

GUIDE



ROOTS

Communicating Roots: Co-learning to improve rural resilience and governance



AGÊNCIA NACIONAL
erasmus+
PORTUGAL EDUCAÇÃO E FORMAÇÃO



Co-financed by the
European Union



CONTEXT: Together for a Common Purpose

There are many difficulties that rural areas are facing in order to create conditions that allow their inhabitants have a fulfilling life, as well as to ensure healthy ecosystems capable of sustaining life.

Many of these difficulties are common throughout Europe, such as depopulation, dismantling of the productive sector, lack of employment, low purchasing power, lack of quality basic services and environmental degradation.

Moreover, some of the major challenges of the 21st century require a healthy rural system: to safeguard food security, generate bioeconomy, promote an energy transition or generate strategies for adaptation to climate change.

CoRoots understands **rural development** as a set of initiatives and processes that respond to the multiple challenges in the respective contexts, that provide common goods, that empower communities to be active agents of land stewardship, that move towards sustainable eco-social systems, and that create resilient territories.

For the creation of innovative models in rural and marginal environments, it is crucial to take advantage of all endogenous capacities and resources. This, therefore, requires the active participation and collaboration of the social and productive sector, as well as the creation of efficient **governance** structures that guarantee social and economic balance under an environmentally sustainable system.

COMMUNICATING ROOTS: A Co-Learning Project

With this vision of rural development many methodologies have been developed in Europe over the last decades. Progress towards urgent solutions requires learning from successful experiences and promoting their dissemination and replication. It is in this spirit that the project Communicating Roots (CoRoots) was born.

CoRoots is an Erasmus+ funded project that brings together universities, research institutes, incubators and rural development organisations to share their experience in the field of social innovation for rural development, territorial resilience and governance.

These three pillars are comprehensively addressed in the approaches and methods used by the CoRoots community. It also promotes resilience strategies in the face of new climate and economic scenarios. In particular, **resilience** is understood not only as a state of resistance and/or adaptation to pressure, but also as an organising principle for communities to challenge the status quo and design alternative futures.

“ *Reciprocity is compassion well understood:
I give you this and you give me that.
Nature has a thousand instances more
of cooperation than of competitiveness.* ”

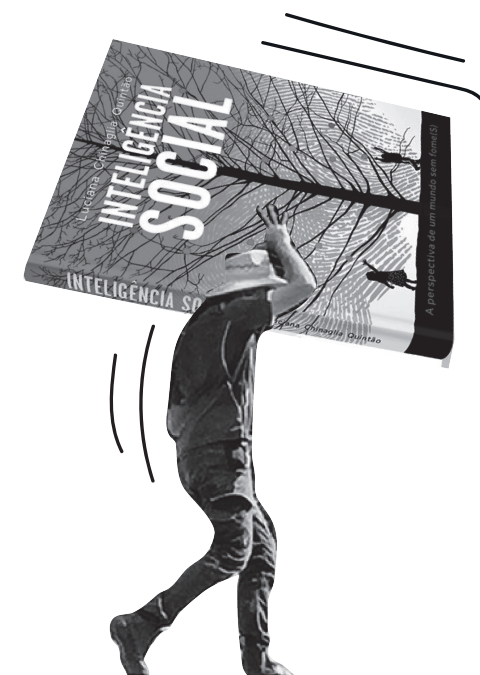
J. Araujo, 2017

Why This Guide?

This guide is the product of the collaborative work of the organisations that are part of CoRoots, and is born out of our firm commitment to share the knowledge and lessons learned during the project.

Furthermore, we hope that it will serve to facilitate the creation of synergies between European actors, as we see transnational collaboration as an opportunity to strengthen the capacity for local action.

To this end, this guide highlights the basic aspects of the approaches, methodologies and projects presented by the CoRoots Community in the exchange of good practices carried out in Austria, Spain and Portugal during the year 2023.



AN OVERVIEW: Proposals and Learnings

This guide brings together methodologies and working approaches used by CoRoots organisations. Although the objectives of the proposals presented may vary, they all have a common denominator: social innovation applied to rural development.

This principle is present in the RAIN model, used by the **Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research (BAB)** to promote business models; in the creation of projects and networks to fight rural depopulation, such as the G100 methodology used by **Cives Mundi (CM)** in Spain; in territorial planning processes promoted by **Prout Research Institute Portugal (PRIP)** under the principles of Block Level Planning; or in the promotion of social businesses carried out by the **University of Beira Interior (UBI)** and their partners through the itinerant incubator i3social.

Together they offer a range of experiences and resources to stimulate the local economy, with a strong component of citizen participation: either to strengthen the capacity for entrepreneurship with a social and environmental approach (BAB and UBI), or to promote initiatives in the service of the common good (PRIP and CM).

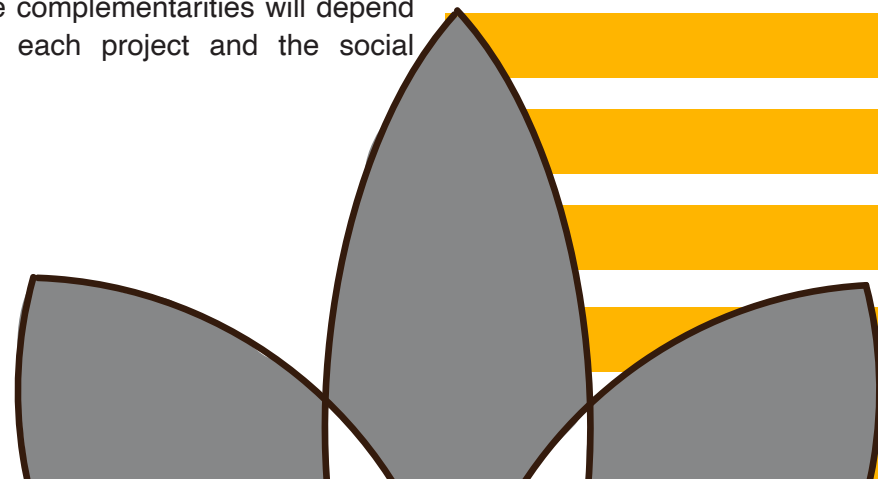
These proposals work with a wide range of target audiences. In most of them, the participation of local institutions is important, either through the training of their technicians to be changemakers (UBI), or as essential partners for the implementation of citizen proposals (PRIP and CM). In some of them, the most active citizens play a central role in the development of the proposal (PRIP), and in others the target audience may vary depending on their application.

For example, the RAIN methodology can be used to incubate a business with local impact, or to design a management model for natural parks, as in the case of Southern Burgenland.

Likewise, we find different scales of work and time of execution. There are interventions that are applied in a short period of time, such as the design of a business model (BAB) or the co-creation of an idea in 6 months (CM). Other interventions presented here require more than 3 years (UBI and PRIP) in order to create permanent social innovation ecosystems.

All the proposals have points of intersection, and complementarities can be found. For example: the dimensions of the RAIN model provide structure to the design of social initiatives; the training components for municipal technicians carried out by UBI, successful communication and cooperation strategy with local institutions, and his “itinerant” nature helps to identify initiatives and synergies; the G100 intervention methodology is an effective system for finding concrete solutions to complex problems and generating alliances between the public-private sector and national stakeholders; and BLP a solid community base that provides territorial resilience in the long term.

In each case, these complementarities will depend on the objective of each project and the social context.



EXPERIENCE INDEX

RAIN. A Living Lab Bussines Model
Concept for Rural Regions.

Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and
Mountain Research (BAB)

06

G100 .Co-creation for a new
rurality. Cives Mundi (CM)

09

Block-Level Planning. Empowering
the Resiliense of Rural Areas

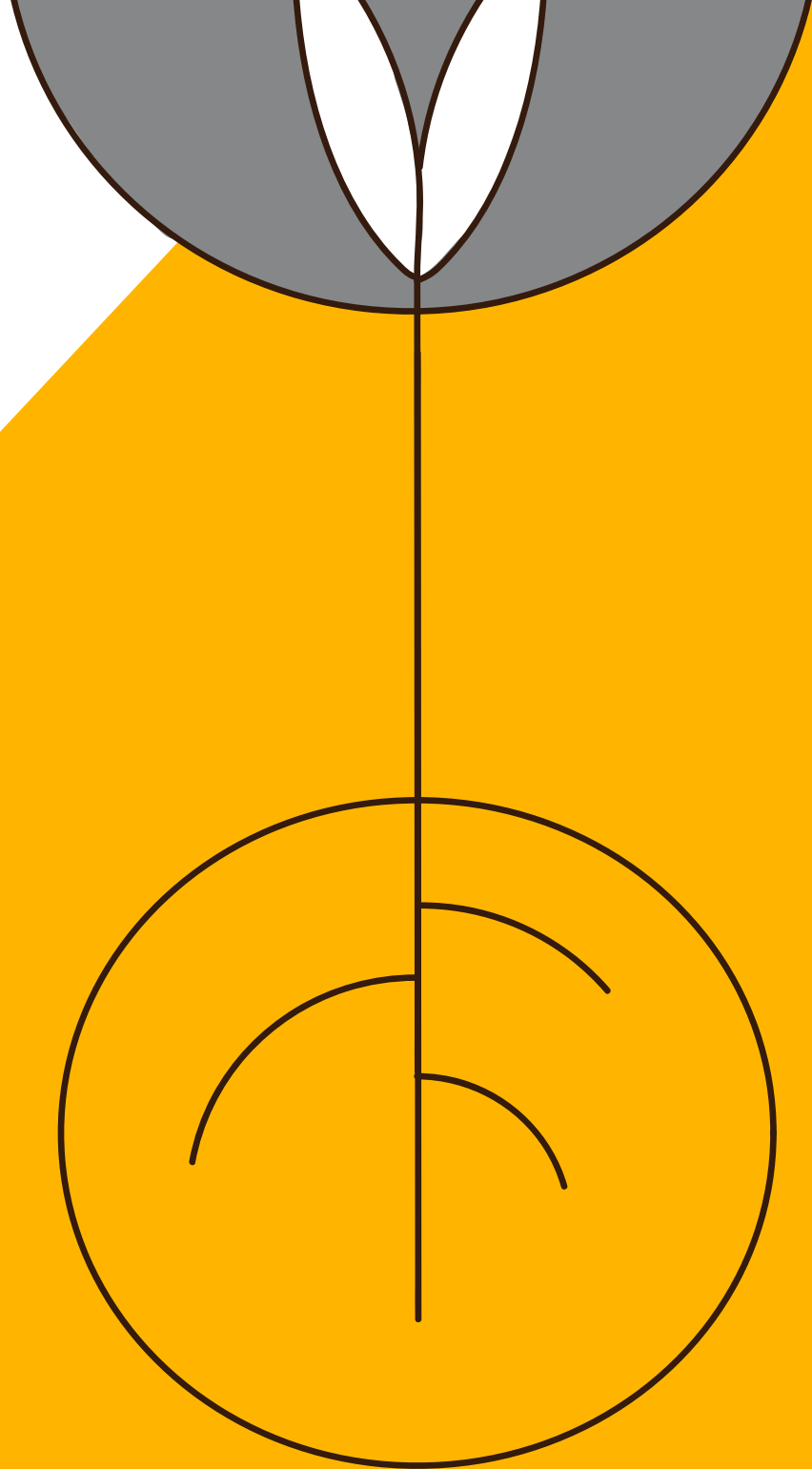
Prout Research Institute Portugal (PRIP)

12

I3Social BSE - Itinerant Incubator for
Social Innovation in Beiras and
Serra da Estrela

University of Beira Interior (UBI)

15



RAIN : A Living Lab Business Model Concept for Rural Regions (BAB)

Objectives

The objective is to provide a structured approach for developing a business, project or activity in rural regions which focuses on open, user-driven innovation and co-creation in a business, citizen, government and academia partnership, integrating circular economy approaches and specific rural problem awareness.

The target group comprises everyone who wants to start or improve concerning business, project or activity in rural regions.



Description

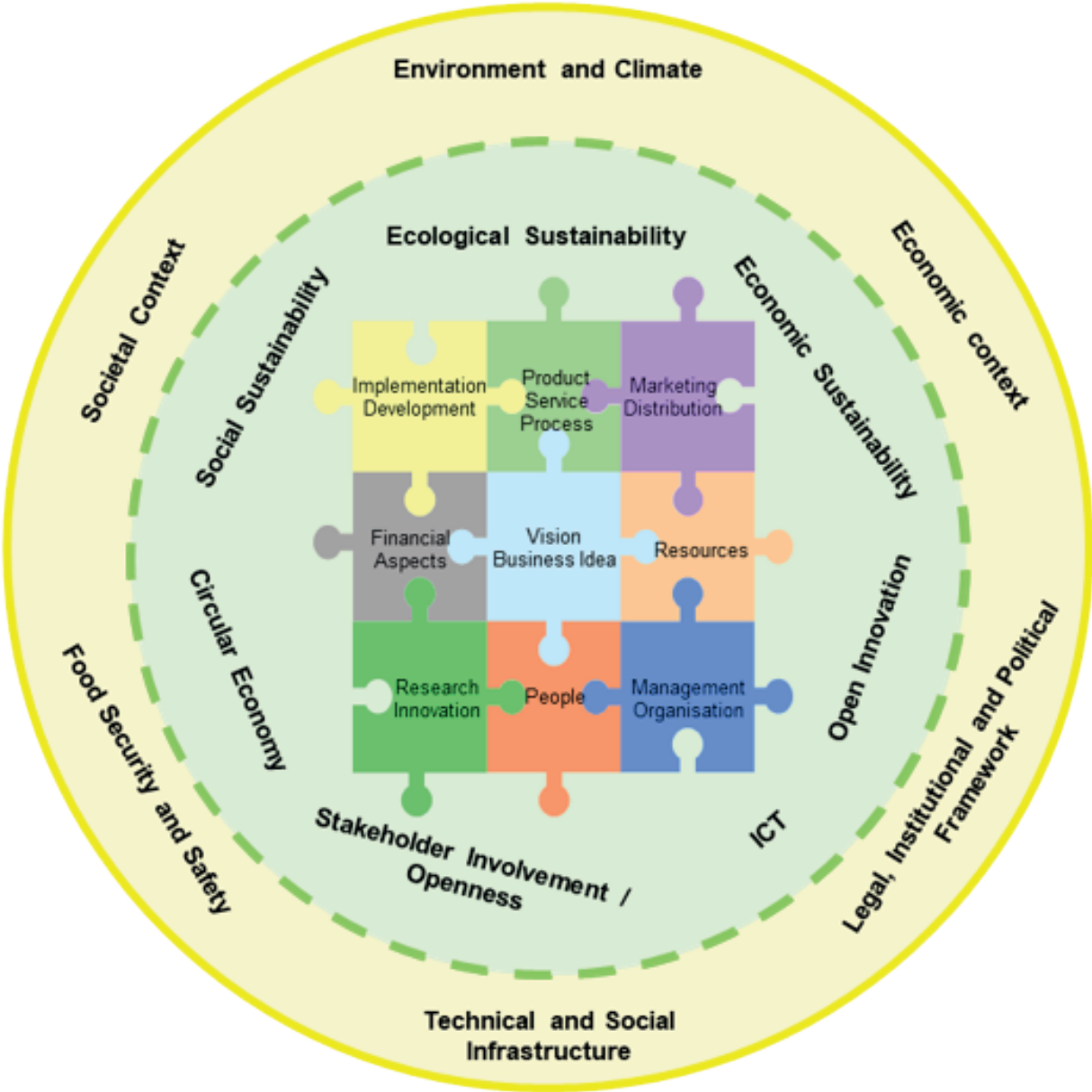
The RAIN concept integrates the topics in three different layers (Core Elements, Principles and Real Life Setting). The RAIN Core Elements capture the central business model. The shape of a puzzle is used to express that everything is connected to everything else and that it is possible to dock on new elements if necessary. The RAIN Principles, outcome of the LIVERUR project, should be embedded in each of the Core Elements. The Real Life Setting comprises themes which can hardly be influenced by single actors and which limit or enable business models. Interdependencies among all the elements are given, every RAIN Core Element has its own set of methods and worksheets.

Starting point for the development of a business model is usually “Vision and Business Idea”. In workshops with the relevant stakeholders, the worksheets for the Real Life Setting can be elaborated. These include assessments of opportunities or risks in the areas of environment and climate; economic context; societal context and social infrastructure; technical infrastructure in rural areas; legal, institutional and political framework; and food security and safety for the respective business model. For each of the Core Elements, worksheets are available to incorporate the RAIN principles with methodological support of the RAIN platform toolbox. Feedback loops are important.

Success Factors of Implementation

- Well-founded training of regional facilitators to communicate the RAIN concept;
- Open ecosystem network to identify and engage the most relevant stakeholders;
- Innovative digital tools and common platform for all regional initiatives;
- Personal contact and trust building measures, personification of services;
- Making use of regional resources, closing value chain gaps;
- Keeping the rural context, creating a common identity.

Work Scheme RAIN



Legend



Core Elements



RAIN Principles




Real Life Setting

A story of RAIN: Southern Burgenland

The project partner from Southern Burgenland (AT), applied the RAIN concept in 2020 to develop a Living Lab in the region. The idea of this endeavour was to generate and further develop regional food products and services considering sustainability and circular economy. Southern Burgenland has plenty to offer: There are idyllic vineyards with cosy wine cellars, castles with exciting history and a special regional cuisine. One can discover and explore wonderful natural and cultural spaces within seven nature parks and taste great quality products from small regional farms.

In Southern Burgenland there are many so-called “Kellerstöckl”, which are small houses that were used for vine production. They were renovated and converted into vacation apartments in order to establish a form of smart and sustainable tourism – the so-called “Kellerstöckl-Weinidylle”, which is located in a nature park. The approach was to involve small and micro enterprises, use and secure historical buildings and cultural landscapes, establish cooperation among Kellerstöckl owners and cooperate with further regional producers.

 Here you can find more information:

<https://www.suedburgenland.info/unterkuenhe/kellerstoeckl/>

<https://www.weinidylle.at/de/startseite>

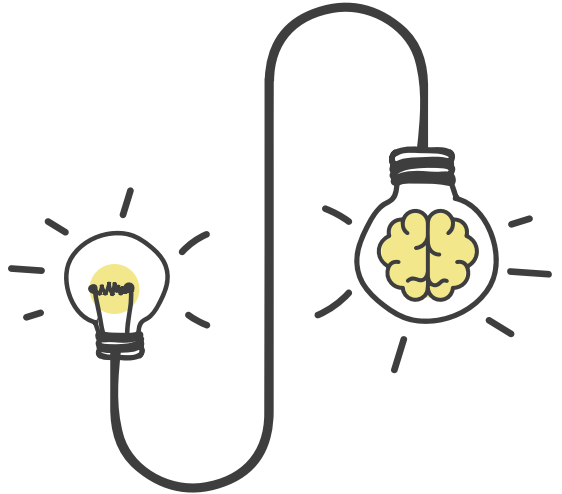
<https://www.suedburgenland.info/sehen-erleben/freizeit-natur/naturparke/>



G100: Co-creation for a new rurality (CM)

Objectives

The G100 objective is the ideation and co-creation of realistic, innovative and sustainable solutions that contribute to solve real problems faced by small rural municipalities.



Description

G100 is the abbreviation of 100 people, a social innovation methodology that gathers 50 men and 50 women to ideate, co-create and validate projects which can be used to solve complex challenges for the social and economic development in sparsely populated rural areas.

Configuration of a G100

The process starts with the identification of one specific challenge present in rural areas, usually a complex and multi-faceted problem (see “Work Scheme G100”). The identified challenges will define the areas to work in, creating as many areas as is considering to be important to solve the problem (area n). One working group will be created for each identified area (n groups).

With a clear work schedule, 100 people are invited to be part in the process. For a G100 constitution there are some requirements to consider: there must to be a gender equality; the members must know the problem as deeply as possible; members must be either a mayor of a municipality, a representative of a public or private financial institution, foundation, etc., or an entrepreneur, technician or professional in the areas

Group Work Process

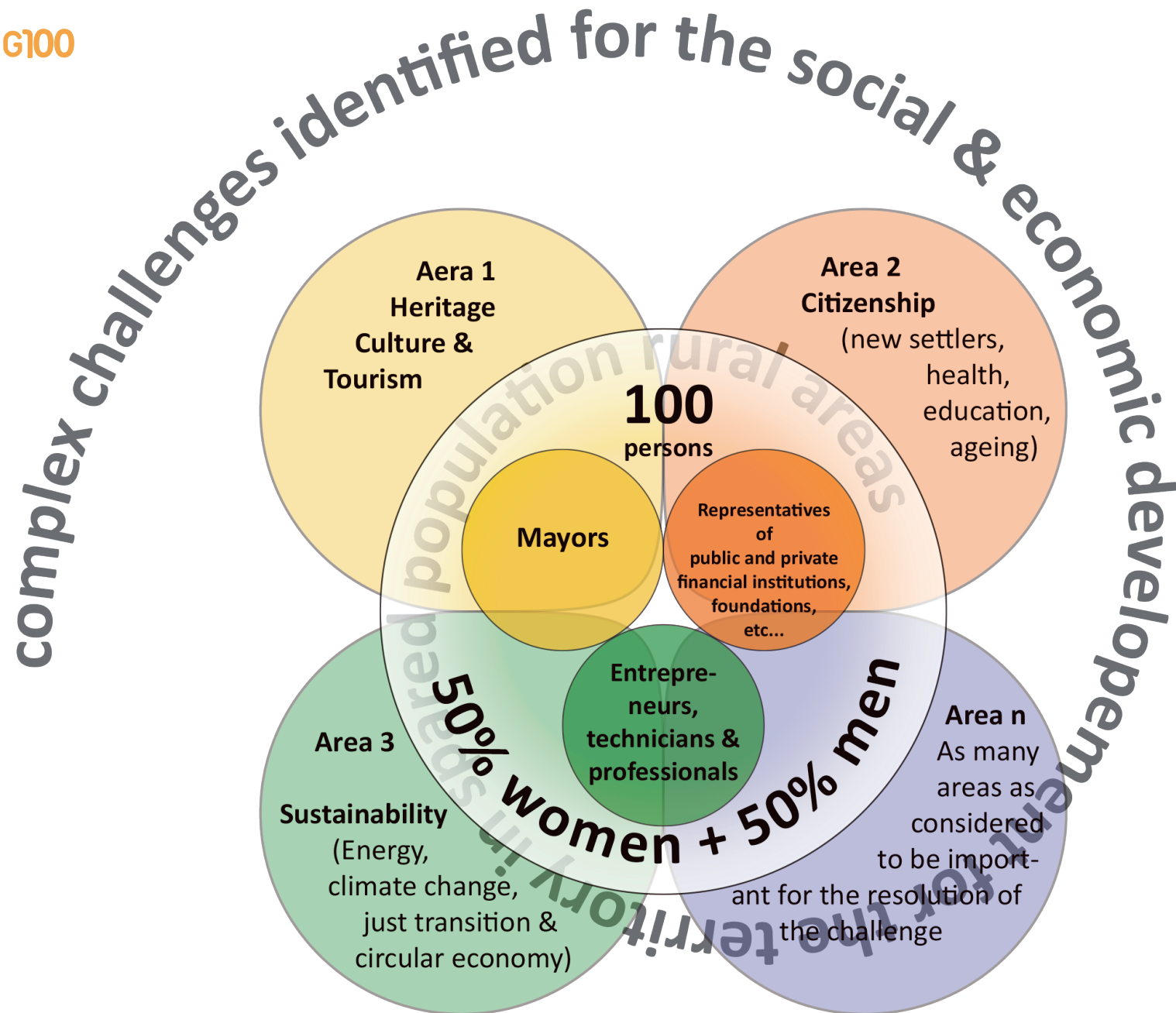
Phase 1: Remote workflow

As the members of G100 can live everywhere in different parts of the whole country, the first phase is in remote workflow. Every group must identify all possible features of the challenges, it’s importance and prioritization (using several digital tools as Trello, Zoom and others).

Phase 2: Two days of intensive face-to-face gathering

Based on an international cooperation methodology called “logic framework”, the assembled members are guided by facilitators to create a complete project. This project should be tested in practice to validate the problem and the solution. Because of the different roles of the members who belongs to G100 (financial & funding private & public institutions, experts in different areas, entrepreneurs, etc.) it’s possible to find the way to play prototypes in the real world.

Solutions should be for anyone in any place. The results of every edition are an open source.




A Story of G100: Nordesnet

The "New Rurality" was the focus of the first G100 edition, and the working group "Technology, Internet and Communication" was created, as connectivity was seen as a necessary element for repopulation. This working group came to the conclusion that the main barrier to offering an internet connectivity service was not technological, but the lack of interest from large operators due to low returns on their investments. As a result of the co-creation process, they launched a prototype called "Rural hacking".

This is a telecommunications network in which the residents of a village are the designers, implementers and operators of their own network. It is what is called "digital hacks", a traditional community work in which the entire population of a village performs a job. This approach brings many benefits to rural areas: it encourages collaborative work for the development of necessary infrastructure; it reduces costs by doing almost all the work with interested volunteers; it creates bonds of trust between the villages involved; and it strengthens territorial sovereignty by giving neighbours control over key communications infrastructure. This was especially encouraging in a pandemic period.

In 2020 an association called Nordesnet was created and registered as a telecommunications operator. Since then, they offer connection service to 6 villages and have deployed 35 km of fibre optics, providing a high-quality connection at almost half the price of the big operators.

 **Here you can find more information:**

- <https://g100.es/es/>
- <https://nordesnet.com/>
- <https://pueblosacogedores.com/>



Block-Level Planning, Empowering the Resilience of Rural Areas (PRIP)

Objectives

The objective of this decentralised planning approach is to develop plans or strategies that boost the local economy and increase the resilience and self-sufficiency of a bioregion.

Block Level Planning is built through participatory processes, with the aim of empowering local communities to be active agents in the development of their territory, and to create learning communities and networks for cooperation.

Description

Block Level Planning (BLP) is a decentralised planning strategy carried out in a participatory manner in a specific bioregion. This approach is based on the Progressive Utilization Theory (PROUT), and focuses on solving concrete problems experienced by the population, such as increasing the purchasing power of the population or reducing unemployment, with a view towards socio-economic self-sufficiency and resilience.



Delimitation of the block (or area)

BLP proposes land planning for a relatively small region, with approximately 100,000 inhabitants, in such a way that planners are able to understand all the problems of the area in depth; local leadership emerges to solve problems according to their perceived needs and priorities; and local citizens are given a voice to solve their problems, to set goals and priorities, to define action plans and to implement the solutions.

In whichever part of the continent or country BLP is applied, the following aspects are foundational: to consider common biophysical features of the territory; to maintain ecological integrity; and to embrace local community aspirations intimately linked to cultural identity.

Guiding principles for empowering communities

- Community and stakeholder participation. The participation and coordination with local institutions is essential
- Training of citizens for decision-making and creation of knowledge transfer mechanisms.
- The local culture should be present as an element of community building, identity rooting and cooperation.

Implementation

The whole community is invited to participate in the cyclical block planning process (see “PRIP Work Scheme to apply BLP”): from the first phase, where

needs are assessed (Diagnose and Mobilise), to the second phase, where proposals are created and implemented (Co-initiate, Co-feel, Co-create and Co-celebrate).

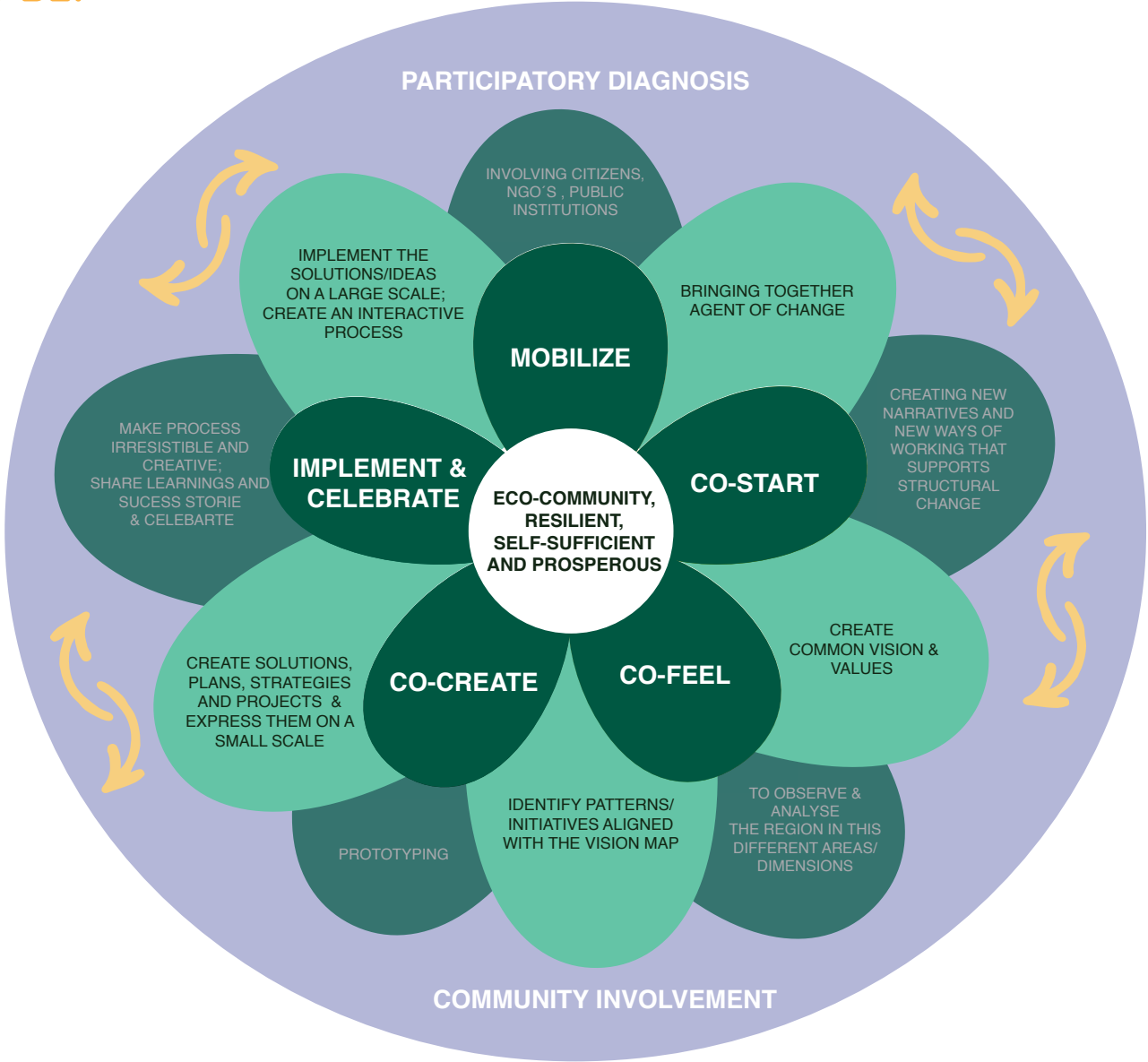
The process becomes cyclical and, in its course, the working groups transform into learning communities ready to continue the work on the region's development and to respond to the challenges that a region faces.

To facilitate this process, three support bodies are needed: 1. a coordination and communication body, to ensure the inclusive work of the entire local community; 2. a team of facilitators, to guide the citizens' work in a stimulating and effective way; and 3. a team of mentors (or experts), to provide the relevant information for decision-making.

Success factors of Implementation

- Strategic partnership building in the early stages (such as town councils, parish councils, research organisations or universities) so that the proposed solutions have a better chance to be supported and implemented.
- Strong presence at local events such as markets in the first stage, so that citizens can learn about the movement's intentions and can express their opinions.

PRIP Work Scheme to apply BLP



- 1ST PHASE- BLP PREPARATORY PHASE
- 2ND PHASE - BLP COLLECTIVE AND PARTICIPATORY PROCESSTIVE

A Story of BLP: Cova da Beira Converge

In 2020, PRIP initiated a BLP in the Cova da Beira region, a fertile rural area in the central interior of Portugal, which covers 3 municipalities and has a population of around 79 000 inhabitants. In the first phase, statistical data were collected on the economy, employment, education, health, natural resources, etc. Subsequently, individual interviews were conducted with 25 local actors. Once the Participatory Diagnosis was completed, not only were the typical problems of rural areas (depopulation, low wages, ...) identified, but also the need for a common strategy that would benefit the entire region of Cova da Beira.

From this analysis, Cova da Beira Converge was born, a movement of citizens and organisations that came together to create a participatory plan and to implement concrete actions to increase the resilience of this bio-region. A partnership was formed between the Prout Research Institute Portugal (PRIP), the University of Beira Interior (UBI) and the 3 City Halls of Belmonte, Fundão and Covilhã.

So far, 5 working groups have been established and are developing solutions for the region in the areas of agriculture, environment, education, justice/social welfare and culture.



Here you can find more information:

<https://covadabeiraconverge.pt/>

<https://prip.pt/>

i3Social BSE – Itinerant Incubator for Social Innovation in Beiras and Serra da Estrela (UBI)

Objectives

i3Social is a social innovation initiative that aims to empower the Beiras and Serra da Estrela (BSE) community (15 municipalities) by building capacity, mobilising resources and developing a collaborative culture of local agents as a way to promote social innovation and entrepreneurship to respond to social problems and to contribute to the settlement of inhabitants in the territory.

Description

i3 Social intervention creates conditions in the territory of intervention (BSE) to generate and develop social innovation processes using inter-institutional, inter-personal, and inter-territorial cooperation. The three lines of intervention are:

- **Capacity Building to work together and respond to social problems in a coordinated manner** by training teams with staff from each municipality and/or from 3rd sector organisations to identify and support new social entrepreneurs and monitor social innovation entrepreneurial initiatives,
- **Social Business Incubation to put Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation in evidence in local and inter-municipal dynamics**, supporting the dynamisa-

tion of spaces for hosting entrepreneurial initiatives (incubators/enterprise nests) through processes, practices, instruments, and monitoring;

- **Networking to link and integrate the experience and resources of various actors active in the BSE territory**, bringing together organisations from the social, economic, and political sectors and other relevant stakeholders in a network with its dynamics aimed at debating problems, emerging new solutions, working in synergy, and strengthening the ability to attract value and investment to the territory.



The intervention Process:

Activation of Municipalities

- Presentation of the i3social initiative.
- Alignment around the theory of i3Social change.
- Identification of interlocutors and creation of dedicated teams.

Listening to Stakeholders

- Stakeholder mapping .
- Design of invitation to dialogue session with stakeholders.
- Meeting with stakeholders.
- Conceptualization and start-up of learning communities around the 3 interterritorial nuclei.
- Mapping of installed capacity to support social entrepreneurship.

Training of Technicians

- Align understanding and concepts about what participation is.
- Learning to work with the different levels of participation.
- Create capacity to evolve to higher levels of participation.
- Promote conditions for the emergence of initiatives for social entrepreneurship.

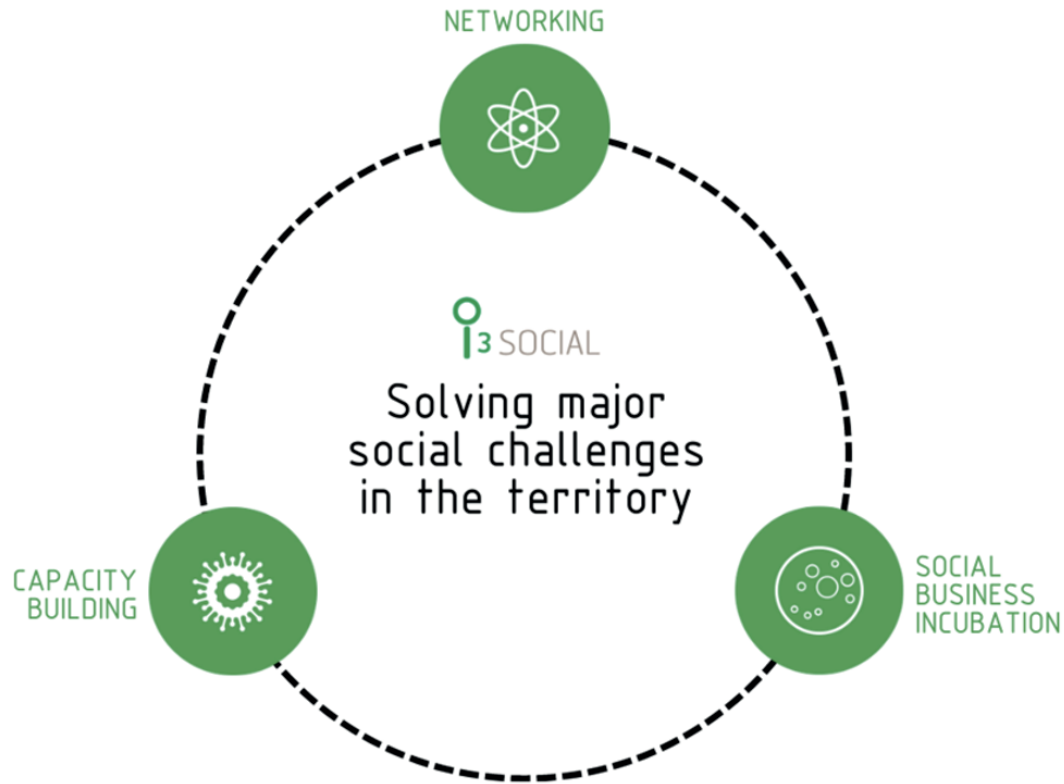
Supporting Entrepreneurs

- Training of technical structures for the support and monitoring of promoters of innovation and social entrepreneurship initiatives.
- Support guides for technicians and entrepreneurs.
- Online platform for registration and monitoring of ideas and projects.
- Incubation spaces dedicated to social innovation projects in several municipalities.

Building the Collaborative Network

- A collaborative territorial network and the promotion of knowledge and resource sharing were achieved through regular meeting sessions and joint organisation of events involving diverse local stakeholders.

**Connect and Collaborate for entrepreneurship
and social transformation**



A Story of I3Social: Educating villages

As a result of the 1st i3Social Bootcamp held in 2020, Aldeias Educadoras (Educating Villages) initiative was created.

This initiative is an active intergenerational program that aims to combat the social isolation of the elderly by investing them in the role of teachers for an integral education of children and young people. In this way active ageing is promoted in a context of reciprocal and meaningful learning, which places the elderly as the main guardians of ancestral knowledge.

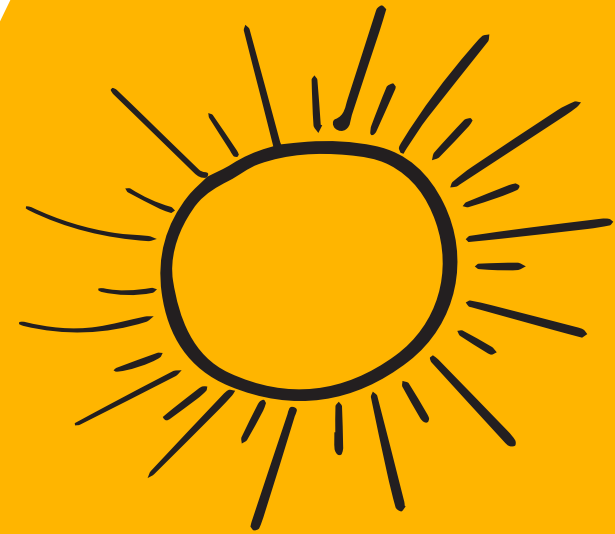
Based on the collection of information, memories and experiences shared by the universe of elderly women from five parishes in the municipality of Fundão, action research projects were developed. This heritage was transformed into structured curriculum for students, and elders became teachers in an open-air school format. In this experience children listened to their stories guided by curiosity and memories of another generation, and rediscovered the history of the villages.

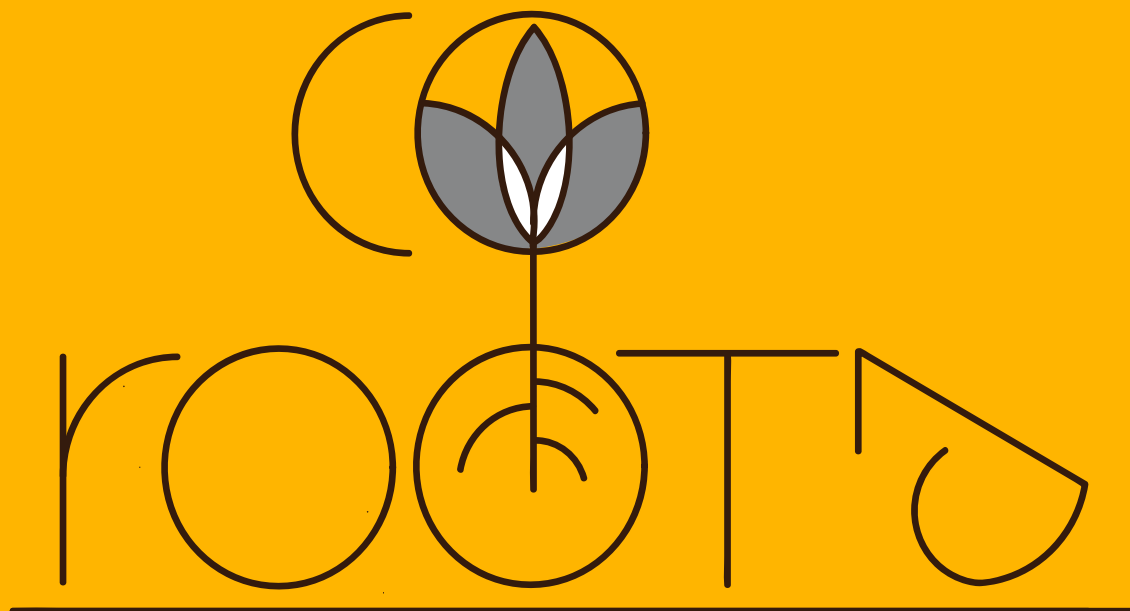
The appreciation of elderly knowledge and life stories, along with their civic participation, supports their physical and emotional well-being. It also provides a new mechanism for preserving local culture and identity, as well as facilitating the integration of newly arrived immigrant families in small villages.



Here you can find more information:

<https://i3social.pt/>





Communicating Roots: Co-learning to improve rural resilience and governance

Keep on going
co-learning...

