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Down to Earth

First Management meetings and Kick-Off Conference

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Galician regional minister of Rural Affairs, José González Vázquez, and Down to Earth partners © Xunta de Galicia

On Thursday, 29th and Friday 30th June 2023, Down to Earth partners were in Santiago de Compostela for the Steering and Management Committees meetings and the project public Kick-Off Conference organised by lead partner **Axencia Galega de Desenvolvemento Rural** (AGADER - Galician Rural Development Agency).

Steering Committee Meeting and Management Committee Meeting

Lead partner AGADER welcomed Down to Earth partners on their premises in Santiago de Compostela on Thursday 29th for the inaugural Steering Committee and Management Committee meetings. The Steering Committee was the occasion to remind every partner organisation of the main feature of Down to Earth funding programme, **Interreg Europe**, and finalise legal aspects. Each regional partner highlighted their



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strategic motivation to cooperate in the partnership, detailed the main challenges linked with sustainable rural development they want to address though interregional cooperation and the policy instrument they intend to improve.

As part of the Management Committee, **Fundacion Juana de Vega** presented the



Down to Earth partners during the Steering and Management Committees

partnership’s methodological approach to deliver the first outputs from our work during the first semester: regional reports on “Environmental risks related with depopulation and ageing population in rural areas”. The **ISOCARP Institute** highlighted the early communication actions currently implemented, notably the launch of the project’s website and its two social media pages (Twitter and LinkedIn). Finally, the lead partner went over the administrative and financial management process that will be implementation throughout the project.

Kick-Off Conference



Kick-Off Conference © Xunta de Galicia

On Friday 30th June, Down to Earth lead partner, AGADER organised a public Kick-Off Conference to present the project to their regional stakeholders and discuss the challenges Galicia is faced with regards to sustainable rural development. The event increased the visibility of the project in Galicia and promoted interregional cooperation as a method supported by EU funding through Interreg Europe.

Following welcome words by **Inés Santé Riveira, general director of AGADER**, **José González Vázquez, Galician regional minister of Rural Affairs**, open the event with a keynote address highlighting the main challenges faced by Galicia with regards to rural abandonment, but also supporting an economic fabric that allows the agricultural sector to grow sustainably. José González pointed out the essential role of knowledge transfer and mutual learning experiences between the different European countries, recalling that what unites the Down to Earth partnership is "the interest in providing the rural areas of our respective countries with a future."



*Galician regional minister of Rural Affairs, José González Vázquez
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« We are all convinced our rural areas are strong and have strong potential »

A first panel session was moderated by **Luisa Boquete Pumar, general secretary of AGADER**, to shed light on the challenges linked with resilient rural areas. **María Gafo Gómez-Zamalloa from the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI)** of the European Commission, presented the European context for sustainable rural development, including the new Common Agricultural Policy and the EU's A long-term Vision for the Rural Areas. **Alba Vilamor from the Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO)** detailed the national context and the existing instruments that support rural areas in Spain.

Antonio Rigueiro Rodríguez (professor at the University of Santiago de Compostella), **Alberto Vázquez Sanmartin** (deputy director of Demography and Conciliation at Xunta de Galicia) and **Isaac Gomez Pineiro** (Deputy Director General of Meteorology and Climate Change in Xunta de Galicia) then delved in more details into the specific challenges Galicia is facing: land ownership fragmentation, ageing population, disaster risk management.



First panel discussion © Xunta de Galicia

Making Galician rural areas more dynamic is a complex issue, especially when we think of mobility and the demographic challenges, but rural areas are key for climate neutrality!

Following a presentation of the Down to Earth project by **José Manuel Andrade Calvo, director of the Fundacion Juana de Vega**, a second panel session featuring Down to Earth regional partners was moderated by **Alfonso Ribas Álvarez, chief research and innovation officer of Fundacion Juana de Vega**. Representatives from the 4 other regional organisations that compose the partnership (Municipality of Campobasso, MeteoRomania, Regionalverband Neckar-Alb , University of Patras, and BSC Kranj the Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska) presented challenges to sustainable rural development in their regions and the different innovative policy approaches they are

implementing to address them, providing of first overview of the interregional learning that's at the core of the Down to Earth partnership.



Second panel discussion © Xunta de Galicia

The Kick-Off Conference concluded with a lunch fostering networking between project partners and regional stakeholders and creating collaborative spaces among participants.

Stay tuned for updates from the project on our webpage and be sure to give us a follow on our new social media accounts!

Webpage: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/down-to-earth>

LinkedIn: [https:// www.linkedin.com/company/down-to-earth-eu](https://www.linkedin.com/company/down-to-earth-eu)

Twitter: https://twitter.com/Down2Earth_IRE

About Down To Earth Project

Down to Earth brings together a group of organizations from diverse European regions, each contributing their expertise in disaster risk reduction and rural development. Collectively, we firmly believe that retaining population and encouraging sustainable practices in key sectors are paramount to halting environmental deterioration and effectively mitigating risks.

Funded by **Interreg Europe**, our partnership will work in unison to identify and promote **win-win solutions**. Our primary focus lies in managing, maintaining, and enhancing practices, tools, instruments and strategies to reduce the risk and impact of environmental disasters. In doing so, we seek to create economic and social opportunities that will attract populations to rural areas.

Central to our approach is **mutual learning** through interregional exchange of experiences. By facilitating knowledge sharing among regional and local authorities, as well as relevant stakeholders from participating rural areas, we can enhance their capacity to address the challenges linked with **climate change** and **sustainable rural development!**

Down to Earth partners

