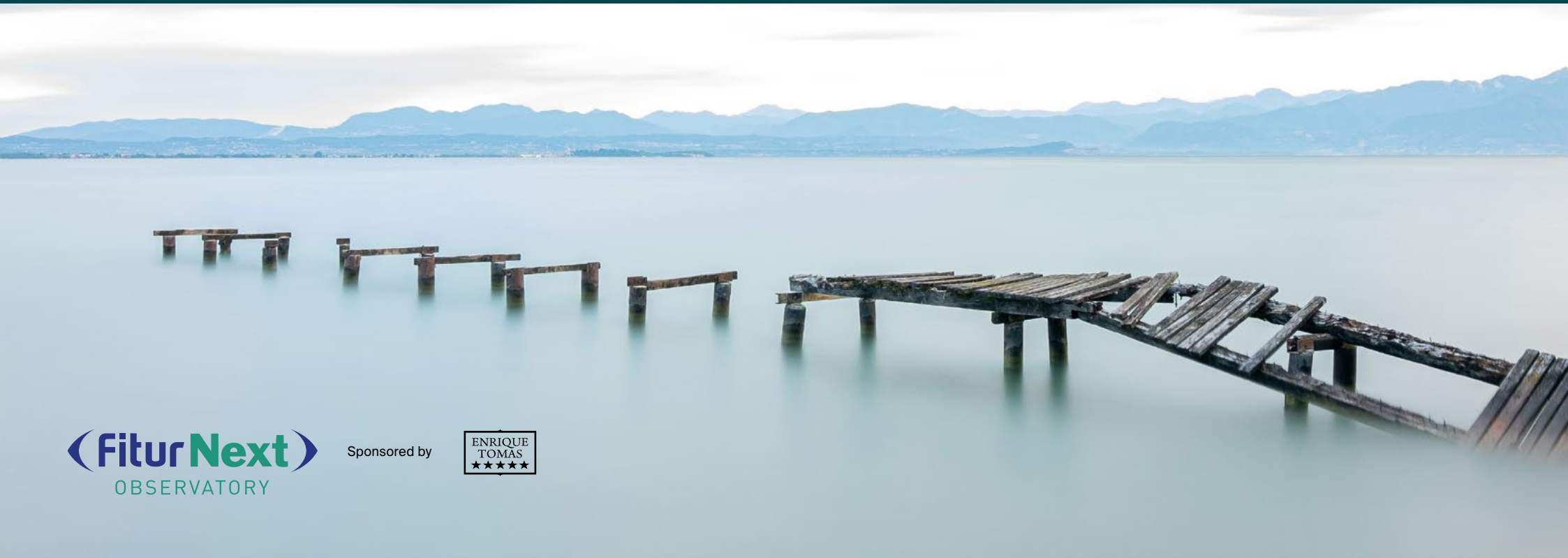
FITURNEXT REPORT 2024

Towards territorial revitalisation through tourism.



FiturNext OBSERVATORY

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Team and collaborators

FITURNEXT TEAM

Javier Creus
Founder Ideas for Change

Francisco Rodríguez
Coordination, research and FiturNext programme. Tourism manager Ideas for Change

Sandra Campos
Research. Consultant at Ideas for Change

Giovanni Maccani
Research. Research Coordinator Ideas for Change.

Elsa Boloix
Communication and press FiturNext. Communication Ideas for Change

Francisca García
Design FiturNext. Design and Art Direction Ideas for Change

ADVISORY BOARD

Adela Moreda
Tourism Lead Specialist at the Inter American Development Bank (IDB)

Alicia Montalvo
Climate Action and Positive Biodiversity Manager at CAF

Cristina Figueroa
Lecturer at the Rey Juan Carlos University

Concha Foronda
Professor at the University of Seville and Director of the Chair of Intelligent Tourism

Daniela Freund
Lecturer and researcher at IQS University

Daniela Moreno
Consultant and researcher specialising in gender and tourism

Peter Rømer Hansen
Strategic Advisor and Founder of Grupo Nao

Santiago Quiroga
Director of Quality and CSR at IFEMA

AUTHORS OF THIS REPORT

Francisco Rodríguez
Sandra Campos

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Prologue

For Enrique Tomás, sponsoring the FiturNext Observatory was a commitment that this year was more fitting than ever, as the Observatory's objectives - to promote good tourism practices in terms of sustainability and this year focused on depopulation and territorial revitalisation - were fully aligned with the new project that the company presented during the fair: País Jamón Tour.

"País Jamón Tour" was created with the aim of revolutionising the world of ham and becoming a country initiative that places the productin its rightful place. The proposal is an expedition through gastronomy, flamenco, dehesa and tradition, creating a unique tourist experience that has been called **"Belloturismo" Ibérico** by Enrique Tomás.

País Jamón Tour is an innovative proposal, which focuses on ham as the common denominator, and which aims to offer a unique experience that **enhances the richness of Spanish culture.** A journey to the origin of an ancient and avant-garde culture, the art of making the most special gastronomic product that exists: ham.

This project also stands out for its commitment to sustainability, a value that links it even more with FiturNext, and aims to promote the beauty of the dehesas of our country, as well as the rural landscapes, the sustainability of its companies, the art rooted in gastronomy and the millenary work around Spanish gastronomy.

In addition, according to Enrique Tomás, *"País Jamón Tour could not be more sustainable... because true sustainability is as simple as giving value to what already exists, and helping to ensure that this value is recognised. We want to help those rural areas that suffer from depopulation, and that the Fiturnext Observatory wants to highlight in order to combat this and other problems. And we are convinced that by taking people to the origin and creating an experience, with the "lever" of ham as the axis, we can help to revitalise the economy of these areas. We just need to show what we already have, because we are a country with many wonderful areas that have yet to be discovered by the public".*

The collaboration between Fiturnext and Enrique Tomás has therefore been a success, making it clear that the participation of companies with the objectives set by the Observatory for 2024 not only makes a lot of sense if interests, objectives and motivation are aligned, but also has enormous possibilities of success when analysing the impact and interest generated.

The next step will be to enjoy the experience and to verify that good tourism practices in terms of sustainability and commitment to areas suffering from depopulation will not only help to revitalise the territory, but also to enrich the tourism offer with innovative products that attract more and more travellers.

Introduction

With this report we have tried to offer a vision that shows some outstanding aspects of depopulation. It should be taken into consideration, as will be seen throughout the text, that it is a very heterogeneous phenomenon, with a global scope and, therefore, with many variables that influence its causes, developments and impacts.

Depopulation is a demographic and territorial phenomenon that consists of a decrease in the number of inhabitants of a territory in relation to a previous period of time. This phenomenon can have different causes: it can be the result of a negative vegetative growth (more deaths than births), of a negative migratory balance (the emigration rate of the territory is higher than the immigration rate) or of both causes simultaneously[1].

The combination of both variables at different scales, together with the factors that promote them, cause **the phenomenon of depopulation to develop differently and uniquely in each territory.** We could say that depopulation is as diverse as each of the territories that suffer it. However, some of the general causes of the phenomenon are common, as will be seen in the following sections.

Among the aspects that most stimulate the depopulation process are historical and economic, social and cultural, climatic and geographical factors. These factors cause, among other effects: **a shortage of employment or educational opportunities, a reduced supply of housing and basic services, or the adoption of lifestyles that, compared to much more populated urban centers, can create a feeling of less abundance or well-being. All of this can lead to the generation of dangerous demographic dynamics.** Young people leave in search of better opportunities, leaving geographic spaces empty of young people and adults, a population located on the reproductive fringe that weakens the birth rate and gradually ages the territories[2].

This territorial imbalance can occur on different scales: either from rural areas to the urban environment, mainly to provincial capitals, or to large cities, causing an increase in inequalities and difficult difficulties for territorial cohesion.

This is, moreover, a repetitive process that feeds back on itself: the lack of sufficient economic activity and basic services in rural areas, together with the supply of employment and opportunities in the cities, generates massive emigration to urban centres. This leads to the loss of human capital in the areas of origin, again influencing the supply of services and jobs, as economic activity is further reduced[3].

This depopulation and concentration in cities causes the so-called *"demotanasia"*, understood as the slow and silent disappearance of the population of a territory that emigrates and leaves the area without generational replacement[4].

As if all this were not enough, the **consequences** of this process of abandonment of territories go beyond the **social, cultural or economic ones.** It also accentuates the degradation of landscapes and terrestrial ecosystems, acidifying and desertifying territories, thus leaving the ideal scenario for the spread of forest fires[5].

For all these reasons, one of the purposes of this report is to **homogenise the conceptualization of this phenomenon under the approach of tourism as a vehicle of positive impact, as well as to influence those key lines of action that promote the demographic revitalization of the territories:** actions oriented towards the social, labour and economic spheres, as well as towards the implementation of basic services and infrastructures.

PART I

FiturNext, impact and replicability

FiturNext 2023 edition summary

In the 2023 edition, more than two hundred international initiatives were analyzed under the challenge *"how tourism can contribute to the regeneration of the natural environment"*. Twelve finalists were selected from all of them and three winning initiatives were subsequently awarded: Iberostar Group, Green Papper Travel and Plogging Tour.

The evolution of the Iberostar Group, which has managed to increase the positive impact of its initiative over the last year, will be presented later on. The twelve finalist best practices showed a high degree of positive impact on the territories where they were developed, as well as a high rate of replicability. The high degree of maturity and consolidation of the three winning initiatives stood out, accentuating their repercussions on the natural environment thanks to the impact analysis on the ecosystems where they were developed.

Regarding the degree of contribution to the challenge of regeneration of the natural environment, we verified the level of contribution through direct interviews with each of the twelve finalists, while analyzing the documentation and information provided on the level of impact on the environment in its link to the tourism sector. The study included a qualitative dimension, where we analyzed the improvements in the quality of ecosystems and the role of residents and visitors in such progress, as well as a quantitative dimension, trying to count the effective improvements carried out by each one of them. To this end, and as in previous editions, an ad hoc impact barometer was designed, with the aim of homogeneously analyzing the degree of impact of the different practices. This barometer consisted of specific indicators for each of the categories, as well as cross-cutting indicators that measure the positive impact at a general level.

After this, the process followed the same procedure as in previous editions. The FiturNext Advisory Board was in charge of re-evaluating each of the finalists, with the purpose of obtaining an external view and revalidating, if necessary, the data obtained. In this edition, in addition, there have been changes in the configuration of the Advisory Board with the entry of a professional from the environmental field to replace an academic who had been part of it since its inception. The purpose of these changes is none other than to **adapt and renew the board of experts and professionals in order to broaden the Observatory's vision and help it grow and remain at the forefront of the tourism industry.**

For its part, the 2023 report continued to focus on **replicability, a concept that has been part of the Observatory's DNA for several years now.** Replicability, understood as a lever for exponential growth, together with the generation of synergies between practices with a positive impact, led to projects such as Starlight Iberá, where the capacity of tourism to increase the quality of life in remote and depressed areas was highlighted.

Finally, it is important to highlight the large number of professional and general visitors throughout the Fair, as well as the generation of contact networks and synergies among the attendees. Likewise, and once again, the repercussion in the media and the press stimulated the visibility of the Observatory and its recognition as a driving agent of a sustainable tourism sector with a social, economic and environmentally positive impact.

FiturNext 2023 Program

Once again this year, the FiturNext Observatory had a stand at FITUR, a space where professionals, experts and tourism organizations such as Turespaña, Seguittur and the World Tourism Organization gathered, as well as winning and finalist initiatives from the 2023 and previous editions. The various roundtables and keynotes were recorded and broadcast via the FITUR Live Connect platform. Among the numerous dialogues held, the following stood out:

JAVIER CREUS

Founder of Ideas for Change

Moderated the table ***"From corporate social responsibility to sectoral social responsibility"***, which included the participation of Miwi Clavera, General Director of the Spanish Association of Sustainability Managers (DIRSE), Antonia del Toro, CSR Director of the Piñero Group and Óscar Rueda, Director of the Presidency of CAF, Development Bank of Latin America. The conversation highlighted the **importance of the union between companies to share and face current and future challenges, seeking solutions together, as well as the potential of collaboration between companies and sectors**, which can improve the world from movements of awareness and awareness of sustainability.

ALICIA MONTALVO

CAF's Manager of Climate Action and Positive Biodiversity

Moderated the round table ***"Regenerative tourism: beyond the environmental sustainability of destinations",*** with the participation of Niels Olsen, Minister of Tourism of Ecuador, Arturo Bravo, Vice Minister of Tourism of Colombia, Elena Pita, Director of the Biodiversity Foundation and Federico Franato, President of National Parks of Argentina. The event highlighted how different Latin American organizations were implementing ***"green"*** **agendas to mitigate climate change and protect biodiversity, contributing to restoring and improving the natural and cultural heritage of their territories.**

FRANCISCO RODRÍGUEZ

Coordinator of FiturNext and head of tourism at Ideas for Change

Chaired the round table ***"Regenerative public policies"*** with the participation of Marta Domènech, Director of Tourism of the Generalitat de Catalunya and Isabel Vidal Tomás, Director of Tourism of the Government of the Balearic Islands. Among other topics, **the role of public institutions in the conservation of natural areas that support tourism was highlighted**, as well as their power to raise awareness among the rest of the actors in the industry.

Likewise, a **series of keynotes were given by relevant tourism organizations.** Beatriz García, from Segittur, Secretariat of Tourism of the Government of Spain, began the round of talks with *"Sustainability in the model of Smart Tourism Destinations (DTI)"*, focusing on the importance of this axis for the DTI model. Blanca Pérez Sauquillo, Deputy Director General of Marketing of TurEspaña, continued with the value of sustainability in the image of destinations with *"Marketing and communication strategy of Turespaña in sustainable tourism"*. Finally, Cordula Wohlmuther, Coordinator of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), put the finishing touch to these relevant talks with *"Destinations- Catalysts of sustainable and regenerative development"*.

Finally, as in the previous edition, **the winning and finalist initiatives participated**, holding various dialogues on their projects, challenges encountered and next steps to be taken.

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC

During the days of the fair, the FiturNext stand hosted different spaces to hold open conversations with the public in relation to:

How to generate value in your destination or company through the regeneration of the natural environment.

What's Next? Let's talk about the 2024 Challenge.

Once again this year, these **spaces served as a networking tool** for attendees and allowed for new connections and contacts for the creation of synergies.

Also, for the first time, the Observatory developed **a space for contact and engagement with tourism professionals of the future, dedicating Saturday to university students.** Tourism students from different universities in the capital attended an event where, with the help of consultants and the disruptive Pentagrowth methodology of Ideas for Change, they began their journey in the construction of Destinations that Rock, based on sustainability, innovation, inclusion and positive impact[6].

Evolution of the winning initiatives

Since the last edition of FiturNext 2023, the winning initiatives have continued their work towards the regeneration of the natural environment, promoting the development of new advances that increase the participation of residents and visitors, leaving the areas where tourism activities take place in a better way, boosting the positive impact on the industry. The following section highlights the progress of one of them.

GRUPO IBEROSTAR - WAVE OF CHANGE

The Iberostar Group's regenerative initiative "Wave of Change" was the **winner** of the 2023 challenge thanks to its **commitment to a sustainable tourism and management model for its entire stakeholder chain, in favour of coastal and ocean health.** From coral regeneration to projects for the conservation and restoration of dunes, mangroves and seagrass, they promote a responsible tourism model based on actions and education, both for their employees and the users of their accommodations.

During 2023, and thanks to the implementation of artificial intelligence in the kitchens of forty-eight hotels, **the company has managed to avoid in just the first six months of its implementation, the waste of 1,600 tons of food waste, that is, the equivalent of 1.5 million meals in a year, allowing to reduce an additional 1,264 tons of CO^2**[7].

In addition, it has launched **the first Sustainable Mobility Plan for the Hotel sector in the Balearic Islands**[8]**, promoting a low-emission culture among its employees,** encouraging collaborative and sustainable transport in their transfers to their jobs.

On the other hand, in March 2023, they inaugurated in Palma (Spain) the reopening of one of their hotels as **the first 100% electric hotel, an achievement also replicated in Latin America**[9]**.**

The Iberostar Group is also working to involve its customers in this roadmap towards regeneration. Specifically, it launched the *"Sleep tight"* campaign, involving its customers on World Oceans Day. The initiative highlighted the contribution to the environment of a guest staying at one of the group's hotels, whose average stay reduces CO^2 emissions by 6% and avoids 1.9 kilos of single-use plastics, while at the same time learning about the company's work for coastal health and care of the oceans[10].

All these actions are part of the **roadmap towards total decarbonization and carbon neutrality proposed by the company for 2030, 20 years ahead of what has been established by the hotel sector itself.**

On the other hand, the Iberostar Foundation and Planeterra have signed a commitment to **promote community tourism** in the destinations that host their hotels, in order to contribute to these territories and their local communities in their economic and social development[11]. In addition, and in this line of actions by the Foundation, the Chair of the Sea has launched **grants worth 48,500 euros to promote the research of a total of 12 projects in marine ecology, conservation and management of the aquatic environment**[12].

All these actions have earned them the **Condé Nast Traveler 2023 award for their responsible tourism model and their pioneering Wave of Change movement**[13]. In addition, and in line with the idea of making visible the changes in the sector towards a more sustainable scenario, the group has awarded the German and Swiss tourism industry for its sustainable tourism initiatives through the first edition of the Iberostar Sustainability Awards[14].

Replicability in the tourism sector

EIn the FiturNext 2020[15] report on how tourism can contribute to local economic development, **the concept of replicability in the framework of the tourism industry was defined for the first time for the Observatory.** This notion was described as the provision, with or without conditions by the promoter, of the necessary documentation relating to a project (or part of it), with sufficient information on the lessons learned, the successes acquired, as well as the mistakes made and the solutions achieved, so that other actors could develop it. In other words, it is about the transfer of learning about what has been done well and what can be improved around a project, so that other actors in other contexts can take advantage of the path already travelled, accelerating the adoption of good practices in the tourism sector.

Later, and with the succession of the different Observatory reports, **the adoption of replicable practices was justified as an axis of growth with a positive impact on the sector,** extending the knowledge of the value generated by these practices to adopters, promoters and the tourism industry as a whole.

For its part, the latest FiturNext 2023 report on how tourism can contribute to the regeneration of the natural environment[16] presented **a practical use case on replicability,** the *"Starlight Iberá"* project. Based on this project, which was also **born from the replicability exercise of initiatives participating in the FiturNext Observatory,** the theory presented in previous editions was developed.

For this edition, **a new practical use case is presented, arising from the replicability of another of the Observatory's initiatives: Sponsor an Olive Tree.**

Apadrina un Olivo was the winning initiative of the FiturNext 2020 Challenge on how tourism can contribute to local economic development. Since its inception, it has been committed to the replicability of good practices as a formula for sustainable growth and positive impact.

A REPLICABLE MODEL AGAINST DEPOPULATION IN PORTUGAL: SPONSOR AN OLIVE TREE

The social project Apadrina un Olivo was born in 2014 in the municipality of Oliete (Teruel, Spain), with the aim of changing the rural reality resulting from the massive demographic exodus from the territory and the consequent abandonment of rural areas, through the enhancement of the municipality's endogenous resources. In a sustainable way, and based on tourism, they have been working since then on the recovery of 100,000 hundred-year old olive trees abandoned in the area. These are sponsored and baptised by godmothers and godfathers from different parts of the world in exchange for a price (€60), which includes a gift of two litres of oil per year and the possibility of visiting their olive tree in Oliete. In this way, **the abandoned olive groves are recovered and given value, preserving the biodiversity of the environment,** while at the same time generating a sustainable economy, based in part on the visits received, and social and economic development for the municipality. This project also provides support to young rural entrepreneurs, generates employment for 27 local people and transmits value to other economic agents in the area in the form of tourism.

The success of this rural economic and social development model **has promoted its adaptation in other environments, contexts and based on other endogenous elements.** This is the case of **Apadrinha uma Oliveira, an adopted replication of the system in Portugal.**

APADRINHA UMA OLIVEIRA

In the region of Abrantes, in the centre of Portugal, in the municipality of Mouriscas, a town of 1,500 inhabitants, lies the oldest olive tree in the Iberian Peninsula[17]. With an age of more than 3,350 years, the Mouchão olive tree is also one of the oldest olive trees in the world. Alongside it, **10,000 olive trees on more than 200,000 hectares, the equivalent of 2,800 football fields, have remained abandoned for years, favouring the increase of forest fires[18].**

All this, and given the capacity of the model originated in Oliete for local social, economic and environmental development, from a regenerative perspective and to alleviate the rural exodus, has motivated its replication in the neighbouring country through the formula of public utility association.

Furthermore, **the region has a number of similarities with the territory of Oliete.** Like the territory of origin, it is an area undergoing a process of just transition, where the energy derived from the coal-fired power station in the municipality of Pego is being replaced by clean and renewable energies. On the other hand, the Portuguese territory is also endowed with hundreds of abandoned thousand-year-old olive trees, once a source of wealth for dozens of generations, whose productive margin is nowadays scarce and one of the reasons for the exodus of population. This is another point of connection between Oliete and Mouriscas: **depopulation and the will to make the most of endogenous resources to create new opportunities to stop or at least slow down this demographic phenomenon.**

In this context, a process has been developed, at different speeds, with the collaboration of Endesa as the main partner. This process began with the need to gain local trust and support, so that the contribution of the triple positive impact that the project could offer to the territory would be understood: **recovery of biodiversity and the cultural landscape, and the generation of jobs and opportunities linked to it. All this as a formula for sustaining the population in the area and for rural development.**

The FiturNext 2021 report set out the different possible levels of replicability. These range from simple inspiration that produces a model, to total replication or copying, passing through the adoption of the same model or its adaptation to different contexts. Based on this, we find in this case **an adapted replication development, led and accompanied by the Apadrina un Olivo team.** In other words, the original model is modulated based on the endogenous characteristics of the environment under the umbrella of collaboration of the initial promoter entity.

On the other hand, and as a fundamental element for the replication of the initiative, derived from the replicability barometer used by the Observatory since its beginnings, we find the level of conditions for the execution of the replication. On this aspect, it should be noted **that replication in this case is carried out from a social and environmental perspective and on the basis of a triple balance that must be optimal:** green components, digitalisation and inclusion, so that the conditions required are minimal in relation to other examples of stricter regulatory or economic requirements. In addition, it should be stressed that this is an association recognised as a public utility entity by the Ministry of the Interior, whose objective is social innovation and environmental recovery and, as such, it is a public utility entity. On the other hand, optimum levels of quality are required, especially in those aspects related to the control of agri-food products, as in the case of olive oil and its by-products.

On the other hand, and in line with the FiturNext 2021 report on the factors for the replicability of tourism initiatives, it is plausible to associate these different components with the various elements and ideas arising from the implementation of the project:

PROOF OF VALUE

This concept was defined as the ability to measure the impact of a project that has been undertaken. The more the demonstrated impact of an initiative can be measured, the more interest it generates and, therefore, the more likely it is to be replicated in other environments. In this case, the proof of value is readily observable. **More than 20 direct jobs have been generated by the activity in the territory of origin, as well as many more indirectly, promoting the demographic preservation of the resident population,** especially the young people who until then were leaving in search of greater opportunities for the future. Such has been this preservation of young families that, thanks to the project, it has been possible to avoid the closure of the school in the municipality of Oliete.

EASE OF UNDERSTANDING

This notion encompasses the understanding of the initiative itself and all the benefits it can generate, both for the participants and for the environment where it is developed. In this sense, **the simplicity of the mechanics on which the initiative is based** (the sponsorship of olive trees), **together with the accompaniment and collaboration of the promoting organisation, promotes a clear and simple understanding of all the aspects to be taken into account for replication.**

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

This refers to the use of the appropriate communication channels and strategy according to the target group. Apadrina un Olivo has a marketing and communication area very focused on establishing **a continuous dialogue with its community, trying to issue clear messages adapted to the needs, interests and priorities of both the community and the sponsors and visitors of the activity.**

LEVEL OF ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION

This concept defines the level of openness or accessibility of the information necessary for the proper development of the initiative. The more open and accessible the resources necessary for the implementation of the initiative, the greater the capacity for replication. This will depend on the unique characteristics of the different projects. In the case of Apadrina un Olivo, the level of accessibility of information is total, since the implementation of the replication is accompanied by the participation of the driving initiative and derives from the application of the methodological manual developed by the initiative. Therefore, **the accompaniment is continuous, as is the flow of information, which remains constant in a bidirectional manner.** From the analysis of the field terrain to be safeguarded, to the tutoring of the know-how, carried out in the place of the initiative of origin (Oliete), previously and with a duration of two weeks.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

The following elements are related to the transfer of information from one context to another, the necessary documentation and the degree of openness:

Toolkit.

This refers to the tools necessary for the correct achievement of the stages that make up the project. In this aspect, **the expertise and knowledge of the different areas of the project** (financial area, legal advice, etc.) stand out, although **the need to innovate in new tools** depending on the context in which they are replicated is confirmed.

Community and community champions.

This aspect encompasses different levels, from local communities (volunteers, neighbours, local population...) to international networks or institutional actors. On the other hand, the notion of community champions refers to key actors (national or international) that have emerged in the community, who attract and encourage the inclusion of other actors in the community. In this context, **it has been necessary to disseminate information to the community,** especially at the beginning of the project, **in order to encourage interest and curiosity from within to the rest of the social layers of the environment.** Furthermore, **the participation of local** and regional authorities, farmers' associations, oil mills, olive oil producers, entrepreneurial entities, as well as the collaboration of cultural and heritage associations from different parts of the country, has been essential.

In terms of the benefits of replication, detailed in the FiturNext 2020 report, those derived from the resilience of the model and its sustainability for the local community are confirmed. Until the start of the project, the agricultural campaigns of the surrounding olive grove had been dismal and did not contribute to maintaining local productive activity and employment. The generation of this new activity, linked to tourism (and all its supply industries) **has contributed positively to the destination, hand in hand with a new conception of the environment, more open to new ideas and opportunities.** In addition, the incubation of new spin-off projects produces a ripple effect of greater scope. This has a positive impact on both the replicated projects and the original ones in terms of communication, support from institutions and local communities, or from the point of view of generating new ideas, among others.

Despite being still at a very early stage, the replication of Sponsor an Olive Tree in Portugal is already having **an observable impact on the destination. Visits to the area where the activity is taking place are gradually increasing, as is the number of godmothers and godfathers of olive trees, which has already reached 70**. In addition, **the activity has generated at least three direct jobs for local residents,** a figure that is expected to increase with the arrival of more visitors. Likewise, the sponsorship activity is accompanied by other related activities that increase its value. Specifically, Apadrina un Olivo has launched new initiatives, such as Despertadores Rurales, a territorial innovation centre and incubation laboratory for new projects in the rural environment, as well as other activities focused on the use of natural resources derived from olive trees and their inclusion in the circular economy.

This is undoubtedly **an example of how an activity linked to the tourism sector can help reduce population,** while empowering rural communities and generating new social and environmental opportunities. But this is not the only example of the replication of Sponsor an Olive Tree.

SPONSOR A VINEYARD

On the other hand, in the region of Valle del Jiloca, in the province of Teruel, an adapted replication of the Apadrina un Olivo model has been carried out, with the aim of influencing the recovery of the vineyards and the winemaking tradition of the region, contributing to the respect, care and protection of the endogenous and historical cultural landscape of the area.

The region, historically centred on its wine-growing potential, **has for years seen its capacity to generate opportunities for the new generations diminished, which has encouraged the rural exodus towards urban areas with greater possibilities.** All of this, as in the two previous cases, generates the abandonment of the countryside, which is detrimental not only to the demography of the area, but also to the environment and its biodiversity.

In this case, we speak of **adapted replication, as the object of sponsorship is no longer the olive tree but vineyards, given the local territorial context. Moreover, the replication methodology also differs.** This has been carried out by the Asociación para la Recuperación del Viñedo del Valle del Jiloca through a process of accompaniment and mentoring by the Apadrina un Olivo team.

Once the existing relationships between the theory of the replicability of tourism initiatives offered throughout the past FiturNext editions and the current connections between the different practical cases provided by the Observatory have been exposed, it is possible not only to corroborate the common ground shared by both realities, or the suitability of **replicability as a mechanism for exponential growth and multiplication of the positive impact on the sector**. It is also possible to ratify **the capacity of enhancing the value of endogenous resources as a way of attracting tourists** and, with this, **to have a tool to fight against one of the great problems of our times and which has occupied the FiturNext challenge of this edition: depopulation.**

PART II

How can tourism contribute to territorial rebalancing?

Research on the challenge

As mentioned in the introduction, with this research we have tried to offer an approach that covers in a general way the most important aspects of the phenomenon of depopulation, taking into account the heterogeneity of the problem and its geographical, social and political dependence and variability.

HETEROGENEITY OF THE PROBLEM.

The phenomenon of depopulation is dynamic and heterogeneous in nature, as will be shown below. The historical, social, cultural, economic, environmental, climatic and geographical differences of the different territories, together with the different levels of measurement of the territorial areas, give shape to **a complex and evolving phenomenon which tends to invalidate any generalised approach to its knowledge**[19].

The following is a compilation of some of the factors that cause the heterogeneity of the event. That is, the reasons why the situation of the different territories are not generally comparable with each other and, therefore, why the application of corrective measures cannot be carried out in a generalised manner, but in a specific and adapted way to each territory.

These factors include:

HISTORICAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

The development over time of societies and the continuation of different events on territories have contributed to migration towards areas with greater opportunities. This is the case of what happened in many of the more rural areas of Spain, **especially from the 1950s onwards.** The technological, productive and communications evolution focused on urban areas, together with the need for labour, led to the obsolescence of the productive and population system that had existed up to that time. **This led to a massive exodus from rural areas to the cities and migratory movements to other countries, which absorbed three quarters of the natural population growth of the time**[21]. Another clear example is the forecasts made by the European Committee of the Regions on the basis of demographic trends in recent periods. Specifically, it is estimated that **in 10 years, in 2033, around 30 million Europeans will have left the continent's rural areas, compared to the demography that existed 40 years ago (1993)**[22].

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS

The anthropological characteristics of the different territories have modulated current demographics. **Cultural currents, the existence of war or political conflicts and the gradual development of social needs shape and condition human presence in the territories.** This is the case, for example, of what has happened in Colombia due to the existence of armed conflicts. In a context of violence promoted by the actions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), **more than six million people have been forced to be displaced from their homes inside and outside the country, making it the country with the second largest humanitarian crisis in the world.** Moreover, **87% of these six million displaced people are from rural areas.** Hundreds of villages and towns have witnessed the forced flight of their populations, who have been forced to abandon their lands, their customs, their communities and their way of life, due to the militarisation of the territories in favour of the armed cause[23].

On the other hand, a social phenomenon associated with rural depopulation is very widespread, especially in the most developed countries: **the "enclassifying dimension". This dimension is linked to the concept of the acquisition of status according to place of residence. This conception links villages with disrepute and lack of opportunities and locates cities as enclaves of the good life**[24].

CLIMATIC AND GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS

The climatic conditions derived from the different geographical positions of the territories shape their demographic configuration. This is the case, for example, of the Gobi desert (Mongolia) or Siberia (Russia), whose extreme climatic conditions make life difficult for their inhabitants, **turning them into inhospitable and unpopulated territories, whose population density ratios do not exceed 2 inhabitants per km^2 and 1 inhabitant per km^2 respectively.**

LACK OF UNIFORMITY OF TERRITORIAL UNITS AND MEASUREMENT CRITERIA

This aspect is of particular interest from the point of view of comparisons and centralised or generalised decision-making. **The lack of uniformity in territorial units and their measurement criteria**, which may vary even within the same country, **creates an additional difficulty in comparing one territory with another and in carrying out accurate analyses that reveal the reality of the spaces.**

Firstly, and related to the units of measurement, i.e. the existing criteria and techniques for geographical delimitations, there is a **wide variety.** Different organisations and entities have established their own reference criteria (of extension and demographic density) for the delimitation and zoning of urban and rural spaces. The United Nations, the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the National Statistics Institute (INE), in Spain, are some of the entities that have set out their delimitation methodologies at different scales. Even within the same nation, it is possible to find different units of measurement, as is the case of the comarcalisation of the autonomous communities of Galicia, Aragon, the Valencian Community or the Pais Vasco Country in Spain. These present singular variations of territorial groupings, such as the unit of the Parishes or Villages in the autonomous community of Galicia, constituted as basic territorial units of their organisation[27].

Related to the above, it is necessary to highlight the **dimensional precision of the units of measurement, the choice of which can generate different diagnoses and solutions.** This is the case of the province of Guadalajara, in Castilla La Mancha, an example of the complexity of associating demographic densities to provinces and regions, since, as we shall see below, it leads to the concealment of large unpopulated interprovincial areas[28].

In the framework of the European Union, the classifications of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUT) are established. The NUT2 areas, in the Spanish context, are equivalent to the scale of the Autonomous Communities and the NUT3 to small regions for specific diagnoses with a population between 150,000 and 800,000[29]. In this sense, and for the application of corrective public policies and the allocation of cohesion funds by the EU, the population density criteria of the NUT2 (12.5 inhabitants per km^2) are adopted. For example, the Community of Castilla la Mancha would be excluded from the allocation of these funds because it has a population density of 25.62 inhabitants per km^2 [30]. Within Castilla la Mancha, the province of Guadalajara stands out, with a population density of 21.7 inhabitants per km^2 , and is excluded from the official requirements for the allocation of territorial cohesion funds. It is worth noting that within this province there are two very different realities: **6% of the territory concentrates 80% of the province's population (the Corredor del Henares), while in the remaining 94% of the territory the density is 5 inhabitants per km^2** [31]. This confirms that the rigid classification parameters and the multiplicity and variability of these require the reduction of territorial units, for example to a county level or similar, for a more accurate diagnosis and corrective decision-making.

DISPARITY IN GROWTH

Population growth in a territory is not uniform. **When we speak of depopulation, we tend to think of rural areas and small municipalities, although the reality of the phenomenon extends beyond this.** In Spain, on the one hand, there is a growth of small municipalities which tends to be concentrated on the Mediterranean coast and in the archipelagos, as well as around the provincial capitals, large cities and on the main communication routes. On the other hand, there is also a population exodus in provincial capitals, such as the city of Cádiz, which has been suffering from this phenomenon for 30 years and has lost 40,000 inhabitants, more than 1,200 in the last year alone, while the province as a whole gained more than 4,300 people in the same period[33].

PRESENCE ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA

The presence of public policies on territorial cohesion and demographic measures on the agendas of the different countries also modulates the phenomenon of depopulation in the territories. We can mention the European Union and Spain as **examples of the promotion of public policies on depopulation**. In both cases, **their competent management bodies have included territorial cohesion measures and have tackled the challenge of depopulation in a transversal manner in all their actions,** generating greater study and interest in the subject. In fact, the European Union devotes the entire Title XVIII of its Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to economic, social and territorial cohesion, establishing in the Article 174 the obligation to direct actions towards reducing the differences between the different levels of development of the regions[34].

An example of the opposite situation is the case of Argentina. Argentina has a total population of 46 million inhabitants over an area of almost 2,800,000 km2, a population similar to Spain (48 million), although it is concentrated over a territory almost six times smaller (505,000 km2). In fact, according to data from Argentina's National Institute of Statistics and Census, 92% of the country's total population resided in cities in 2021, a figure that is much higher than the world average and is expected to increase in the coming years. However, as in many other parts of the world, this is not a common theme in political decision-making and action, given that other issues of general interest (inflation, unemployment and schooling rates, guaranteeing basic services to the population, etc.) take precedence.

Moreover, the **cross-cutting nature** of this phenomenon in decision-making should be highlighted. **The implementation of economic or social measures and policies can also have an impact on the demographic disposition of a territory.** This is the case, as mentioned in the previous point, of what happened in Spain during the period of industrialisation and the green revolution in the middle and end of the last century, when decisions were taken under the focus of the drive for urban development and the need for labour. As a result, the population emigrated in the hope of a more prosperous future[37].

AN APPROXIMATION IN FIGURES OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

The phenomenon of depopulation and, with it, the demographic and territorial imbalance, is present in a large part of the world's geography.

According to data from the United Nations (UN), **in 2018, 55% of the world's population lived in cities, a percentage that is estimated to reach 70% by 2050. These cities consume 75% of the world's available energy resources and emit 80% of the carbon that pollutes the environment[39].** This fact, in a context where the world's population is three times larger than in the mid-20th century, with 8 billion inhabitants in the world by 2023 and an increase of more than 2 billion people expected by 2050[40], reinforces the importance of the demographic balance of the different territories.

If we focus on specific territories, the situation is even more extreme. **In Europe, for example, less than 30% of the inhabitants live in rural areas, which account for 80% of the territory[41].** Meanwhile, **in North America, the number of rural dwellers is around 17%[42].** The rural population of **Latin America and the Caribbean is around 18%**, making it the region with the highest proportion of population concentrated in mega-cities in the world. In fact, of the region's total population in 2018, 14.2% resided in the six cities with 10 million or more inhabitants[43].

In order to understand the gravity of these circumstances, it is necessary to talk about population density. In this regard, the figures are also disparate, and can even be confusing. For example, **the areas of France, Spain, Italy and Germany sum 1.8 million km², with a total of 257 million inhabitants. To reach this population figure in South America, it is necessary to add the areas of Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia and Brazil (about 12.3 million km²)[44].** Therefore, the average number of inhabitants per km² in Europe is 142, while in these South American countries it is 24 inhabitants per km². If we look at smaller geographical levels, we can see that in some regions of Northern and Eastern Europe, such as the Nordic countries, population ratios are around 4.9 inhabitants per km²[45].

For its part, **Spain is the fourth country in Europe, after Estonia, Finland and Latvia, with the most municipalities at risk of depopulation**. Spain's rural areas (defined as those with less than 30,000 inhabitants and a population density of less than 100 inhabitants per km²) cover 84% of the country's surface area, but are only home to 15.9% of the Spanish population[46]. **This 84% of the territory is what we know as *"empty Spain"*.**

In fact, **in Spain,** and without an inhospitable climate, **we find truly alarming demographic ratios, which are even higher than in European areas with extreme climates.** This is the case of some villages in the Serranía Celtibérica (6.99 inhabitants per km²) which show areas with 1 inhabitant per km², or some enclaves in the Celtic Strip, with an average density of 4.56 inhabitants per km² [47]. These ratios are very similar to those found, for example, in Finnish Lapland, with 1.8-2 inhabitants per km² [48].

If we look at specific regions in inland Spain, we find that **Asturias and Castilla y León are among the Autonomous Communities most affected by population abandonment** (more than 85% of their municipalities had less population in 2020 than in 1996). They are followed by Extremadura, Aragón, Galicia and Castilla la Mancha [49].

But the phenomenon of depopulation is particularly noticeable at the municipal level. Of Spain's 8,131 municipalities, 5,102 have lost population since 2001, rising to 6,232 localities in the last decade, which means that **3 out of every 4 municipalities in the country have lost population continuously.** This phenomenon is, moreover, eminently rural. In fact, **municipalities with low population density occupy 48% of the national territory, which means that almost half of the country is at demographic risk[50].**

The general trend is, therefore, **the concentration of a growing population around large cities and main communication axes**, leaving the rural areas empty and drawing a picture of generalised demographic imbalance over the different territories.

A SINGLE COMMON PATTERN: THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEPOPULATION

The process of depopulation, as we have seen in the previous points, is very heterogeneous and its development takes place in very different ways in different territories. However, its settlement on the spaces generates a series of consequences that outline a common and shared pattern of the phenomenon. It is worth noting that these consequences are accentuated in rural environments, whose fragility makes them areas of special vulnerability and attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The environmental consequences of depopulation are varied:

Crop abandonment.

The abandonment of cultivated areas due to the lack of people to work the land causes the loss of wealth in the territories, favours the **disappearance of local products and degrades the productive capacity of the countryside.** In fact, in Spain alone, more than 4 million hectares of cultivated land have been abandoned in the last 40 years. Moreover, this promotion of rural desertification can negatively affect the survival of local and endemic fauna[52].

Agricultural and livestock.

Traditional extensive production models **are replaced by industrial models that are less labour-intensive and have a high environmental impact[53].** In addition, local agro-ecological practices and traditional sustainable livelihoods are lost, leading to a decline in biodiversity (loss of cultivated varieties) and associated wild species.

Environmental degradation.

The reduced agricultural and livestock production of the environments and the consequent lack of local products leads to the need for a greater flow of exports and imports of commodities to the different territories, **which generates an increase in pollution derived from transport.** There is also an **abuse and pollution of natural water resources[54]** (due to the use of fertilisers and massive water consumption). All of this makes these territories more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Increased risk of forest fires.

The abandonment of traditional rural activities means an **increase in forest space, which increases the risk of fires, their spread and the emergence of desertification in these areas.** We can mention as an example the continued growth of the forest area in Europe, which is increasing at a rate of 357,000 hectares per year. In Spain alone, it is growing by 78,000 hectares per year, a total of 1.8 million more since 1990[55]. This increase in flammable forest masses caused by the misuse of the soil creates spaces that favour the rapid spread and uncontrolled spread of forest fires[56]. In 2022 alone, 786,049 hectares burned in the European Union. Of these, 39% were in Spain (310,000 hectares, similar in size to the province of Alava), which was the most affected member state[57]. This is not only crucial given the loss of biodiversity and the polluting impact generated by the proliferation of fires, but also because of the aridity it causes in the soil. **Soils cease to have the capacity to retain water resources, causing droughts and large areas of desertification[58].**

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Decrease in the quality of life.

Those territories that begin to lose inhabitants are exposed to a loss of basic services (health, food, education, etc.). In addition, the decrease in the number of inhabitants in a given area reduces the economic resources available to it, as well as reducing employment opportunities.

On the other hand, t**he overpopulation of urban centres also increases exposure to pollution, as well as a greater generation of pollution** (they emit 70% of the world's carbon dioxide). In fact, the World Health Organisation (WHO) stated in 2022 that 99% of the world's population lived in areas where they breathe air that exceeds health limits, which is the cause of 6.7 million premature deaths worldwide each year.[60]

Loss of cultural identity - Alienation.

The loss of a territory's inhabitants also leads to the loss of its ancestral practices, customs, knowledge and trades, forgetting part of the historical memory of the place. Furthermore, the uprooting of one's own cultural values makes it difficult for them to be passed down through the generations, feeding the phenomenon of alienation typical of the current contexts of globalisation[62].

This, moreover, is reinforced by the tourist phenomenon. The depopulation of spaces and environments causes, on the one hand, a lower distribution of tourist activity due to a reduction in the number of destinations to visit and, on the other hand, and as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the loss of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. This polarises tourist activity and generates a greater concentration of visits in mature territories, which is combined with the aforementioned concentration of inhabitants.

Another case to mention in the line of the loss of cultural identity is that of the social epicentres of small municipalities, at least in the Spanish context: the bars. **Bars are a driving force for the development of social life in towns**. This is the case, for example, in Castilla y León. In the region, and as of 2023, 800 villages do not have a bar, which means that a total of 70,000 inhabitants will not be able to enjoy this service[63]. Many town councils are considering various alternatives and measures to promote and attract self-employed people who want to start up in the hotel and start their business in these small towns. This is the case of the municipality of 100 inhabitants of Villalaco (Palencia), which after more than eight years without a bar has managed to reopen it as a community meeting place. Other town councils have opted for the establishment of a cultural manager to organise activities for residents to meet[64], with the aim of providing a social meeting point for the resident[65] community.

Landscape degradation.

El The abandonment of spaces degrades and culturally dehumanises landscapes. **The decrease of the population that works the fields due to the exodus to the cities and with it the abandonment of land on a large scale makes different types of land use disappear,** losing the traditional and historical cultural landscape of the different territories[66].

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

Price increases.

In large cities, **the increase in the number of people increases the demand for housing, which in turn pushes up the prices of rents or the sale and purchase of residences.** This is accompanied by a **rise in the cost of living,** which is combined with a low wage endowment due to the large labour supply that is constantly threatening the territory[67]. On the other hand, in territories with depopulation, transport to remote areas with poor connections increases the price of products in rural areas. In fact, according to the latest Funcas report on economic information, inflation hits harder households with lower spending power located in rural areas. Among the most affected expenditure groups in these environments are food, energy and restaurants[68].

Loss of value of the primary sector.

The primary sector (fishing, livestock and agriculture) accounts for only 2% of GDP, yet its importance within the economic structure is vital. A country's domestic production allows for greater independence from third parties, while at the same time ensuring the supply of its population[69]. The International Labour Organisation considers that the promotion of decent work in rural economies is fundamental for the eradication of poverty and the guarantee of the food resources necessary to supply a growing population[70].

Increase in the cost of public services.

Whether in depopulated territories or in those that receive a massive population, **the costs of public services increase due to the demographic imbalance[71].** For example, in Aragon, the depopulation and demographic dispersion of the resident population generates an extra cost in the price of public services: almost 11% of pharmaceutical spending, or almost 75% more in education costs[72]. On the other hand, the overcrowding of public services in cities also increases their costs without improving the quality of these services (longer waiting times, public transport bottlenecks, high ratios in schools, etc.).

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

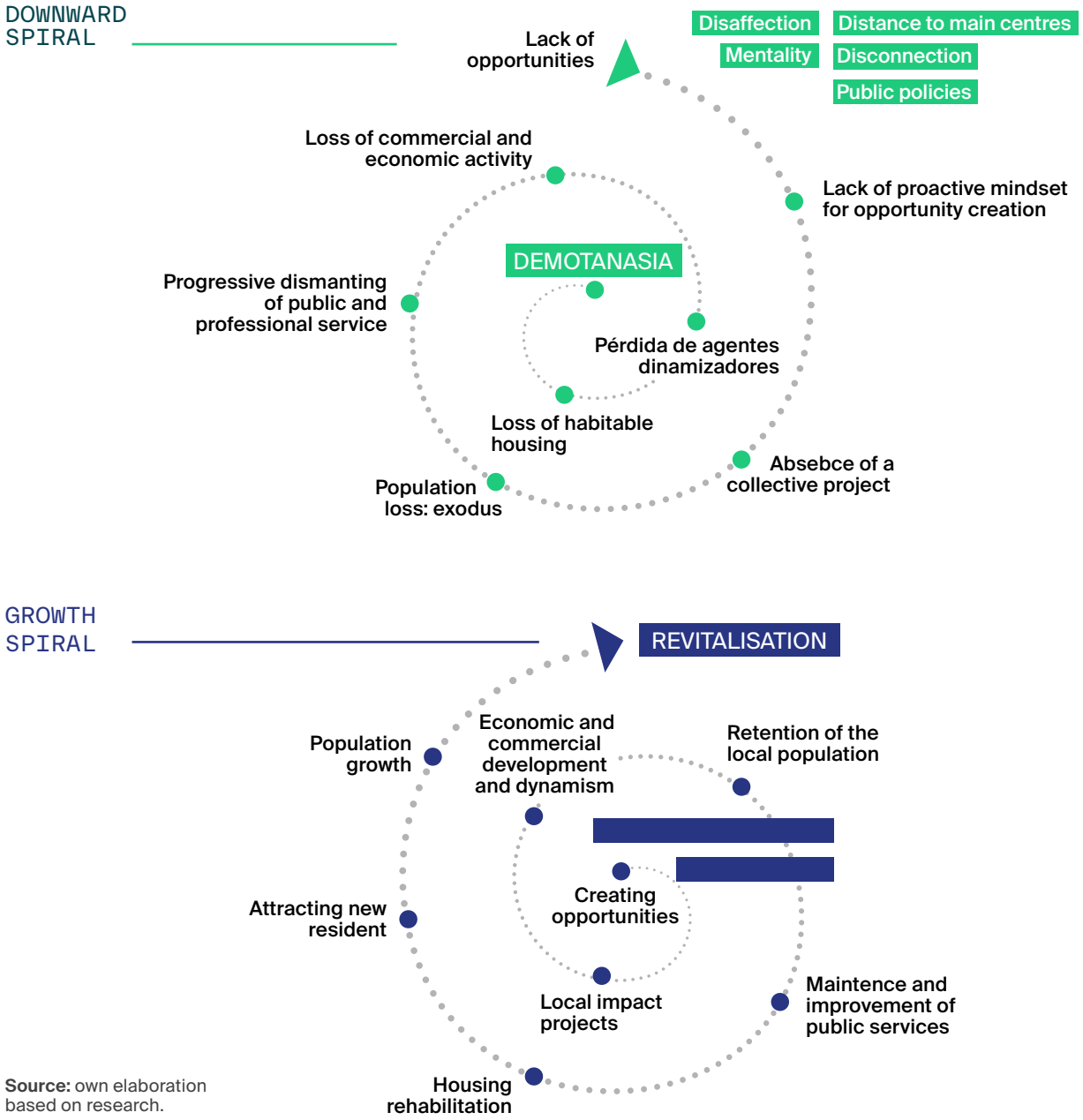
Overpopulation.

As indicated in the previous point, overpopulation, i.e. a massive increase in population density (number of inhabitants per square kilometre) in a territory, **hinders the work of the public administrations in charge of efficiently providing the fundamental services for the well-being of its inhabitants**[73].

Territorial disintegration.

The abandonment of territories encourages their neglect in social and political terms because the decrease in the number of inhabitants reduces their representation in public institutions and in civil society. An unbalanced socio economic development, and thus an incohesive territory, fosters a decrease in stability and general progress[74].

Below are two images relating to the processes of depopulation (spiral of decrease) and those of repopulation or demographic rebalancing (spiral of growth). The aim is to show in a visual way the relationship of actions that comprise the development of the two realities that modulate the phenomenon of depopulation.



Source: own elaboration based on research.

IDEAS FOR CHANGE

PUBLIC POLICIES AND GOOD PRACTICES IN THE FIELD OF DEPOPULATION

Territorial imbalance is a phenomenon that is increasingly being addressed by different institutional bodies at different levels. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, which encourage governments, the private sector and civil society to work together, reiterate the importance of territorial cohesion for the global common good. Specifically, **the importance of the territorial and demographic balance of territories affects 7 of the 30 SDGs launched in 2015**[75], **although they are clearly underpinned by goals 10 and 11:** reducing inequalities and sustainable cities and communities; **as well as 11 of their specific targets.** These include such exemplary ones as ensuring universal access to safe, affordable and sustainable public transport services, strengthening the protection and safeguarding of the world's cultural and natural heritage, and supporting social, economic and environmental linkages between urban and rural areas for regional and national development planning in different countries[76].

More focused on the continental level, it is possible to observe the inclusion of public policies on the specific issue of depopulation. This is the case of the European Union and its member states.

As previously stated, **territorial cohesion in economic, social and demographic terms is of great importance for the territory of the Union,** to the point of being added to the 1985 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Its Title XVIII on economic, social and territorial cohesion states:

> *"In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions. Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions"* [77].

However, the situation in Europe, like the general trend in the rest of the world, continues to widen the demographic gap between urban and rural areas. In fact, **80% of the European territory is considered rural and is inhabited by only one third of the total population of the Union (around 30%).** This, together with the general trend towards the urbanisation of spaces, makes it necessary to adopt a long-term vision when it comes to decision-making and the generation of new public policies[78].

The European Committee of the Regions is part of the European Union. This is the representative body of local authorities and regions throughout the European Union, whose task is to advise on the creation of laws that affect their territories. They are responsible for drawing up opinions on proposals for EU legislation in line with the different needs and realities of the various regions and localities, so as to encourage political debate even outside the Union[79].

One of the most important dialogues held is on the evolution of depopulation in the EU. This issue is disseminated through various reports and conferences held as part of its activities. Such is its importance that depopulation is on the agenda of all the new actions carried out by the European communities with a view to the future[80].

Also, within the framework of the European Union, the Commission warns of its concern in this area. From the Commission's Democracy and Demography area, **efforts are directed towards changing the trend and creating a favorable environment for the rebalancing of population density, especially in rural areas**[81].

En Within Europe, **special attention is being paid to Spain's action on depopulation**, given the seriousness of the situation in our country and the quality and quantity of measures that have begun to be implemented.

At the national level, **a National Strategy on the Demographic Challenge has been drawn up in 2019.** The creation of this strategy involved the participation of all ministerial departments and a multidisciplinary technical approach, whose objectives are focused on guaranteeing equal opportunities and the exercise of citizens' rights throughout the national territory. To this end, it established 7 cross-cutting objectives:

1. **Guarantee of full territorial connectivity.**
2. **Ensuring the provision of basic services for all people.**
3. **Incorporation of the demographic perspective in the formulation of new laws.**
4. **Simplification of regulations and bureaucracy to facilitate the management of small municipalities.**
5. **Enhancing the value of the territories concerned and eliminating their associated stereotypes.**
6. **Encourage the formulation of public-private coordination mechanisms.**
7. **Alignment of the actions to be undertaken deriving from the strategy with the Sustainable Development Goals**[82].

EIn 2020, the restructuring of the Spanish Government's ministerial departments created the **Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, as well as the General Secretariat for the Demographic Challenge**[83]. The latter is responsible for coordination between inter-ministerial actions and territorial administrations in the area of the demographic challenge, as well as for promoting public-private collaboration in this area[84]. This has led to actions such as the Rural Campus initiative for university internships in rural environments. The main objectives of this programme, which enables training placements to be carried out in rural destinations, are as follows:

- **The commitment to the potential in terms of resources and labour force of the various territories at risk of depopulation.**
- **Promoting youth employment and boosting local talent.**
- **The generation of new forms of ties or roots.**
- **The creation of employment opportunities in the most vulnerable territories[85].**

Another country where public policies have been developed to try to alleviate depopulation in their territories is **Scotland.** The country has **a very uneven demographic distribution with large rural areas undergoing depopulation, with the Highlands region standing out. This imbalance affects the provision of public services and is closely linked to the lack of employment opportunities.** In order to alleviate the situation, the regional and national governments have promoted the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, for the installation of green free ports in two municipalities in the Highlands, together with a project to regenerate the city of Lochaber, the Fort William 2040 Master Plan. Both actions aim to boost the Highland economy and stimulate significant new local manufacturing activity[88].

Back in **Spain**, and descending even further in terms of competences and geography, **the actions carried out by the autonomous government of Castilla La Mancha, one of the autonomous communities with the highest percentage of depopulation in the country, stand out.**

According to the Strategy against depopulation in Castilla-La Mancha 2021-2031[89], the map of depopulation in this Autonomous Community extends over a large part of its territory: 67.4% of all municipalities have a population density below 12.5 inhabitants km^2 (municipalities at risk of depopulation) and, **of these, 81% have less than 500 inhabitants.**

Due to its actions in this regard, **Castilla La Mancha is positioned as an international benchmark in the fight against depopulation**. Last December 2023, and at the request of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the regional government of La Mancha announced at international level the measures developed to tackle depopulation. Specifically, all the actions included in the ***Law on economic, social and tax measures against depopulation and for the development of the rural environment in Castilla La Mancha,*** as well as in its implementation tool, the Regional Strategy against Depopulation, were detailed. In particular, the design of the taxation provided for in the Law has aroused great interest, as it is a pioneering measure of tax deductions for attracting population to rural areas. To date, it has managed to benefit 82,000 people living in depopulated municipalities in the last year[90].

But this is not the first time that the regional government of Castilla la Mancha has positioned itself as a benchmark in this area. **Already in 2022, the European Union pointed to these actions as an example to follow for many countries facing the demographic problem[91].**

Among the measures of the Law are the **categorisation and zoning of the rural territory, actions to guarantee basic public services to the rural population, actions aimed at economic diversification, tax measures and tax benefits for residents in rural areas and the establishment of bodies for collaboration and coordination of actions[92].**

Thanks to the implementation of this Law over the last two years, **Castilla La Mancha has increased its migratory population**, i.e., without taking into account the data on vegetative growth, by 8,612 inhabitants. This has managed to attenuate the overall population loss (taking into account migratory and natural increase balances) with a balance of 1,249 fewer inhabitants, far fewer than would have been the case if there had been no migratory increase. In fact, **in the provinces of Cuenca and Guadalajara, the most affected by depopulation, the balance has been positive by 1,780 inhabitants, 1,472 in Guadalajara and 308 in Cuenca**[93].

At this point, it is necessary to highlight an issue which has emerged from the particular analysis of many of the regions suffering depopulation, which was already anticipated in the first points of this study: it is necessary to emphasise the importance of the territorial units of measurement, **as the general positive data for provinces may be derived from the population increase in certain regions** (due to their proximity to large centres, the existence of industries, etc.) despite the fact that there is a continuous negative balance in others. This, together with the heterogeneity we have been talking about throughout this report, emphasises the importance of "zooming in" on the specific territories and the particular conditions they present.

Finally, it should be stressed that Castilla La Mancha is not the only Autonomous Community to have approved a regulation to boost demography in depopulated areas. Other regions such as Galicia (2021), Extremadura (2022), Aragón and Comunidad Valenciana (2023) have approved a legislative framework with a focus on depopulation.

The Role of Tourism in Depopulation

Tourism activity is an element that generates demographic flows and contributes to the local economic development of the areas where it is carried out. Tourism can therefore play a positive role in the fight against depopulation.

In recent years, especially since the pandemic caused by Covid-19, rural tourism has become an increasingly widespread leisure option. The practice of tourism in rural areas, which are those most prone to depopulation, goes beyond the enjoyment of nature and outdoor leisure. It also extends to other layers of the environment, such as the need to invest in the conservation and recovery of spaces, to develop the local economy and to emphasise the recovery of cultural aspects that are lost as a result of depopulation. Therefore, it means **the exercise of responsible tourism that affects these territories from a perspective of social, economic and environmental sustainability.**

For this reason, **tourism is beginning to be seen as a tool to help mitigate depopulation,** although it must be said that tourism alone is not capable of achieving this. **It is necessary to provide planning, management and coordination of the tourism activity that is developed** (or planned), on issues such as the admissible carrying capacity for the sustainability of the territories, the intensification of excursionism, which causes a mirage effect on them, and the linking of values with local communitie[95]:

PERMISSIBLE CARRYING CAPACITY:

Each territory, depending on its intrinsic and specific characteristics, has a different carrying capacity. We understand carrying capacity as the number of subjects that a territory can support in a certain period of time without producing negative effects (environmental, social, etc.). It **is essential to study and understand the capacities that can be supported by the different destinations in order to avoid future damage of any kind, ensuring the sustainability** of the different territories.

The case of Anento stands out, a municipality in Zaragoza (Spain) with 40 inhabitants that has received 3,000 visitors in just one weekend, which translates into a relative growth of 1,650% in 4 years. This overcrowding requires management by the public bodies in charge, which are also aware of the need to improve and increase their basic and tourist infrastructures[97].

THE MIRAGE EFFECT OF EXCURSIONISM:

Visiting places without staying overnight is what we know as excursionism. **This activity can have negative connotations for different destinations** because the fact that travellers do not stay overnight reduces spending in the destination and its surroundings, while at the same time generating a false sense of increased demand, which can confuse market trends. However, **it should be mentioned that excursionism can also generate positive impacts on territories.** This is the case, for example, of hiking in places far from large centres, which in many cases do not have accommodation available for overnight stays. An example of this is the activity carried out by T-Guío, one of the finalist initiatives of this edition. In this case, the reception of visitors, even without an overnight stay, contributes to local economies (bars, restaurants, etc.) and at the same time contributes to the maintenance and conservation of the cultural and natural heritage of these remote territories.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SUPPORT BY THE LOCAL POPULATION:

Occasional over-saturation, together with the generation of low profitability in economic and employment terms for the territories where tourist activities are offered, can generate collective dissatisfaction, leading to a popular feeling of rejection of

tourism. It is therefore **necessary that tourism development is carried out on the basis of the values of the local community and its interests in the territory.**

For all of the above reasons, **it is essential to promote the cohesive role of the tourism sector as an opportunity to generate wealth, develop territories and improve the quality of life of the local population**[98].

Another important aspect to be highlighted **is the role of new technologies in relation to tourism and the fight against depopulation.** The geographical barrier of many rural territories can be overcome thanks to the use of technologies, both in how they are configured as a channel for the transfer of messages to the general public (supply of services, products and resources), and in the connection between the different parties (suppliers and demanders of tourism services). In other words, **technologies can act as planning, management, promotion or transaction tools simultaneously.**

The use of smartphones in travel-related searches and purchases, chatbots as 24-hour customer services, the proliferation of online payment systems and gateways, the use of augmented and virtual reality, artificial intelligence, Bluetooth, the use of big data for the creation of

personalised services and the massive use of social networks around the world are just some of the examples that help to boost tourism activity[99].

On the other hand, tourism and many of its transversal or associated activities encourage the participation of territories in the industry and, therefore, the generation of tourist flows to all types of spaces. An example of this is the film and tourism binomial. **The capacity of the film industry to make a territory known is very powerful.** This is the case, for example, of what happened in New Zealand with the production of the *"Lord of the Rings"* saga, whose 20 locations exhibited in the first trilogy increased from 1.7 million to 2.4 million visits per year after the broadcasting of these first productions[100].Such was the impact on visitors and residents that legal tender coins were minted in connection with the saga.

Another **example of tourism and cinema is related to the activities of the Film Commissions**. Film Commissions are filming offices whose purpose is not only to highlight the landscapes, monuments and climate of a territory, but also to make its technical and human resources visible. In this way, the different places projected on the screens benefit from their visibility and receive benefits in the form of tourism.

The attractiveness of the film industry is so well known that public measures have been implemented to stimulate it. Specifically, in 2021, the Spanish government launched an investment of 25 million euros to boost Spain's role as an International Audiovisual Hub. In particular, and fundamentally linked to depopulation, one of its five programmes is the Spain Film Friendly Land. The aim of this programme is to strengthen the territorial network of the Spain Film Commission which, "together with the expansion of the catalogue of locations, monuments and reference sites, will increase the number of film shoots throughout Spain, with special attention to remote, rural or urban locations, as well as in depopulated areas" [101].

In Spain, **the Spain Film Commission is the non-profit association that has been leading the international positioning of the country as a filming destination** since 2001, through the coordination of the efforts of the different offices distributed throughout the country. The Spain

Film Commission **has progressively advanced in its links with the tourism industry.** On the one hand, and for several years now, it has had an agreement with IFEMA for the creation of a space at FITUR (International Tourism Trade Fair). **FITUR Screen is constituted as a place that allows the connection between the tourism** and film industries through the dissemination of knowledge about film tourism, commercial exchange and the formulation of proposals for the development of this activity in Spain[102]. On the other hand, the Spain Film Commission is a member of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), while collaborating with other institutions of great importance in the tourism sector such as Turespaña or regional and municipal tourism bodies[103].

For its part, an **example of the integration of technologies in the public-private collaboration of the Film Commissions is the creation of a film tourism application in Spain.** The Spain Film Commission, together with Turespaña, have launched the application **"Spain Screen Grand Tour"** which indicates the routes where different films have been shot in Spain, as well as information about them and their locations. The purpose of this alliance is the creation of content on screen tourism and the promotion of the territories that have hosted the different film productions[105].

Another action in this line is the **public-private alliance between Turespaña and Netflix.** In 2021, both organisations launched the short film competition *How would you say Spain is without saying it?* in the framework of the International Tourism Fair (FITUR). The aim was to raise awareness of Spain in greater depth and in all its diversity, while highlighting the link between audiovisual production, local tourism and the opportunity both areas represent for strengthening the country's cultural richness and diversity.

Of the 43 projects presented by the 30 educational schools, 5 have been selected for production funding. In them, stories linked to local values and attributes highlight the different singularities of the various territories of the country[106].

PART III

Initiatives

Explanation of the system of evaluation of initiatives: Territorial revitalisation impact barometer

Having analysed this year's challenge and presented the research carried out on it, we now proceed to show how the initiatives that have been analysed in this edition have been evaluated.

In addition to replicability, which is measured through the initial registration form of the initiatives to the challenge, the FiturNext Observatory includes the measurement of the impact in relation to the challenge launched. This measurement is carried out by means of a barometer created specifically for each of the challenges, bringing together the different categories of initiatives. Thus, in addition to taking into account the initial registration questionnaire, at least one interview is conducted with the project promoters based on the impact indicators established. In this edition, **a barometer has been designed focused on making an assessment in terms of slowing down and halting depopulation, thus analysing the degree of contribution of the different initiatives to the challenge.** Among other factors, it measures the growth of visitors to the territory, the increase in organisations and commercial activities, the employment generated and the dissemination of local values and traditions, among others.

In a transversal manner, and in order to include the previous challenges of the FiturNext observatory, the creation of a community between visitors and residents and, in some cases, with the agents that make up the tourism sector of the offer is analysed; participation in the territorial revitalising tourism value chain, both directly and indirectly; whether the initiative focuses on groups in a situation of special vulnerability (gender equality, accessibility); and finally, whether employment is generated and whether it is inclusive.

After this second filter, sixteen initiatives are selected and then forwarded to the Advisory Board, which re-evaluates the proposals. **From the combination of both evaluations, the twelve initiatives are selected to be incorporated into the Observatory and the three winning projects are chosen, one per category, as well as the nine finalist initiatives**. All of them are listed in the following section of this report.

FITURNEXT 2024 CHALLENGE: TOWARDS TERRITORIAL REVITALISATION

This edition, with a focus on how tourism can make an important contribution to the demographic challenge and the social and economic rebalancing of the different territories, it has been necessary to delve deeper into a series of aspects related to:

- **The management and promotion of territories suffering from depopulation:** Putting spaces back on the map. **Making known and giving value to the different endogenous resources** that make the territories worthy of a visit and **reinforcing the local identity** of their residents and surroundings.

- **The importance of connections:** **Communication,** whether at the level of transport and infrastructures or telecommunications, **is essential for the development of territories anywhere in the world.** A good network of connections to other points that brings the local community closer to the different basic services available, and allows easy access to them, can become a brake on depopulation and even contribute to the revitalisation of destinations.

- **More than experiences, looking for tourist experiences:** Visits to territories that are losing population are often concentrated in rural environments. Here, the proximity of the local population and the experience of local traditions and cultures make the experience **close, unique, personal and connected to the environment where it takes place.**

These aspects make up the main characteristics of the categories of this 2024 call:

- Revitalising tourism services
- Management of depopulated territories
- Promotion of depopulated territories

The impact assessment of the different categories has been carried out by means of their corresponding indicators, which will be described in more detail below.

CATEGORIES AND INDICATORS OF REVITALISATION OF TERRITORIES TO MEASURE IMPACT:

As every edition, the Observatory creates a new ad hoc barometer for the evaluation of the impact of the different initiatives in relation to the challenge. On this occasion and following the research carried out on the subject, 8 common indicators and 1 specific indicator were formulated for the different categories. Each of them is developed and listed below, according to the categories, as shown in the following table.

- **Visitor growth:** the increase in the number of visitors to the territory is vital for the viability of the project and the start of territorial revitalisation. The economic boost it can generate not only for the tourism industry itself, but also for all related and transversal sectors and industries, creates new opportunities for the local population.

- **Seasonality:** For visitor growth and with it, the generation of new opportunities to be solid, it must, as far as possible, develop throughout the year. A tourist flow concentrated in specific periods of the year does not encourage the creation of stable or continuous opportunities.

- **Increased connectivity:** the growth of the above indicators leads to improvements in territorial connectivity, both in terms of transport or access and in terms of communications and infrastructures.

- **Number of new businesses created:** the stimulation of demand leads to the creation of new business offers which, without being tourism-related, contribute to satisfying the needs of the growing supply and, therefore, of demand.

- **Trade:** all of the above leads to an increase in commercial activities in the area and its immediate surroundings.

- **Employment:** thanks to the increase in new services, businesses, connectivity and commerce, the need for labour is generated, which increases the supply of jobs in the territory and its surroundings.

- **Increase in the number of children in the territory (annual ratio):** with the growth of the population coming from abroad

and the slowdown in the migration of the residents themselves, the population begins to increase naturally in the destination, increasing the number of children and young people and consolidating the future of the territory.

- **Increase in basic services (schools, health centres, pharmacies...):** the growth of the population of the territory and the generation of commercial activities, connectivity and employment, naturally generate an increase in basic services that cover the needs of the new population in safe and sustainable conditions.

- **Increase in tourist services:** the increase in the flow of visitors stimulates the creation of new tourist services that can cover the needs of the growing demand.

- **Dissemination of local values:** The loss of population is not only a question of numbers. The abandonment of territories entails the death of traditions, work, values, identity and local cultures, many of which are in danger of disappearing.

- **Actions to promote depopulated areas as tourist destinations:** YAs Gabriel García Marquez once said, "what is not communicated doesn't exist". Putting territories back on the map by highlighting their local and endogenous resources is part of the recipe for territorial balance.

TABLE OF CATEGORIES AND INDICATORS

Travel services revitalized	Territory management in depopulation	Territory promotion depopulated
Visitor growth		
Seasonality		
Increased connectivity		
New businesses created		
Trade		
Employment		
Increase in children		
Increase in basic services		
Population increase		
	Increase of travel services	
Diffusion of the local values		
	Dissemination actions such as depopulated area	

As usual, these indicators have been added to those relating to the themes of previous editions, with the aim of consolidating the knowledge accumulated over these five years:

- **Community:** Is there any kind of community created around the initiative that includes residents and visitors?

- **System:** Does it generate or participate in any way in the territorial revitalising value chain beyond the local level?

- **Vulnerability:** Does the initiative impact people in situations of special vulnerability or does the activity favour any group in this situation (gender, accessibility, limited economic capacity...)?

- **Inclusive employment:** Is employment generated for people in vulnerable situations directly or indirectly? And is the workplace accessible?

Winning and finalist initiatives

CATEGORY I

Tourist services

CATEGORY I - TOURIST SERVICES

Genalguacil Pueblo Museo

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	Foundation
LOCATION:	Genalguacil (Málaga), España
YEAR OF BIRTH:	1994
WEBSITE:	www.pueblomuseo.com

OBJETIVE:

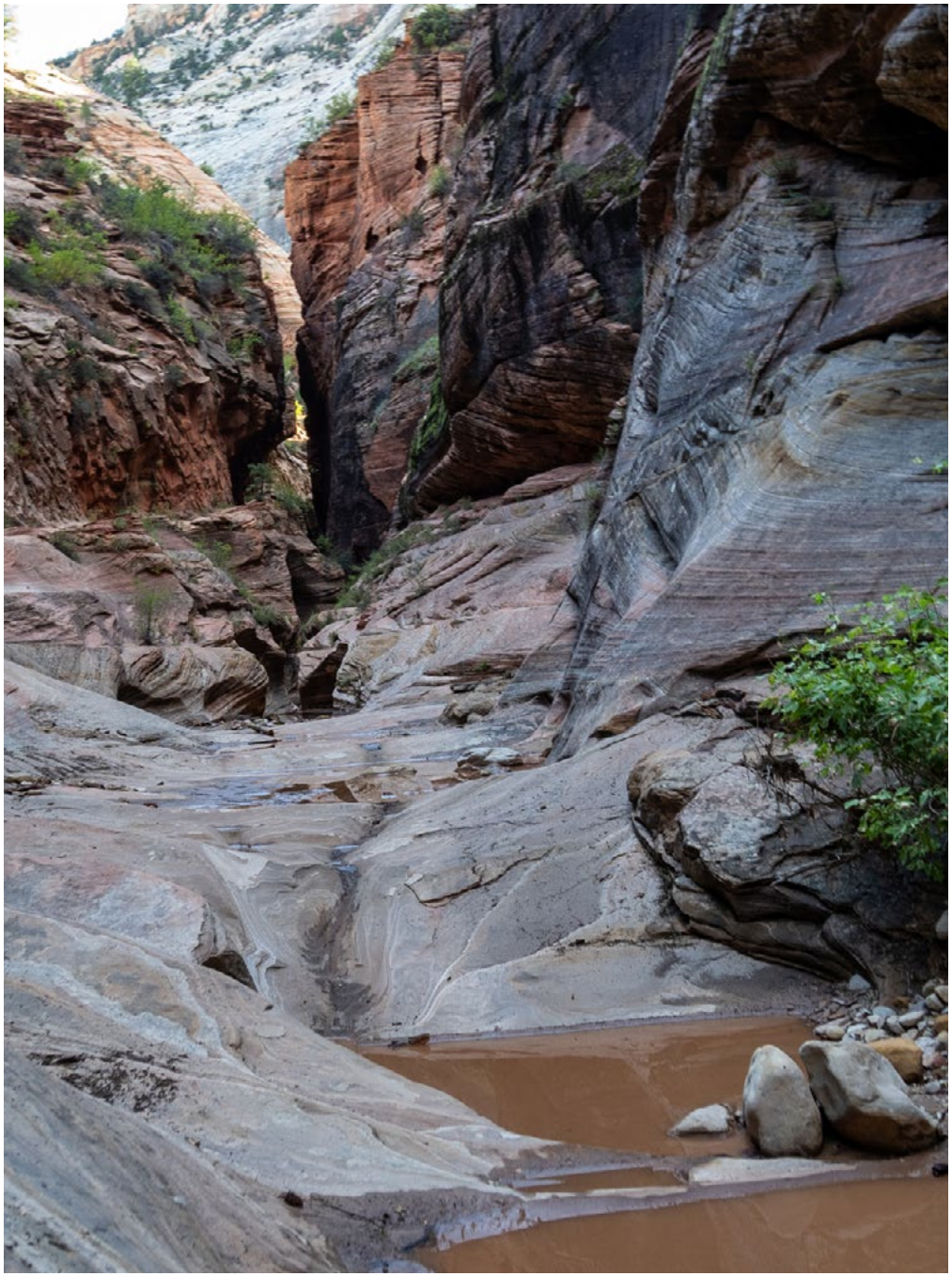
To combat depopulation through the fusion of art, culture, tradition and nature, creating a municipality with artistic and cultural tourist attractions.

ACTIVITY:

It began as an initiative of the current mayor, but in order to give it continuity in the face of changes of government, the Foundation was created. It is the only inhabited museum town in the world, which has strengthened its identity and the roots of the residents, who are also the inspiration for the works of art exhibited in the streets every day. In this way, quality tourism is created, which is seasonally adjusted and spreads throughout the entire municipality. Along with the visitors, the different artists also come to create their works, which promotes the commercial and economic activity of the municipality.

RESULTS:

- 20,508 visitors in one year in the central museum.
- More than 180 artists have left their mark. Inclusion in the ranking of the Observatory of Culture (La Fábrica), rubbing shoulders with other heritage assets such as the Alhambra.
- Population recovery and, for the first time, an increase in the number of children enrolled in school.
- Fibre optic installation and road improvements
- Creation of two new restaurants (one of them vegan) and new accommodation offers.
- At least 8 new jobs. Initiative replicated in the EU framework.



Jáchal Tierra Adentro

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	Foundation and AAVV company
LOCATION:	Argentina
YEAR OF BIRTH:	2021

OBJETIVE:

To give value and identity to Jachal, an emerging destination where rural tourism can be a driving force for development. After planning, they work with local actors and institutions for the co-creation of initiatives in small communities for the provision of tourism services, mainly focused on the practice of ancestral crafts.

ACTIVITY:

Community-based tourism association made up of small tourism entrepreneurs that seeks to strengthen the small villages in the area by giving them visibility through tourism. In this way, they generate tourism experiences and products, strengthening small associative groups, especially formed by women, avoiding uprooting and generating local and dignified employment. They also offer training in tourism, in order to professionalise the destination's growing offer.

RESULTS:

- A thousand visits in a remote village of 100 inhabitants.
- Creation of self-employment, especially for women in vulnerable situations.
- The project has achieved joint and coordinated grouping and action, which has also been replicated in other nearby villages.
- The Internet has been installed and new roads have been opened that connect municipalities.
- They have trained the community so that they can disseminate their services on social networks, as well as training in tourist services.

Escuela de Herreros

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	SL Company
PLACE:	Toledo, Spain
YEAR OF BIRTH:	2012
WEBSITE:	ramonrecuero.com

OBJETIVO:

To give value and identity to Jachal, an emerging destination where rural tourism can be a driving force for development. After planning, they work with local actors and institutions for the co-creation of initiatives in small communities for the provision of tourism services, mainly focused on the practice of ancestral crafts.

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Mama Uma

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	SL Company
LOCTION:	Ecuador
YEAR OF BIRTH:	2016
WEBSITE:	mamaumatravel.com

OBJETIVE:

Creation of tourism for the next generation. Promotion of a conscious tourism for destinations and visitors through the approach to Ecuadorian ancestral knowledge.

ACTIVITY:

Creation of tourism activities with the participation of local indigenous communities based on local ancestral culture and values. They offer trekking guides and forest school, promoting an active and experiential education through tourism.

RESULTS:

- More than 400 mothers and their children have visited 16 rural destinations.
- Co-creation of tourism activities with the local indigenous population.
- Training in communication and social networks for the indigenous women who provide the activities. Training of children in relation to local culture and nature.
- Opening of accesses and a path to an ancestral space.
- Creation of 8 self-emloyment for several indigenous women and generation of synergies between them.
- Creation of connections between suppliers of tourist experiences and demands.
- Support for 12 young people in the territory.
- Contribution to the maintenane and improvement of very basic services such as drinking water and energy.

Abriendo Pueblos by T-Guío

TYPE OF PROMOTER ENTITY:	Self employed
LOCATION:	Maestrazgo, Spain
YEAR OF BIRTH:	2018
WEBSITE:	abriendo-pueblos.com

OBJETIVE:

To show Maestrazgo (Teruel) and its villages and landscapes in a different way, providing access to places that are not always open, thus giving visibility to a surprising and unknown part of the hidden heritage of the region.

ACTIVITY:

Generation of a la carte guided tours of the localities of Maestrazgo. The promoter has reached an agreement with the different mayors of the area to hand over the keys to the most important resources of the territory (which are closed), so that they can be visited.

RESULS:

- Around 400 visits per year
- The activity helps to maintain minimum services and heritage elements in some towns, in others it simply gives them visibility, but in any case, the local population feels valued and is encouraged to preserve their heritage.
- It collaborates with different businesses in the area for the execution of their activities, especially bars and restaurants.
- The initiative helps tourism to be seen in a different way in places that have so far been very preserved.

CATEGORY II

Managing depopulation

CATEGORY II - MANAGING DEPOPULATION

Recartografías

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	Non-profit association for research and territorial action. Academic
LOCATION:	Teruel, Spain
YEAR OF BIRTH:	2013
WEBSITE:	www.recartografias.es

OBJETIVE:

To raise awareness of the problem of rural depopulation from a proactive point of view and to offer solutions for the development of rural areas through land stewardship and tourism.

ACTIVITY:

They use endogenous heritage and intangible values as tourist activities offered by residents in community with visitors (craftsmen, gastronomy...). They work through the custody of the territory, restoring and revitalising the abandoned village and its dilapidated buildings. They offer tourist, cultural and interactive activities, workshops and training talks in different formats and themes, being the diversification of the cultural offer of the rural world, one of their main pillars. They also carry out research projects that allow the participation of university students, encouraging academic attention to the problem of depopulation.

RESULTS:

- Opening of the Farmhouse and Rural Memory Museum.
- In San Agustín (a village with 100 inhabitants), the number of visitors has increased from 0 in 2016 to 1,000 per year.
- In another nearby municipality, the number of residents has increased from 2 to 6.
- Two lodgings have been created for the first time, the bar has been maintained and a new business has been set up.
- Asphalting and recovery of streets and connections to other nearby municipalities, improved access by public transport.
- New building under construction. Synergies between the local community, the production of tourist activities and depopulation associations and universities.
- Creation of at least 4 jobs.

AlmaNatura

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	Foundation and S.L.
PLACE:	Spain
YEAR OF BIRTH:	2022, although in existence for more than 25 year
WEBSITE:	www.almanatura.com

OBJETIVE:

To attract new travellers that allow the revitalisation of the environment through agreements between organisations, workspaces and tourist experiences based on endogenous resources.

ACTIVITY:

AlmaNatura LAB is a rural immersion laboratory that promotes innovative, sustainable and meaningful initiatives. They carry out rural teleworking immersions in an old renovated mill in the Sierra de Huelva where they work remotely and connect with other people, local or from the work team, through participation in active tourism activities, local challenges of the population, or community work, among others. To promote rural development in the area, they have agreements with other organisations and entities such as universities, local governments and the Andalusian Institute of Historical Heritage.

RESULTS:

- Around a thousand visits per year and growing.
- 4 jobs generated, population
- Growth of 3 new families.
- 10 people in a municipality of just over 600 inhabitants with a continuous exodus.
- Creation of new tourist and transversal services in the territory, as well as promotion of the commercial activity of km0 products.
- Support for nearby municipalities that benefit from the increased influx of visitors.

Centro Expositivo ROM

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	Foundation
LOCATION:	Aguilar de Campoo, España
YEAR OF BIRTH:	2006
WEBSITE:	santamarialarealmuseorom.com

OBJETIVE:

To raise awareness of the monastery of Santa María la Real de Aguilar de Campoo and to promote the Romanesque heritage of the area (north of Palencia, south of Cantabria and northwest of Burgos) through a triple E of heritage: education, emotion and entertainment.

ACTIVITY:

Develops, publicises and safeguards the Monastery while serving as a launching point to promote Romanesque art as a tourist resource. It offers traditional guided tours with the support of new technologies, as well as dramatised tours. It is also committed to the dissemination of values through education with school visits, using new technologies, as well as different themed visits and summer camps, not only located in the Monastery, but also in different resources of its rich Romanesque and mediaeval historical heritage.

RESULTS:

- Entre 20.000 y 40.000 mil visitas anuales, con un crecimiento constante.
- Han promovido la conexión a internet del municipio y el uso de nuevas tecnologías. Ellos mismos ofrecen un bus en verano.
- La fundación ha restaurado más de 100 iglesias románicas.
- Se han formado numerosos guías en patrimonio y han creado sinergias con otros negocios y agencias de viaje para la comercialización de paquetes.
- Creación de al menos 3 puestos de empleo directo, así como oferta en formación.
- El municipio gana población no censada.

CATEGORY III

Promotion of depopulated territories

CATEGORY III - PROMOTION OF DEPOPULATED TERRITORIES

Camino del Cid

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	Public consortium
LOCATION:	Spain
YEAR OF BIRTH:	2002
PÁGINA WEB:	www.caminodelcid.org

OBJETIVE

Creation of a cultural tourist route of some 2,000 km that runs through areas of low demographic density (43% of these towns have less than 100 inhabitants, 80% suffer from depopulation), thus promoting their economic and social development.

ACTIVITY

Through the cultural route, which can be travelled on foot, by motor vehicle or bicycle and which crosses a large part of Spain, especially places with depopulation, it favours the generation of economic resources (new tourist and transversal businesses) and the consequent creation of employment; roots for residents as an attraction for visitors and the promotion of synergies between the different towns and associations that share problems and experiences.

RESULTS:

- More than 100,000 travellers and growing.
- Creation of 5 new accommodations with more than 80 beds and service companies such as bicycle repair, as well as other models of assistance on the route.
- Creation of connections and synergies between localities that share objectives and problems.
- Improvement of the infrastructures of the paths, as well as the annual signage of these.
- Dissemination of local values in the media, such as RTVE or Chanel Italia.
- Collaboration with Turespaña and other cultural routes.

Montañas Vacías

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	Private individual
LOCATION:	Teruel, Spain
YEAR OF BIRTH;	2019
WEBSITE:	www.montanasvacias.com

OBJETIVE:

To show the depopulated territory in a different way using new media and promoting cycling routes in these territories.

ACTIVITY:

Consists of a network of bicycle routes to raise awareness of the demographic situation in the mountain areas around Teruel and Guadalajara by raising awareness and enhancing the value of endogenous resources.

RESULS:

- The constant trickle of national and international visitors (5 to 10 people per day) in previously unvisited areas (30-40 villages in Teruel and Guadalajara) has allowed existing services to be maintained after the pandemic, and synergies to be created between them.
- A bar (social centre) has been reopened.
- Replication in Soria, Lleida, Mexico, Switzerland, Germany, Navarra, etc., mostly in areas with depopulation.
- Creation of 2 new jobs and maintenance of the population level.
- National and international dissemination of the depopulation situation.
- Maintenance and repair of roads and paths.

Eurovelo

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	Association, European initiative.
LOCATION:	Europe
YEAR OF BIRTH:	1997
WEBSITE:	en.eurovelo.com

OBJETIVE:

Creation of a cycling network that crosses Europe, expands and connects the various countries and areas, especially rural areas, contributing to their economic (higher average daily expenditure) and social development. It also offers an environmental perspective, as it is slow tourism and low-emission transport.

ACTIVITY:

A network of 17 long-distance cycle routes, with nearly 90,000 km of itineraries connecting and linking the entire European continent. The routes can be used by both cycle tourists and local commuters.

RESULTS:

- Although not all cyclists are accounted for (difficult due to extension and multinationality), the growth is continuous (11% compared to 2019), exceeding 180 cyclists per day in the high season.
- Creation of bicycle assistance services and picnic areas throughout the network.
- Creation of connections and infrastructures between municipalities such as in Arlene (Ireland).

Best Tourism Villages by OMT

TYPE OF PROMOTER:	Intergovernmental organisation specialised in tourism ONU
LOCATION:	Global
YEAR OF BIRTH:	2021
WEBSITE:	www.unwto.org

OBJETIVE:

To make tourism a lever for rural development. Addressing how tourism can help the Sustainable Development Goals through territorial integration and cohesion, promoting new tourism policies and demonstrating the power of tourism as an incentive.

ACTIVITY

Award an annual prize to a village that is an outstanding example of a rural tourism destination with recognised cultural and natural assets, which preserves and promotes community values, products and lifestyles with a commitment to sustainability. The initiative also includes an enhancement programme that benefits a number of villages selected from those that do not fully meet the criteria of the initiative. These villages receive support from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and its partners to improve elements of the areas identified as gaps in the process.

RESULTS

- Five of the villages are already starting to gain maturity as destinations.
- Digitalisation of the destination has taken place in villages in Andorra and Greece, in others, investment has been made in infrastructure (Government of Oman), strengthening population retention in the finalist and winning villages through the activity generated.
- Replication of the concept in India at national level.
- Diffusion in major prestigious international media.

Toolkit of winning initiatives

CATEGORY I - TOURISM SERVICES

Genalguacil Pueblo Museo

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHALLENGE

Revitalisation of environments through the generation of tourist services in depopulated areas.

INDICATORS

- Dissemination of local values and culture
- Generation of new tourist activities
- Generation of employment

CONTRIBUTION TO THE TOURISM SECTOR

Genalguacil is an example of how a small village with scarce population and resources can fight against the exodus of its young people through tourism and culture. The involvement of the residents in the works on display and the creation of community activities between visitors and residents generates an identity value and pride that has a very positive impact on the revitalisation of the territory.

Genalguacil Pueblo Museo

REPLICABILITY FRAMEWORK

DEVELOPMENT

The degree of development of the initiative is very high, also due to the length of time it has been running (more than 25 years) and the involvement of both the public and the residents from the beginning.

DOCUMENTATION

The initiative has documented the project. In addition, the different activities carried out over the years are documented on an audiovisual level.

RESOURCES

The resources needed to set up a similar project are between 100.000€ and 500.000€ and at a human level a team of between 5 and 25 people.

DEPENDENCIES

Because it is a project that uses public land for the exhibition of works, it requires support, especially at the local regulatory level, for its implementation.

TRANSFER

The documentation would be shared openly, in order to facilitate its replication in other contexts with similar characteristics.

ECOSYSTEM

As this is a project that involves the participation of various local actors to ensure its success, it requires that the actors are willing to take an active role.

REPLICABLE ELEMENTS

IDEAS

Make the municipality an open-air art museum available all year as a form of tourist attraction.

TOOLS

Having a municipality willing to transform its streets in an artistic way.

To have artists of different profiles who make and leave their works in the municipality.

To count on the participation of the local population to encourage local roots through culture and art.

WHO CAN REPLICATE

Fundamentally, local public administrations, but also county councils or larger regions that have a common project. Also a group of municipalities that want to network around a cultural project.

CATEGORY II
MANAGING DEPOPULATION

Recartografías

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHALLENGE

Revitalisation of environments through the management of territories suffering from depopulation.

INDICATORS

- Revitalisation of territories through tourist activity.
- Creation of employment
- Co creation of tourism activities with the local population

CONTRIBUTION TO THE TOURISM SECTOR

The Recartografías project seeks to reverse the phenomenon of descartrography, the process of gradual disappearance of places on maps as a result of rural decline. By developing the municipality of San Agustín as a tourist destination based on endogenous resources and local participation, they achieve their challenge, while at the same time disseminate the reality of empty Spain.

Recartografías

REPLICABILITY FRAMEWORK

DEVELOPMENT

The degree of development of the initiative is high, especially as it has been running successfully since 2013 and can be a benchmark for replication.

DOCUMENTATION

The initiative has a website where various articles on the project are published. In addition, as they are the promoters of the academic environment, they have various publications with their research.

RESOURCES

The resources needed to set up a similar project are between 25,000 euros and 100,000 euros and, in terms of human resources, a team of between 5 and 25 people.

DEPENDENCIES

As they work at a local level and make use of the territory for their development, the approval of official entities is needed to set up a similar project.

TRANSFER

In order to encourage the creation of similar models to help other territories, the initiative leaves its documentation open.

ECOSYSTEM

By working in environments with a very small population, a project of these characteristics requires that the actors, both public and private, are willing to assume a very active role.

ELEMENTOS REPLICABLES

IDEAS

Use of endogenous values to raise awareness of the demographic, economic and social situation of the territory.

TOOLS

Generation and development of land stewardship system.

Synergies with the local community for the production of tourist activities.

Actions to disseminate the activity.

WHO CAN REPLICATE

Public and private entities willing to work in collaboration to promote land stewardship activities by developing co created activities together with the local population.

CATEGORY III
PROMOTION OF DEPOPULATERRITORIES

Camino del Cid

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHALLENGE

Revitalización de entornos a través de la promoción de territorios en despoblación.

INDICATORS

- Exponential growth of visitors
- Increase and creation of new tourist services
- Actions to disseminate local values and heritage

CONTRIBUTION TO THE TOURISM SECTOR

Camino del Cid is a project more than 20 years old which, through literary culture, offers different trails that can be travelled by vehicle or on foot, through areas with a high level of depopulation. In order to meet the needs of hikers, new services have been created, generating employment and new economic activities, making these territories more dynamic.

Camino del Cid

REPLICABILITY FRAMEWORK

DEVELOPMENT

After more than 20 years, the project is a reference for the creation of similar routes that pass through territories suffering from depopulation.

DOCUMENTATION

The initiative is partially documented. Specifically, its website contains all the information on the different routes, modalities and services, as well as the origin and development of the Camino del Cid.

RESOURCES

The resources needed to set up a similar project are between 25,000 euros and 100,000 euros and at the human level a team of less than 5 people.

DEPENDENCIES

Due to the fact that this route passes through different territories, it needs, for example, adequate signposting. In addition, to set up a similar project, the approval of various official bodies is needed.

TRANSFER

PIn order to encourage the creation of similar routes that have a positive impact on the territory, the documentation would be left open to all.

ECOSYSTEM

Because of the complexity of a project that articulates multiple municipalities and activates tourism services, a high level of involvement is needed at both public and private levels.

Replicable elements

IDEAS

Utilización de un territorio con huella cultural y baja densidad demográfica para la generación de rutas turísticas que los revitalicen.

TOOLS

- Cultural footprint (literary, mythological, cultural, etc.)
- Support to local communities through information and support for the generation of economic activities that meet the needs of travellers.
- Development of tools that add value (certified trails, app signage, safe conduct, stamps, etc.)

WHO CAN REPLICATE

Local public bodies in collaboration with private entities that, autonomously or in consortium, and based on cultural, artistic or anthropological characteristics, generate properly oriented and signposted routes.

PART IV

Conclusions

Conclusions

TERRITORIES TO LIVE IN AND TO VISIT

As this report has shown, depopulation, far from being only a local problem, is a global issue. The concentration of population in large cities, at a time of continuous growth of inhabitants worldwide, presents various problems that require actions with a broad and joint vision.

This is due to the fact that in territories (countries, regions...) made up of multiple areas with little population balance, it is necessary to have a depopulation perspective when implementing regulations. In other words, creating laws that focus solely on large population centres means that other centres with other needs receive an undesired impact. For this reason, **it is essential to assess the impact on these less favoured areas when regulating.** All of this is described in the Spanish Government's National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge, where depopulation was declared as an issue of special relevance for the country and measures were put in place to legislate for equal opportunities.

On the other hand, as described throughout the report, and with a view to reversing the downward spiral, **one of the first steps to be taken is to promote the creation of opportunities at local level in these areas suffering from depopulation.** To this end, the creation of a suitable environment is one of the keys. This translates, among other factors, into public policies that foster the creation of value in these territories.

Such is the case in Spain, as described in previous points, of **Castilla La Mancha,** an Autonomous Community that exemplifies an appropriate, holistic and forward-looking level of action. Although it is not the only case in the country, **it represents such a knowledge base that has led Europe and the OECD to look at the measures carried out.**

On the other hand, another of the basic factors that can help to set the growth spiral in motion is a change of mentality. To this end, the

fight at all levels against the social and cultural factors described in its dedicated section is essential in order to settle the existing population in these territories. This, in turn, is another of the objectives of the aforementioned National Strategy for the Demographic Challenge.

As has been demonstrated by the winning and finalist initiatives in this edition, when opportunities and a change of mentality are combined, the result is an essential first step towards population settlement and subsequent growth. Here it is worth noting that the more collective a project is, i.e. **the more local people it includes, the more resilient it can be.** This is due to both the greater involvement of residents and the lesser dependence on individuals for its continuity. Such is the case, for example, of Genalguacil, Pueblo Museo.

This initiative, like the other winners and finalists of this edition, shows that **tourism can be a key player and can contribute positively and sustainably to population growth through the creation of opportunities,** demonstrating that the rural environment can also be attractive, both for visiting and living, and that it is a **very powerful tool to halt the downward spiral of decline and start the spiral of growth.**

Although there is still a long way to go, this report shows that analysing the different causes of a problem, understanding the current and potential consequences and highlighting actions carried out, both public and private, that are working and can be replicated, either through adoption or adaptation, is a way forward. This is interesting, at least in terms of **alleviating a problem that is as much a problem for those who live in those environments that suffer depopulation as it is for others who suffer overpopulation.**

PART V

Repository of initiatives from previous editions of FiturNext

FITURNEXT 2020 CHALLENGE:

How tourism can contribute to local economic development

WINNERS

Apadrina un Olivo.
Fundación Starlight.
Soap for Hope.

FINALIST

Vías Verdes.
Local Alike.
Pichaeats.
Fundación Yetapá.
Taste of Fethiye.
NotOnMap.
Totonal.
Plan Wallata.
Favela Tour.

FITURNEXT 2021 CHALLENGE:

How tourism can contribute to gender equality

WINNERS

Afrikable.
Women in Travel.
Fundación Codespa.

FINALIST

Open Eyes Project.
Active Woman.
RaizUp.
Women in eTravel.
Equality Tourism.
Fundación Santander (Best Africa).
Fundación EnVía.
Fundación Barceló.
ASEET.

FITURNEXT 2022 CHALLENGE:

How tourism can contribute to a more accessible society

WINNERS

TUR4all (PREDIF).
Because We Care (Albastar).
Programa de turismo inclusivo (COCEMFE).

FINALIST

On Wheels app.
Sentir el Alto Tajo.
Can Morei.
Viajeros sin límite.
Plan de turismo accesible (Dirección General Turisme Comunitat Valenciana).
Plan Turismo para Todos (Dirección de Turisme de Catalunya).
Equalitas Vitae.
Dominican Access.
Borja, con todos los sentidos.

FITURNEXT 2023 CHALLENGE:

How tourism can contribute to the regeneration of the environment

WINNERS

Plogging Tour.
Wave of Change (Grupo Iberostar y su hoja de ruta para la salud costera).
Green Pepper Travel.

FINALIST

Amazonia Emprende.
B'n'tree by click a tree.
Red de Reservas Naturales de la Sociedad Civil del Alto Ricaurte.
Quinta Saroco.
Chao plástico en el mar.
La ruta del Coral (by Procoreef).
La mar de dones.
Playa Viva & Resimar.
Camina Sostenible.

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