

## Rural Depopulation and Food Sovereignty highlighted in 10th Spanish Rural Forum for a living countryside.

Marina GUEDON - 23 March 2017



A few weeks ago, on March 3rd to 5th, I participated – as member of a consumer group and of Valencia Food Sovereignty Platform – in the X Forum for a living countryside 2017 (Foro por un mundo rural vivo 2017) held in La Venta de Contreras in Minglanilla, a small village in the heart of Spain, in Castilla region. This biennial event was organised by Plataforma Rural, a Spanish platform linked to Via Campesina that gathers rural organisations, environmentalists, NGOs, Farmers trade unions and Food

sovereignty movements. More than 350 people – farmers, rural inhabitants, mayors, but also urban consumers and activists coming from all over Spain took the opportunity to exchange on rural, food and farming challenges and to agree on proposals for the future.

Since the motto for this X Forum was “Transforming municipalities for a living countryside”, the conference started with testimonies of mayors of small villages under 500 inhabitants but also civil servants from cities who are working to establish alternative sustainable solutions. The reality is still challenging for most of them : Lola from Carcelen explained that she and local inhabitants try to keep their natural resources clean by fighting against the building of a nuclear cemetery in the territory whereas Alfredo from Carcaboso prevented the selling of water to private companies in his region. The price to be paid for defending local communities can be high – unfair firing – but it is worth doing it, involving also urban people. “Uniting creates and gives power” Lola said. This also implicates to “work together beyond political colours on a local level” Laura from Taraveruela declared.

The recent change in the national territorial law called “Ley Montoro” is a new barrier for these small municipalities as it reduces their competencies and limits their capacity to invest and that in most cases means that they cannot survive Besides that, this law is an endangerment for the future of the “commons” – lands without ownership traditionally managed by local communities. But one of the biggest threats for rural Spain is depopulation. “What about redistributing population instead of distributing poverty to rural areas”, proposed Cesareo, Catielfabib’s clerk.

Participants then spread into workshops to learn, discuss and exchange on topics proposed by the organisers such as : energy sovereignty, social and solidarity economy related to food sovereignty, living countryside and new population, farmers’ rights, public services in rural areas, food sovereignty alliances in Spain, trade agreements (TTIP/CETA).

This working day ended with a group exercise that helped to identify what the main needs, challenges and visions for the rural countryside and food sovereignty in Spain were. This exercise helped to get a clearer picture on what main strategic initiatives should be implemented within the next 2 years by participants or their organisations : “Food sovereignty actions” and “Integration of newcomers and youth in the countryside”. Other issues were also

identified as important ones ; CAP2020, Public services, TTIP – but more difficult to be worked out on local level only. There was also expressed an interest to follow on working on GMOS, Farmers rights and to include a feminist perspective in all the actions. These topics are compiled in the [Manifest](#).

But what would be a Spanish rural gathering without food and fiesta ? Everybody brought a speciality from his or her territory for the Farmers' dinner... and we enjoyed regional songs and dances. The Forum concluded with a presentation given by children sharing their learnings and proposals from their own forum (environmental activities had been organised for children) and thanks to the clown show that parodied these 3 days, the Forum ended brightly with a lot of laughter.

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**Depopulation in Spain.** Territories from Castilla, Aragon and Castilla are sadly known as the “Southern Lapony”. With less than 8 hab/km<sup>2</sup> (less than 2 in some places), these territories suffer severe depopulation. Six out of ten Spanish municipalities have less than 1000 inhabitants and an ageing population and could be considered as "endangered villages". Even if rural voices are changing the traditional motto to their children from “study and leave the village” to “study and come back here” and some initiatives like Abraza la Tierra are trying to attract population, the integration of newcomers and maintenance of young generations is still a challenge. The lack of action from the national government is one of the reasons highlighted by experts and rural associations like REDR – to maintain public services such as health centers, schools, public transport -, and although a parliamentary commission has identified [measures and priorities](#) already in 2015 , the implementation of a plan to fight depopulation is still expected. Source : [REDR](#).