

Empowering local communities to contribute to the rural vision and Pact



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One of the main demands of rural communities is to be part of the decisions that affect them at the territorial, economic, social, and cultural levels. Being heard and involved in decision-making is crucial to ensuring their needs are reflected in political agendas, supporting the development of locally relevant actions that contribute to the [EU's rural vision](#). Achieving this requires promoting and implementing the Rural Pact at all levels – European, national, regional, and local.

The Policy Lab '[Bringing the Rural Pact closer to citizens](#)' of 22 May 2024 identified the necessary elements for the Pact to add value to local development. It is essential to adopt a **shared local strategic vision and implement transformative actions tailored to needs and opportunities on the ground**. These processes require inclusive structures that engage local governments, social organisations, and businesses, promoting joint decision-making.

Enhancing existing structures rather than creating new ones

The Catalan 'Landscape Charters', promoted by the governmental agency '[Landscape Observatory of Catalonia](#)', set out **common objectives, agreements, and management strategies among public and private organisations** in a supra-municipal area to enhance its landscape.

On this basis, the [Landscape Charter of the Priorat region](#) fosters a **co-creation framework** of transformative projects, which contributes to the rural vision at all levels and empowers the local community. It has provided a comprehensive **roadmap for the socio-economic development** of the rural area, fostering self-organisation on the territory, and coordination and cooperation among different actors.

LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) can play a key role here, with their **local governance structures and participatory strategies able to mobilise capacity, cooperation, and networking**. However, the LEADER governance and methodology are not useful if LAGs do not periodically update and expand their representation, strengthen relationships with territorial stakeholders, and actively participate in energising their communities. They must go beyond being simple bureaucratic offices managing funds and distributing grants.



Catalan Rural Pact working groups

Activating all governance levels

Working only at a local level is not enough. Regional and national governments must show political, technical and strategic commitment to address rural challenges and give voice to local communities. Building **spaces for co-creation and dialogue among stakeholders at all levels** is therefore crucial to prevent rural areas from being excluded from decision-making and to address widespread discontent present in many areas.

Since 2020, the [Rural Agenda of Catalonia](#) has supported a **territorial coordination space** where all stakeholders involved in rural development collaborate and work together. The governance of the [Catalan Rural Pact](#) succeeds in placing the needs of rural territories at the centre of the political agenda. This helps prioritise and coordinate public and private efforts to respond to rural needs from a broad and integrated perspective, rather than a solely sectoral one.