

# Rural Depopulation in the Pampean Region of Argentina: Intervention Model\*

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## Abstract

The depth of technological changes in the Pampas agriculture, led to the downsizing of the agricultural structure, due to the loss of producers and the decline of the population in rural areas. This article analyses this problem, and proposes a new intervention model for rural communities, incorporating the conceptual foundations of WWP (Working With People), the planning as a way of Social Learning and elements of the European initiative LEADER. In addition to the development of these principles, their application in Punta Indio and the Pampas region of Argentina is described. After a number of years since it began, its importance in articulating rural development in rural communities with depopulation problems is also highlighted.

## Keywords author:

Agricultural transformation, Pampas region, depopulation, rural villages, social learning, endogenous development, partnership.

## Keywords plus:

Agriculture, socialization, rural planning, rural development projects, endogenous development, Pampas (Argentina).

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# Despoblamiento rural en las Pampas argentinas: un modelo de intervención

## Resumen

La profundización de los cambios tecnológicos, en la agricultura pampeana conllevó un achicamiento de la estructura agraria, por la pérdida de productores, y la disminución de población en los pueblos rurales. El artículo analiza esta problemática, y propone un nuevo modelo de intervención en las comunidades rurales, incorporando las bases conceptuales del llamado WWP (Working With People), la planificación como Aprendizaje Social y elementos de la iniciativa europea LEADER. Además del desarrollo de sus fundamentos, se describe su aplicación en la localidad de Punta Indio en la Región Pampeana Argentina. Tras unos años desde su inicio, se destaca su importancia para articular desarrollo rural en comunidades rurales con problemas de despoblamiento

## Palabras clave autor:

Transformaciones agrícolas, región pampeana; despoblamiento; pueblos rurales; aprendizaje social, desarrollo endógeno, partenariatado.

## Palabras clave descriptor:

Agricultura, socialización, planificación rural, proyectos de desarrollo rural, desarrollo endógeno, Pampas (Argentina).

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# Dépopulation rurale dans les Pampas de l'Argentine: un modèle d'intervention

## Résumé

L'approfondissement des changements technologiques en agriculture, dans la pampa argentine, a produit une réduction de la structure agricole. Ceci est dû à la diminution de la population dans les régions rurales et à la perte de producteurs. L'article analyse cette problématique et propose un nouveau modèle d'intervention dans les communautés rurales, qui inclut les bases conceptuelles du WWP (Working With People), la planification comme apprentissage social et des éléments de l'initiative européenne LEADER. On fait la description de ses fondements, et aussi de son application dans la ville de "Punta Indio" dans la Région de la pampa argentine. Après quelques années d'application, on remarque son importance pour l'articulation du développement rural dans des communautés rurales ayant des problèmes de dépeuplement.

## Mots-clés auteur:

Transformations agricoles; Pampa argentine; dépeuplement; villes rurales; apprentissage social; développement endogène; partenariat.

## Mots-clés descripteur:

Agriculture, socialisation, aménagement rural, projets de développement rural, développement endogène, Pampa (Argentine).

# Introduction

The transformations in the Pampas agriculture are being responsible for rural changes, with a strong economic and social impact (Rabinovich & Torres, 2004). The agricultural effect has led to a productive concentration, disregarding the small and medium producers, and causing a decline in the rural population (Navarrete et al, 2005). The impact of these effects is focused on rural villages, where there is a lack of employment opportunities outside of the agricultural industry, combined with the changes affecting the level of employment in the farming world. This constitutes the most visible problem, causing a reduction in population, not only due to an ageing population, but also due to the loss of youngsters who look for a better location in the neighbouring towns (Gorenstein et al, 2009). The existence of these situations reinforces the idea that the way in which these issues are approached needs to change, including the rural development (Cáceres et al, 2010). This document tackles this problem, initially exploring the causes and effects of the situation, as well as the change in the focus of planning applied until now in the rural development policies, particularly for the region being studied. Subsequently, these principles are used to implement a small trial programme, which aims to tackle these issues: Intervention model for small rural communities. Later on, these fundamentals are used for the implementation of a small pilot experience at the town of Punta Indio, through the Intervention Model for Small Rural Communities that tackle this problem.

## 1. Productive agriculture model and its social effects

The changes in the Pampas agricultural sector<sup>1</sup>, over the last decades have had a significant impact amongst the social actors involved (Barsky & Gelman, 2001). In the 1990s, a new economic policy was established in Argentina. This caused a transformational change in the agricultural sector, characterised by a technological change, under the protection of political and economic circumstances (Lema & Brescia, 2001). The strong increase in the agricultural export product prices, and the widespread increase in transgenic soya cultivation led to a market deregulation

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<sup>1</sup> The Pampas region is an economic and geographical area in Argentina, which covers five provinces: Santa Fé, Entre Ríos, Córdoba, La Pampa and Buenos Aires. (Rapoport, 2000).

and improvement in infrastructure, specifically in ports, transport and communication. (Rapoport, 2000). This situation combined the view of old and new social actors: contractors and planting pools (Lódola, 2008). The process, known as agriculturalization, based on the adoption of technological packages, benefited from the actions of these actors, which favour large producers with access to capital<sup>2</sup>. The other side of the situation is personified by the small and medium producers (with limited access to capital) who often choose to leave the system, renting or selling their land (Cáceres, Soto, Ferrer, Silvetti & Bisio, 2010). Data from the INDEC-CNA compared between 1988 and 2002 in the Pampas region demonstrates the problem. In this period, 29% of the agricultural operations (EAPs), between 50 and 200 hectares, have been lost. In contrast, there was an increase in the average size of the farm size from 400 to 533 hectares, as well as those larger than 1000 hectares.

This restructuring during the 1990s has also led other transformations, such as the closing down of the railways<sup>3</sup>, leaving hundreds of inland villages isolated<sup>4</sup> across the country. The railways were a symbol of Argentina, which allowed the inaccessible areas to be connected across this vast country. As a result, it had a strong link to social and agricultural development, especially in the Pampas region (Rapoport, 2000). The decision to close down thousands of kilometres of tracks and make thousands of employees redundant (72,261 employees between 1990 and 1998), left a large dent across society, especially in rural areas due to the effects it created (Veschi, Silva & Nieva, 2000).

The landscape of the Pampas region is formed of around 800 rural villages with less than 2,000 inhabitants, of which 462 are at risk of disappearing. This figure is based on a comparison of the population census of 1991 and 2001 (Benitez, 2005). The important links between these rural communities (villages/towns) and agricultural activity, has defined the destiny of many of these, acting as a thermometer of the changes experienced (Sili, 2005). In many cases, the lack of new employment opportunities (not agricultural), combined with the changes that affect the levels of employment (family and salary) in the farming sector, are the most visible problems

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2 In general, “planting pools” receive funding and due to the high profitability of transgenic soya production, rent their land as an outsource production activity.

3 Argentina had the most extensive rail network in Latin America with 36,164 km. With the reforms of the 1990s, the active rail network was reduced to 8,339 km (Veschi & Nieva, 2000)

4 INDEC (2001) defines rural as “the combined population of villages or towns with a total population of less than 2,000 people and the dispersed population in the countryside”

in the smallest villages, which are going through a crisis period due to the lack of economic activity. This causes depopulation, not only due to the ageing of the population, but also due to the fact that the young people are leaving in order to find a better future in cities (Gorenstein, Napal & Barbero, 2009). It is important to highlight the observations that students make in rural villages<sup>5</sup> which summarises the problem: *“There are many people that resist in the villages, who don’t want to abandon their roots or forget their history, people who do not want to abandon their land. The effects of agriculturization led to, amongst other things, the land ownership being spread across fewer people: economic groups, work pools and large landowners. This has become overwhelming, as it destroys biodiversity and rural employment”* (Dirección General de Cultura y Educación, 2006, p.7).

A quick glance allows us to understand the disequilibrium that has historically marked the evolution of agriculture in this region, which far from disappearing or tempering, has increased in recent times. Somehow, the rural development (DR) policies introduced in Argentina in the last two decades did not achieve the stated objectives or as such did not address the problems facing the Pampas region (Carballo González, 2009; Cáceres et al, 2010). For some authors (Manzanal, 2006; Posada, 1999, Carballo González, 2009) DR in Argentina has always been linked to policies for poor rural sectors outside of the Pampas region. Posada (1999), states that DR is a process, a way of working for a productive progress, improving standards of living for the rural population and strengthening society and democracy. Sili (2005), relates this to a rural transformation process arising from the organisation and involvement of the territory (adopted by the INTA 2007: “Focus of territorial rural development”). This situation encourages us to find new ways of tackling DR in the region, focusing on finding Solutions for this problem. On this basis, the application of an *Intervention model for small rural communities* is proposed.

## 2. Application of a new planning focus for rural development

The planning of development in Latin America has often conflicted with the economic or political instability of its governments, as well as with inherent elements of the governmental activity itself, which has prevented the achievement

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5 CEPT N° 13 (2006). The project refers to the students of the N° 13 - Paraje “El Billar” Educational Centre in the Carlos Casares area of Buenos Aires (Pampas region). Retrieved on August 22, 2006. For more information <http://www.juventudrural.org.ar/articulos/art003.pdf>

of some of its objectives (Downes, 2001). Farrell (1979) indicates some of the most important objectives: 1) The lack of control in key sectors of the economy, which is necessary in order to achieve an effective planning. 2) The nature and direction of the political leadership, which often lacks of technical and entrepreneurial skills required for implementing development processes. 3) The lack of suitable organisational structures and lack of participation amongst the population in the planning process. 4) The limited knowledge based on which decisions are made. 5) The shortage of personnel and lack of technical knowledge with regards to planning, implementation and management, and 6) The inefficiencies in terms of creating effective development strategies. Jainarain (1976) also states that development planning in these areas often suffers from the consequences of excessive institutional centralisation and the lack of future planning.

The centralist view has shaped, amongst many other actions, a rural development in Argentina, developed under the comparative advantages of the Pampas region for agricultural production (Caracciolo de Basco, 2003). This is a model which is characterised by its technological adaptation in order to maximise yield, leading to productive concentration, in contrast to the Argentinean rural social security system which faces threats related to the low social indexes and distribution problems (Navarrete et al, 2005). The constant loss of producers and rural population reinforces the need to change of approach, not only the decrease in human resources, but also social capital and cultural identity (Carballo González, 2009). For Cazorla, De los Ríos & Salvo (2007) this is a planning model, in line with what has been done in other places in the last century, characterised by its technical-scientific nature and political criteria. This is referred to internationally as the: Class Planning Model (Friedmann, 1991).

In the last century the idea of planning has had many nuances, linked to intellectual thinking and the evolution of the concept of development. The new concepts, based on mankind's integral objectives, created a new vision with regards to planning. Various studies, amongst which J. Friedmann's stands out, would be transformed into undisputed references, from a new way of planning with a critical aspect, to development focused solely on economic growth (Cazorla et al, 2007). The needs of the population can be interpreted as mutual and morally acceptable requirements, where planning can be understood as a feasible problem-solving process, in order to meet current and future needs (Friedman, 1991). This is where the concept of social learning arises. The crucial element of social learning is that learning and practical work are considered as simultaneous processes, in that one

process involves the other. The knowledge gained from the experience is validated in the practical work and is an integral part of the activity. Its main assumption is that all the effective learning comes from the change experience: the population affected actively participate in planning, in order to validate the knowledge gained and provide a mutual learning between the planning expert (Cazorla & Friedmann, 1995).

### 3. Methodology

The methodology used is based on research, participative action and the criteria established in the planning model as social learning, in order to analyse local communities. Through this framework, a dialogue with the population is proposed, using the participative mechanisms that allow a critical reflection process of the everyday life, finding problems, their causes and effects. The work was also carried out with different areas of the Leader initiative (territorial focus, bottom-up focus, creating local action groups, innovation, and integrated and multi-sector focus) as a methodological part of tackling the problems faced by the rural communities. The fieldwork covered the area of Punta Indio Town. This was decided because the detected problem is similar to the ones of many other rural villages of the region (lack or shortage of job sources, lack of formative options with job possibilities, and the poor provision or lack of adequate basic services) mainly affecting the young people that look for a better future at the urban centers. During this work, methodological tools were used to enable quantitative and qualitative information to be collected. In the analysis of the data collected there was a focus on the main socio-productive processes that contribute to the problem in question. In order to achieve this, a phased approach was used which shaped the process and achieved a coordinated and evolving implementation of the study: (I) Organisation. (II) Territorial Diagnostic. (III) New Institutionalisation. (IV) Strategy design. (V) Application. (VI) Evaluation. The proposed model is aligned with the concept of Working With People (WWP), and is understood as the professional practice in the context of rural development, implemented by a team aiming to connect knowledge and action through a common project. In addition to the technical value of production (goods and services that are generated), it mainly incorporates the value of people involved who participate and carry out the project work (Cazorla, De los Ríos & Yagüe, 2011).

## 4. Research Location

The pilot project's work was carried out in the town of Punta Indio, in the province of Buenos Aires, Republic of Argentina. This belongs to the administrative area<sup>6</sup> of Punta Indio<sup>7</sup>, located 160 kilometres south of Buenos Aires on the 'La Plata' river. The town has a permanent population<sup>8</sup> of 660 residents (INDEC, 2001). The economy is mainly based on the agricultural activity, primarily livestock (cattle rearing). There is very little activity in the industrial sector, and the service industry is hardly developed. The activity is mainly agricultural, although the tourist industry is showing clear signs of growth. In particular, it is worth to mention that this tourism is centred within the limits of the 'Parque Costero del Sur'<sup>9</sup>. However, in the same way that it is affecting other villages, the lack of employment and incentives has led to many residents (especially young people) to leave for a better future in urban centres.

CHART 1. Evolution of the population in the Punta Indio administrative area

TOWNS IN THE PUNTA INDIO ADMINISTRATIVE AREA	CENSUS PERIODS		
	1980	1991	2001
Verónica	5657	5138	5772
Pipinas	875	1172	1020
Punta Indio	767	722	666
Dispersed rural population	4449	3060	1857

SOURCE: INDEC (1980,1991,2001). National Census (Population, Households and Housing)

Chart 1 shows the population trends in the three main towns in Punta Indio, as well as the remote population (rural dispersal), based on data from the last three-population census.

The survey carried out amongst the population<sup>10</sup>, highlights that the main problem is linked to the lack of opportunities for young people, which represents a 68%

6 In the majority of the provincial states in Argentina, the secondary territorial division is the administrative area. Each area also has a main town or capital, which in this case is the town of Verónica.

7 The area of Punta Indio is 1550 km<sup>2</sup> and is divided into three sections, with Verónica being the capital, and alongside Pipinas and Punta del Indio, these are the most populated areas.

8 "Permament residents" are referred to as there are people who live elsewhere and just come for holidays or long weekends as they often have holiday homes.

9 Parque Costero Sur was declared a global biosphere reserve on the 8th December 1984. It covers a costal area of over 70km in length and an average width of 5km.

10 Surveys carried out with youngsters in rural areas (aged between 12-18) and adult population over 18 years of age. The methodology used a stratified sample and its proportional allocation had a confidence

of cases. The main reasons include: the lack of suitable employment opportunities, for their life expectancy, the lack of secondary or higher education opportunities leading to employment prospects and; the inadequate provision or lack of basic services: phones, Internet, suitable roads, transport services, health services. The lack of suitable infrastructure is also apparent, dirt tracks make it difficult to move around, study, go shopping, run errands, attend health appointments, and the nearest towns of Verónica or Magdalena are located over 20 kilometres away.

## 5. Activity in the selected territory

### 5.1. Territorial focus

According to Vázquez Barquero (2007), a territory is a geographical space, with certain characteristics that give it an identity and not a mere geographical support of resources and economical activity. The initial activities carried out in the research zone were focused on visualising the geographic dimension from a physical, economic and social perspective, with the purpose of defining a development strategy. In order to achieve this, workshops were carried out with focus groups and meetings took place with the local representatives in Punta Indio and its neighbouring communities (Chart 2): Verónica, Pipinas<sup>11</sup>. This research allowed us to visualise the general problems in the area. The research methods applied: semi-structured surveys, interviews with key people, group dynamics and SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), allowed us to understand the actual situation in the area and subsequently formulate a development strategy.

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level of 99%, with a maximum tolerance level of  $\pm 3\%$ . The distribution of the sample was carried out according to the population centre and differentiating the adult and child population. Of the 33 surveys carried out, 72.72% involve students in secondary education, 15.15% are not currently studying and 12.12% are studying a university degree outside of the region. Of the 47 adults surveyed, 59.57% were male and 40.43% female.

<sup>11</sup> The workshops carried out in the town of Verónica (9/07/2007), Pipina (04/09/2007) and Punta Indio (24/11/2007) involved institutions, people linked to different sectors of the economy, including amongst others: Rural Extension Agency INTA Chascomús; Rural Society of Punta Indio; dozens of primary schools; Regional Authorities of the Schools and Culture Department of Buenos Aires Province; beekeepers association; councilors from parties with political representation in Punta Indio; Chamber of Commerce; Municipal Authorities; representatives from cooperatives; representatives from associations and residents groups.

CHART 2. Main problems identified by the different workshops carried out

MAIN PROBLEMS LINKED TO THE PUNTA INDIO ADMINISTRATIVE AREA	
Tourism in the administrative area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no strategy for developing tourism that links the various projects within the area.</li> <li>• It is possible (and necessary) to work in a different regional or zone cell.</li> <li>• There is a lack of suitable basic infrastructure for tourism development.</li> </ul>
Agricultural activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farming activity is one of the region's strengths, although it is not recognised as such.</li> <li>• Stimulate the rearing of pigs and generating added value (sausages), linked to tourism. Address sanitary problems, in order to guarantee the quality of products.</li> <li>• Support is required for apicultural producers in the area in order to value their production.</li> <li>• There are no dairy farms left. There are small-scale producers, making homemade products. Regulation and support conditions are required.</li> <li>• It is difficult for small producers to access to financial support.</li> </ul>
PROBLEMS LINKED TO PUNTA INDIO	
Training options for young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of employment opportunities in villages.</li> <li>• Limited formal and informal training opportunities.</li> <li>• Young couples also search for work elsewhere, as they cannot find work in the village that meets their needs and expectations for personal development.</li> <li>• The lack of employment opportunities in certain professions is also highlighted. People from the countryside complain that there is a lack of people who know how to work in the countryside (farm work).</li> </ul>
Complementary economic activity in the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination of the area's most important activities: tourism, farming, and agriculture.</li> <li>• It is crucial to develop a tourism programme for Punta Indio with all of the agents involved, rather than just an individual effort, as is currently the case.</li> <li>• The development of a tourism plan will stimulate entrepreneurship, complementing local tourism activity.</li> </ul>
Structural deficiencies in the administrative area, affecting tourism development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revitalise the Parque Costero Sur: in general, the village's population do not recognise the importance of this park and are not aware of it.</li> <li>• Form a commission, which can manage the Parque Costero Sur, given that there is currently very little involvement from the local, provincial and national government.</li> </ul>
Lack of plan for basic development in Punta Indio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the problems facing Punta Indio is the general lack of services: there are no tarmac roads to reach the towns of Verónica or Magdalena, there is no service station, no natural gas, there are problems with the internet service and the power system is not adequate. There are also problems with the cable TV service.</li> <li>• It is important to agree an urban planning strategy for the town, given the possibility of new buildings and the fact that it is part of the Parque Costero Sur.</li> </ul>

SOURCE: the Authors

## 5.2. Bottom-Up Focus

A bottom-up focus is talked about when policies emerge from the population itself, through to the top, allowing the people involved to participate through inclusive tools. This acts as a catalyst for the process by providing an opportunity for the people to analyse their own problems (Vázquez Barquero, 2007, Cazorla et al. 2005, Arocena, 1995). This way of working has been an important element of this experience, as different participation methodologies were used (interviews with key people, informal group discussions, workshops (general and specific), brainstorming, surveys), allowing the community to understand the development priorities and ensure that the solutions are identified, analysed, and implemented by themselves. The use of these instruments enabled the community to feel represented and interact through the social learning mechanism, “learning by doing”, with regards to the creation and implementation of a development strategy in their region (Cazorla et al. 2004).

## 5.3. Creation of a new institutionalisation (partnership) local action group

The territorial vision adopts a multidisciplinary perspective, combining a wide range of aspects (social, economic, political) in the development process (Vázquez Barquero, 2007). This approach to understand the territory is not, without conflict, often linked to the political and economic power struggle. This is also common with DR, and its actions are often subject to the disputes in this area. The practice of obtaining political votes with promises of government posts is significantly present in local areas, limiting and often determining the actors and organisations’ free rein. This makes it difficult for social organisation processes to emerge and creates its own functional approach to organisation. This all contributes to confusion among the members of the community, a social distrust, a lack of interest among participants, and certainly demobilisation (Manzanal, 2006). Therefore, the impact of these weaknesses, with regards to creating and strengthening local development experiences, discourages these initiatives from being spontaneous or experimental. As such, the creation and institutional strengthening become one of the foundations for promoting and coordinating the local development in the region (Ferraro, 2003). For these reasons, creating a new institutionalisation (local action group), that is not exposed to these flaws and can manage development, is one of the key challenges of this proposal.

The fieldwork helped to bring actors together and raise awareness amongst them, based on a participative territorial diagnostic. The use of tools that enabled: the territory's problems and opportunities to be prioritised, available resources to be identified, key development factors to be identified, and to reach to an agreement with regards to the prioritisation of development initiatives. The analysis consisted on organising the main socio-productive processes into subcategories: i) general aspects, ii) farming sector, iii) environment, iv) trade, v) tourism, vi) associativism, vii) craftsmanship, viii) cultural heritage. Based on the output of the themed workshops (organised by the above themes), a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) was carried out on the different socio-productive sectors in Punta Indio. As a result, the tools and processes used formed the foundations for the creation of a Development Strategy for Punta Indio, which includes: priority areas of focus, guidelines, and specific development activity/projects to be achieved. The comprehensive announcement of the creation of the Social Action Group was made during a working meeting: *"In the town of Punta Indio, in the administrative area of Punta Indio on the 22nd April 2009, people are gathered whose names, addresses, and identification numbers appear on the payroll, in order to establish a not-for-profit Civil Association, as well as to approve a social statute which will govern the entity and appoint its authorities, including..."* as stated in the Constitutional Agreement of the Local Action Group (GAL) and with the vote of all those who were present, in accordance with what is stated in the legal status statutes in the Province of Buenos Aires, members of the Management Committee (eight members) and Audit Committee (four members) were selected. Furthermore, a majority vote agreed to appoint the local action group: "Amigos del Parque Costero Sur". Its main objective is to exploit the Punta Indio region, aspiring to achieve economic and human development, in harmony with the surroundings, to ensure the conservation of the environment. In order to achieve this, several actions were carried out with the community of Punta Indio, with the purpose of creating a long-term, endogenous and participatory local development strategy.

## 5.4. An innovative approach

An innovation is defined as creating something new, that provides new solutions to problems and responds to the needs of individuals and society (Gómez Muñoz, 1986). The implementation of a development strategy in Punta Indio involves a set of productive support or ideas that can provide new solutions to old problems. The objective of the chosen projects is to promote local products or activities. Therefore,

certain actions were prioritised, based on the following criteria: a) the possibility of finding technical support, b) technical-economic cooperation with the producer (GAL provides advice, minimal investment and the producer), c) training projects linked to the environment and tourism development, and d) projects linked to the identity of Punta Indio. The actors selected for these projects were residents of Punta Indio, meeting the following criteria: 1) they presented a feasible development project, 2) they demonstrated an interest in development activity, 3) they accepted some kind of technical advice and/or, 4) they decided to be part of this pilot programme. When GAL made the announcement, a total of 27 projects were submitted. Many were not feasible at that time due to their high cost or because they did not meet the required criteria. At this initial stage, 18 projects were selected and work began by the half of 2009 and the first few months of 2010.

The projects: Design and construction of an interactive centre and themed museum in the Parque Costero Sur, 2) creation of a nursery for native plants, 3) improvements in tourism signage and brochure design, 4) creation of a zone map of historical tourist sites, 5) drafting and organising a calendar of local festivities and creating a Website, 6) creation of a Tourist Information Centre, 7) Improvements to coastal resorts, 8) growing aromatic plants, 9) growing mushrooms, 10) production of clay handicrafts, 11) production of organic horticulture, 12) beekeeping, 13) compost production, 14) tree nursery: programme for youngsters aged 12-17, 15) pottery workshop: (7 people), 16: weaving (10 people); 17) wood carving (8 people); 18) creation of a centre for training in alternative activities in Punta Indio. There are many projects that are carried out thanks to agreements between GAL and various institutions (both national and local). The UNLP<sup>12</sup> is an example of this.

Through its various faculties in the region, it provides educational or technical support for carrying out workshops or consultancy. These include: Faculty of Natural Sciences and Museums; Faculty of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences; the Economic Science Faculty's Tourism degree. However, in addition to the support of the UNLP's experts, there has been a strong support from the Punta Indio Town Council, who have financed some projects or managed a local funding programme. For example, in the case of the tree nursery, which works with the "Programa Jóvenes" (youth programme). Another example is the funding of teachers who provide occupational workshops, with funding from local programmes.

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12 Universidad Nacional de La Plata (National University, La Plata)

## 5.5. Integrated, multi-sector focus

Various authors (Saraceno, 2001; INTA, 2007) agree that this focus is a key aspect of rural development, as it enables an integrated, social and economic view of the territory. This highlights the need to support rural development with an integrated territorial offer, allowing the population to remain in the rural environment. This includes an improvement in infrastructure, basic facilities and services. Chart 3 summarises the GAL projects that have been implemented, categorised by functional area and quantified in terms of actors involved (people from Punta Indio involved in the projects).

Chart 3. Summary of projects implemented by GAL in Punta Indio

TYPE OF PROJECTS MANAGED BY THE GAL	PROJECTS		ACTORS INVOLVED (PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE PROJECTS)	
	Nº	%	Nº	%
Protection and conservation of the environment, treatment of places of interest in Punta Indio	2	11	10	11
Valuation of heritage tourism	5	28	15	15
Evaluation of local production	6	33	20	21
Training and development	5	28	51	53
Total	18	100	96	100

SOURCE: The Authors

## 5.6. Funding and Management

It is important to mention that this study was a pilot, as if there is a desire to implement all of its aspects, the intention is to carry out a feasibility study across the rural areas of this region. This explanation is important as there is no doubt that obtaining funding has been the main difficulty with implementing this model, given that there is no national or local programme that systematically allocates funding to the GALs (or similar groups), so that they can drive productive development in their regions. Furthermore, the legislation in place requires that Civil Associations have been established for at least two years in order to receive funds for a set period (grants or subsidies). The GAL's Constitutional Act in Punta Indio was implemented on the 22nd April 2009, but its legal status was obtained more recently on the 11th March 2011 by Resolution D.P.P.J Nº 2785. As a result, minimal economic support was provided by

individuals who participated in the projects and by the Punta Indio Town Council. However, proposals were made for funding at all levels (local, provincial, national) and often compensating for those difficulties, contacts and agreements were established with national and provincial entities for carrying out activities.

## 6. Results

The implementation of this pilot intervention model for small towns with depopulation problems in Punta Indio has not been an easy process. We also believe that, despite the fact that we have been able to create a development strategy and start tackling certain projects, we cannot talk about its success at all. The important thing is to begin to reevaluate certain resources and the community's potential. For the process of working with people, the most important aspects have been: the creation of a development strategy in Punta Indio, the creation of a local action group "Amigos del Parque Costeros Sur", the selection and implementation of 18 projects, that benefit, employ and involve adult and young people in the area. Furthermore, another important contribution of this model is the legal bill<sup>13</sup> (D-1006/10-II-0) about "*the creation of a programme for implementing development processes in the rural areas of the Province of Buenos Aires (PRODERBA)*". This has a parliamentary state in the Chamber of Deputies in the Province of Buenos Aires and has been a genuine product of this model. Its existence has facilitated a wider coverage (in the press) and discussion (journals, workshops, debates) on the subject of tackling the problems facing rural villages in the Province of Buenos Aires.

## Conclusions

The transformation in agriculture has had a huge impact in rural villages, where the lack of new opportunities has led to the ongoing decrease in population. The experience of the pilot intervention model in rural communities aims to tackle this problem. Its application has not been exempt from adjustments and improvements, but this allowed us to take an important step to face up to reality. The process has allowed us to make a number of conclusions and recommendations for future applications: 1) The model shows itself as a vehicle for articulating development in rural villages. 2) The methodology enables the

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.hcdiputados-ba.gov.ar/>

community to participate in different stages. 3) This participation motivates the population and contributes to the creation of a positive environment for implementing initiatives. 4) The importance of establishing suitable planning, from an action plan and having a multidisciplinary work group, ensures that difficulties are avoided when scheduling activities. 5) There were difficulties in achieving an equal representation of political and private groups during the creation of GAL. 6) In order to achieve a good understanding of the strategy's objectives and aims, it is necessary for the process to be supplemented by training for the participants. 7) the low budget determined the experience. 8) Transparency requires adequate coverage of all the actions carried out in the community, especially by the GAL. 9) In general, rural spaces have a wide range of representative institutions. As a result, it is important to increase participation amongst the community so that decisions are representative of the majority.

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