

The dangerous tilt of the GDP of the Marina Alta towards the sea

TERRITORIAL DIAGNOSIS OF THE MARINA ALTA III

Enlarging the horizons of the productive system of the Marina Alta is the great challenge that the region must meet to to achieve not only an improvement of its socio-economic conditions but also, a greater territorial cohesion. This is another of the conclusions drawn from the Territorial Diagnosis of the Marina Alta prepared within the Local Agreement for Employment and Local Development of the Marina Alta, constituted by the municipalities and the Crema.



The coast of the Marina Alta in Xàbia, at the height of the Cabo de la Nau. PHOTO: ESTEPA.

In the field of the productive system, the study confirms how since the 1960s it has followed the sun and beach tourism model. That, on the one hand, has meant focusing efforts on a model that is limited. And, on the other, it has caused important inequalities in the territory. The weight of this tourist industry has been concentrated in the coastal and pre-coastal strip, while the interior not only remained practically on the sidelines but saw, at the same time, a reduction in the primary sector, with a progressive decrease in agricultural activity. With this, the Marina Alta has tilted dangerously towards the seashore and it is necessary to correct that unevenness that concentrates the county GDP in the coastline.

The diagnosis published by the Crema speaks of "decompensation" of the productive system, for being "very oriented towards activities related to this sun and beach tourism, leaving industry and agriculture in the background".

The translation of this imbalance in the territory is not only evident but also a source of inequality that must be corrected.

Three regions

As this newspaper already advanced in the first installment of the series of reports on the Territorial Diagnosis of the Marina Alta, the existence of three differentiated areas in the region in terms of socio-economic aspects is one of the issues on which we must act. And it is precisely in this chapter of the productive sectors where it is most clearly seen. The study makes it clear analysing one by one the different productive sectors.

Tourism excellence limited to part of the territory

The tertiary sector is, it points out, "strongly marked by tourism activity and trade, focusing on the coastal and pre-coastal strip of the region." That has, at the same time, advantages and disadvantages.

Regarding the positive side, "it is a consolidated tourism model and differential compared to other nearby competing destinations." In fact, "the tourist perceives a quality in the products and excellent services", at the same time that it has "a wide cultural offer, recreational, gastronomic ... oriented to the visitor".

That is the positive. "However," it adds, "it is an underutilized tourism model, since the activity is concentrated only in a part of the territory, using only the resources that exist" in that coastal strip. At the same time, "the model of sun and beach has a limited growth and is seasonal, so it is essential to take advantage of all the potential offered by the rest of the territory" of the Marina Alta "to complement the current tourism model." It points to this goal, in fact, as a "key point" to achieve a "sustainable development of the regional economy".

An industry of micro and SMEs with honorable exceptions

As it gained weight during the last decades, the tertiary sector devoured the other productive sectors of the region. In the case of the industrialist, the study says, "it has reduced its weight in the regional GDP" after having been "powerful in the middle of the 20th century".

And it is, it says, "the industry that is still active in the region is concentrated in the middle part of the region, basically in the belt that joins Pedreguer, Gata de Gorgos, Teulada and Benissa, with the addition of Pego - although in this case, it is basically agri-food industry-".

In this sense, the document cites examples of large companies such as Rolser, Masymas, Borrell, Paco Martínez, Garmol or Baleària, but highlights that, in reality, they are the exception, because "the business size that predominates is the micropyme and companies without employees (self-employed)".

Deep agrarian "depression" with some reasons for hope

But it is the primary sector which is "the most worrying case," it says. "The activity of agriculture in the Marina Alta has been progressively decreasing until it is currently in a depressed state in areas of the region where traditionally it had a lot of weight".

The study attributes this thinning of agricultural activity to five factors:

- The little innovation in work methods.
- The smallholding.
- The lack of profitability of crops.
- The rural individualism.

•The lack of generational relief, derived from the depopulation of the interior of the region.

However, it also highlights that there are examples that give reasons for hope in recent years. In areas such as Xaló or Llíber "they have known how to conserve and enhance agricultural-wine activity and combine it with tourist activity, resulting in a diversified economic activity that respects the environment".

Innovation is the way

It also highlights the different agri-food projects promoted in different municipalities in recent years and that "with innovation and quality, are marking the way to reverse the current situation of decline". Quote, specifically, those of the Bio Moscatell in El Poble Nou de Benitatxell; Pego Natura; Cabrera grapes, in Benissa; the Mercats de la Terra; BioXàbia; and Bodegues Xaló.

In the same innovative line other projects are also giving excellent results which also fit together. For example, in the hospitality branch: Nyam Casual SeaFood, L'Escoleta de Sagra, El Baret de Miquel in Dénia or Unesco's own Creative City of Gastronomy project. Also in the field of industry (Rolser, Point, ...) and in trade (Marinalia, Toy Bags, Ale-hop, ...). "However, these cases are not abundant in the region and innovation is still latent," it warns.

For this reason, one of the lines of action to be adopted is to deepen this innovative terrain "with awareness and training at managerial levels as well as in early formative stages with the aim of developing a productive system adapted and consistent with the current demand".

The number of associations - a strength to achieve cohesion

The Territorial Diagnosis of the Marina Alta is a broad radiography of the socio-economy of the region with the aim of promoting economic development. And to build that future it is important to know the shortcomings but also identify the strengths. One of them already mentioned is the excellence of the touristic pattern prevailing on the coast. But another that the study highlights is the high degree of associationism in the Marina Alta. "If we compare it with other regions of the Valencian Community, the index and number of associations in all areas is very remarkable, both locally, with associations of merchants, neighborhoods, fiesta, and supramunicipal. Entities that have, in addition, "a constant activity in the region that help social and territorial cohesion and the revitalization of the area."

The recipe: tourist diversification, urgent intervention in agriculture and promotion of R & D

The final conclusion of the study in relation to the productive sectors comes to summarize what has already been commented upon. And it is as follows: "The current production system is very focused on tourism, which, although with a settled and successful model, requires a restructuring focused on diversifying the current offer and deseasonalizing and segmenting the tourist demand. For its part, the agricultural sector needs urgent intervention to reverse its negative trend through innovation and entrepreneurship; while in the industrial sector, strategies must be promoted that help companies opt for greater R & D efforts".