European Network for Rural Development

RURAL INSPIRATION AWARDS NOMINEE

SPAIN

Rural revitalisation

Rural coworking spaces create opportunities for cooperation and innovation in rural areas while helping to attract new professional to settle in the countryside.

Summary

The cooperation project 'Cowocat_Rural' aims to boost the creation of employment and economic activity in rural areas and to promote the values of coworking and teleworking in the participating territories. Its concept is based on the need to promote entrepreneurship through the use of information and communication technologies.

The project tries to transfer the pioneering experience of coworking to rural areas in Catalonia, Spain. 'Cowocat_Rural' works to attract young skilled professionals to rural areas and to tackle outmigration. It has developed a methodology for setting up and supporting a network of coworking spaces and it advocates coworking among professional and local actors who might be interested in joining the network by creating their own new coworking spaces. The project promoter is the LAG Consorci Intercomarcal d'Iniciatives Socioeconòmiques.

CC Rural

COWOCAT RURAL

Location
LAG Consorci Intercomarcal d'Iniciatives Socioeconòmiques, Ribera d'Ebre – Terra Alta.

Programming period
2014 – 2020

Priority
P6 – Social inclusion & local development

Measure
M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)
Total budget 319 852
EAFRD 139 775
National/Regional 180 077

Project duration
2014 – 2021

Project promoter
Consorci Intercomarcal d'Iniciatives Socioeconòmiques

Contact
info@cowocatrural.cat

Website
www.cowocatrural.cat

Results

Eighteen spaces and more than 130 professional coworkers are part of the network.

twelve networking meetings have been organised among rural coworkers, with more than 300 attendees.

Organised a training program in two institutes, to promote the coworking concept among its students.

Promoted a rural coworking space in a University (URV -Tortosa).

Created the Rural&Go programme, this structured 10 tour packages that combine work and holidays, for the discovery of rural territories and coworking spaces.

Lessons & Recommendations

❑ Coworking in rural areas is an innovative concept that can potentially do a lot to encourage and enable people to live and work in rural areas.

❑ Coworking spaces depend on high-speed broadband and other basic services that must be made available in the area.

❑ The existence of motivated professionals is more important than just having an available space.

❑ Even small successes which enable individuals and families to spend more time in a rural area can have a positive impact on the local economy.

❑ It would be useful to network and exchange with similar initiatives in other European rural areas to discuss common challenges and solutions and look for entrepreneurial opportunities.

Funded by the European Commission

Context

Coworking is a way of working that allows independent professionals, entrepreneurs and SMEs from different sectors to share the same physical and virtual work space. In the city of Barcelona, coworking spaces are increasingly popular and the network Cowocat Association was put in place to connect them.

The project promoters thought that rural coworking spaces could stimulate economic activity and help maintain the population in rural areas of Spain where out-migration is a real problem. This new way of working would be a great opportunity for professionals who want to work in a collaborative space without needing to move away from a rural environment.

Objectives

The general objectives of the project focus on:

- Championing coworking, supported by ICT, as a new way of working in rural areas.
- Promoting teleworking and coworking among entrepreneurs in rural territories.
- Creating awareness and synergies between rural territories through coworking.
- Attracting talent and new populations to rural areas.

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Activities

'Cowocat_Rural' is implementing a series of actions organised as follows:

Set up a network of coworking and professional spaces and create synergies among them

- Create a database for identifying and connecting coworkers and rural professionals who are part of the coworking ecosystem in the Catalan rural areas.
- Support existing coworking spaces, public or private, in the participating territories.
- Design a digital platform to encourage the networking of coworkers and rural coworking spaces.

- Organise networking meetings among rural coworkers, in which ideas for new projects and collaborative work are fostered, building on the complementarity of the professional skills of participants.
- Promote workshops to encourage operators of coworking spaces to jointly define new actions and lines of work to be developed in the project.

Support the creation of coworking spaces in rural areas

- Prepare a methodological guide for the creation of new coworking spaces in the rural environment.
- Provide advice on rural coworking and the creation of new spaces. 'Cowocat_Rural' offers a technical assistance service (with home visits or through meetings via Skype), aimed at supporting people or organisations who are interested in coworking and/or in creating a coworking space in Catalan rural areas.

Advocate for coworking in knowledge and innovation environments

The project includes the development of a series of programmes and actions to promote coworking among different groups, such as young people or women. These include:

- A programme to promote coworking in universities.
- A pilot programme to encourage coworking among high school students.
- A conference to promote coworking among rural entrepreneurs.

Communication activities to promote coworking and the Catalan coworking infrastructure

The 'Cowocat_Rural' website and social networks are used to promote the project. Other communication actions include:

- Developing a 'Coworking Rural Visa' (called RuralPass) that promotes and facilitates the mobility of professionals between the rural coworking spaces and between these rural spaces and urban ones.
- Providing a professional and specialised coworking advisory service in each of the coworking spaces of the network.
- Moreover, the project aims to open up to other territories, and transfer the pioneering initiative of the Catalan rural coworking ecosystem through inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects.

Main Results

Direct benefits :

- More than 18 spaces and 130 professional coworkers are part of the network.

- Twelve networking meetings have been organised among rural coworkers, with more than 300 attendees.

- Offered mentoring and consulting sessions to existing coworking spaces as well as new ones.

- Created the Rural&Go programme, that had 10 structured tour packages that combine work and holidays, for the discovery of rural territories and coworking spaces.

- Created the RuralPass programme, to promote and facilitate the mobility of coworkers, between the spaces located in the rural areas of Catalonia and with urban spaces.

- Organised a training programme in two institutes to promote the coworking concept among its students.

- Promoted a rural coworking space in a University (URV -Tortosa).

- Participated in different discussion forums on coworking, innovation and entrepreneurship such as: Coworking Spain, Coworking Day BCN, BIZ Barcelona, Innova Fair and 'Foro de Empleo' of the URV Terres de l'Ebre, etc.

- The project has been promoted in national and international publications as an example of good practice.

- Organised the 'Catalunya Coworking Day', offering training for 50 participants and the opportunity to exchange experiences with others.

Networking value:

Cowocat_Rural was born with the will to be enduring and sustainable over time.

That's why it took advantage of the experience and know-how of various agents. Among them, the Coworking Association of Catalonia (called Cowocat) was one of the most important and with whom collaboration is constant.

Collaborated with local administrations (entrepreneurship services, youth, etc.), universities, secondary schools, and professional associations.

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Since its creation, the objective of Cowocat_Rural was the generation of a 'network of networks' (a big community of small local coworking communities, comprising spaces and their coworkers). These local networks (coinciding with the LAG area) were grouped under the leadership of an agent in charge of boosting the territory.

Transferability:

The project participates in a transnational LEADER cooperation project called 'CoLabora' with LAGs from France, Germany, Latvia and Wales (2018-2020). The transferability of this initiative has therefore already been established and the Cowocat_rural methodology will be shared with the European partners.

Synergies with other EU policies:

The project has clear synergies with the EU action for Smart Villages as well as 'Broadband Europe': employment, digital solutions, etc.

"Rural coworking has allowed me to increase my quality of life, improving my work-family conciliation and giving me more time for myself, while also allowing me to establish new collaborations with my coworking colleagues"

Mª Pilar Andres Munté, Coworker

Additional sources of information

Twitter: @cowocatrural / #cowocatrural

*This project has been categorised under 'Rural Revitalisation' by the nominating National Rural Network