



Animation, networking, cooperation

LEADER case study A Smart approach to cultural and natural heritage improvement

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The project *Gratitud Pallars* impresses by its integrated and innovative character in support of landscape conservation, climate change mitigation and smart sustainable tourism development.

The first discussions about improving the valorisation of the natural and cultural heritage in the rural area of Lleida, in Catalunya, started in 2017 when the local Association 'Marques de Pastor' and the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) Pirineu Occidental joined efforts in creating an initiative that would increase the active engagement of stakeholders for the long term.

Essentially, *Gratitud Pallars* aims to improve the relationship between humans and nature through partnership, volunteering and the use of new fundraising tools.

The LEADER approach (area-based, community-led, integrated, partnership action) is integral to the project. Its success demonstrates that cross-sector cooperation between public bodies, businesses, landowners, the local population and visitors is crucially important to address global issues successfully at the local level.

The main project activities include the conservation of nature trails and dry-stone walls, the creation of ecological micro-reserves, the restoration of heritage sites, workshops and educational activities. All activities seek to raise the appreciation of nature and to improve the environmental quality and biodiversity of the area.

The project website (<https://www.gratitudpallars.cat>) is very user-friendly and clear. It informs that each year since 2014 a trail conservation project is organised and identifies the forthcoming initiatives until 2027. Volunteer weeks are promoted whereby the lead partner Associació Marques de Pastor (AMP) also organises a special accommodation offer for visiting volunteers.

With the online 'Calculator' everybody can offset his or her carbon footprint and thereby directly sponsor local micro-reserves in support of increasing biodiversity in the area. The progress of the financial contributions is attractively visualised for each cause.

The website is jointly managed by AMP and the LAG Consorci LEADER Pirineu Occidental. All funds raised through the website directly support the project activities. The plan is to upload new good causes promoted by other local actors in future.

Gratitud Pallars effectively integrates environmental and nature conservation, green tourism and healthy activities (nature therapy, and in one micro-reserve yoga and Tai Chi classes). The focus on recognising the value of the environment is clear and smartly linked with the various crowd-funding tools.



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To achieve this, the technical aspects of the project such as the design of the website, crowdfunding tools, and CO₂ off-set calculator required extensive preparatory and ongoing refinement work. Intensive local networking raises awareness and participation in the project, including the design of landowner stewardship agreements for the micro-reserves that create a sense of ownership, local control and responsibility.

Current plans seek to expand the project to cover additional geographic locations in the area and to intensify the engagement with tourist services. It is clear that this type of project requires ongoing promotion and networking at local, national and European levels. Building the relevant capacity of the local actors is thereby key to ensuring its long-term duration. As a strategic cooperation project, the LAG receives the funds for developing the *Gratitud Pallars*, whereby LAG staff can actively support AMP in the project implementation.

Funding is applied for annually. Over the past three years, the total costs of the project were €83 334, including 90% LEADER (43% EAFRD, 57% DARP Regional contribution) and 10% Private Funds (AMP).

The project methodology is transferrable. A manual of best practice was produced in year one and will be updated over the next months.

Further information: <https://www.gratitudpallars.cat>

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