas Rurales, PRODER) that retained the essential aspects of participatory development and endogenous growth promoted by the LEADER community initiative.

4.4.2. The consolidation process

Once the IDC informed CEDER about the principles of the new call it began technical assistance work to adapt the development programme of the LEADER II call to the new call (PRODER). A significant change was to take this opportunity to expand the territory—which had been increased to 42 cities—and provide social and spatial clarity to enable new development processes. Thus, in the second half of 1997 the association received approval of its proposal.

In developing this new program, the IDC incorporated the association's technical assistance and focused primarily on a program to support the implementation and management of projects and the planning, design and implementation of training programmes for both the public and members of the board of the association.

The dynamics of work established in 1997 remain valid today. The work of CEDER, with technical assistance from the IDC (in the many facets that have been observed), has managed to continue the development process which began with the LEADER community initiative and its extension to a wider area: 42 municipalities, 2030 km² and 10,313 residents.

4.4.3. Extension into other areas

The work of providing technical assistance to the IDC CEDER also extended to other associations whose applications—as in the case of CEDER—had not been accepted in the LEADER II programme. This was the case for two associations in other areas of the province of Cuenca (ADIMMAC and SEDECUCE).

Thus, the IDC Cuenca supported a process of planning and joint work between the two associations in order to explore the possibilities of being part of the PRODER programme. This resulted in the union of the two associations (and their target regions) under a single association: the Association for the Development of Sierra Media and Mancha Alta Conquense (ADESIMAN), which had over 700 members. One of them was the IDC Cuenca itself, which took over management of a technical assistance programme based on the motivation and cohesion of group members and on the planning and design work of the new development programme, approved under the PRODER programme.

Thus, the IDC Cuenca, through technical assistance, helped to revitalize two major associations in the region which were at a critical point following the refusal of the LEADER II scheme. As the result of this development a new partnership was set up in the region to carry on the development process which began with the first phase of the LEADER programme.

4.5. Overall results of the process

To conclude this section, we have some of the most significant global figures on the achievements of this social involvement process so far. It has spanned more than 25 years and across three rural development groups and brought together 93 municipalities (39% of all municipalities in the province); 15 cooperatives; five business associations; seven professional associations related to primary, secondary and tertiary industry; and over 100 local associations. It created the Protected Designation of Origin "Aceite de la

Alcarria," which covers 137 municipalities in the provinces of Cuenca and Guadalajara; two cooperatives with more than 500 members; and three companies. It also supported the establishment of 16 senior clubs in 16 areas of the province. These organisations bring together over 1,200 seniors citizens.

5. Conclusions

Social development is one of the strongest guarantees for the progression of any development program (Unión Nacional de Centros de Animación Rural [UNCEAR], 1991) and is particularly important in areas with low population density. It is impossible to know the precise effects of this social development process, accompanied by the IDC Cuenca, on the area's development. However, based on experience and the results that have been analyzed, the process has been an overall success

The process begins by encouraging people, in this case through the endogenous culture, and prompting them to unite because of their appreciation of the region and their interest in improving their living conditions. This methodological factor —the start of the cultural caravan— has facilitated the entry of the IDC into the region in a way which is close to the population. The cooperative work created ties and mutual understanding between the IDC and local population, and established the IDC as a valued contributor to the population within the community development process.

The elements that act as stimuli are usually outside the community. In addition to culture, there are other factors such as perceived threats to their interests (Armstrong, 1993), the positive stimulus of an external agent (Pettit, 1925) or the demonstration effect. The demonstration effect —when a group is organized and plunged into the development process and becomes a stimulus for other groups in the territory— is deeply rooted in rural areas and is essential in the social involvement process.

Another important methodological aspect is to have a defined working philosophy and the ability to adapt to the various initiatives that will be carried out. This can be seen throughout the work of the IDC although the cultural caravan is a prime example of something that was not proposed directly by the IDC Cuenca, but rather the provincial council under agreement with the IDC. However, the IDC learned to apply their principles to the activities in order to achieve the results shown above.

However, the community must have a full sense of ownership over the development process (Armstrong, 1993). Therefore, it is necessary that the community is involved in determining those who actually require immediate help, rather than relying on the perspective of an external agent that will identify those who appear most urgent. Addressing the needs felt by the population unites individuals in achieving these goals. Actions to address needs not generating consensus results in division between those who agree and those who do not. Shared experiences adapted to the prioritised needs of the population should be based on flexible models which can provide innovative responses to those needs within their own specific context. In addition to the experience of the IDC Cuenca, it is clear that the response to these perceived needs will reveal new ones which encourage the continuation of the community development process (Rezsohazy, 1988).

Finally, the IDC's technical assistance and aid for associations emerging in the territory is of crucial importance. One aspect of this assistance targets the achievement, through partnerships, of plans that will provide content for the process and act as a force for greater cohesion among its members. Ongoing educational programmes, designed to strengthen awareness of the local situation and provide the population with new skills that promote social participation and develop leaders for the new development processes, are also crucial in this regard.

The process of social structuring encouraged by the Cuenca IDC has followed a specific guideline: associations arise as a consequence of the desire and will of their members to contribute to the achievement of certain objectives within their community. In this context, the role of the IDC is to encourage and facilitate this process through its tools and methodological characteristics. The role of this process of social activism is to promote social structure and enable people to address various aspects of their development according to their own needs (Armstrong, 1993). This development becomes sustainable when the associations generate it themselves by forming new partnerships that continue to deepen through increased structuring of their society and additional improvements in the quality of life of their region's population.

6. Bibliography

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Contact details (For further information, please contact)

Dr. José María Díaz-Puente

Phone: +34913365838

E-mail : jm.diazpuente@upm.es

URL : <http://ruraldevelopment.es/>