

# The brakes on the development of the region: deficient transport, aging population and depopulation in the interior

## TERRITORIAL DIAGNOSIS OF THE MARINA ALTA (II)

Seven months of research (from March to September of this year) in order to "reflect in detail the current situation of the Marina Alta at socioeconomic, labor, social and territorial level" have resulted in the Territorial Diagnosis of the Marina Alta elaborated by Creama within the framework of the *Local Agreement for Employment and Local Development* constituted by the great majority of the town halls. A vast document, on which this newspaper (la Marina Plaza) offered a first look a few days ago and into which it now goes into detail given the value it provides for the analysis of the current situation of the region and to establish in a consensual manner among the municipalities the lines of action to boost the economy, promote employment and, by extension, improve the living conditions of its citizens.



The communication by road in the interior of the region is one of the brakes to the economic activity.

The study is based on extensive data collection work. On the one hand, quantitative (statistics from official, cartographic sources and more than 200 variables related to the territory and the work environment); on the other, qualitative (55 personal interviews throughout the region, two Focus Groups with the participation of experts and the constitution of a Citizen Forum open to all civil society). From there the conclusions are drawn up, following the following structure: integrated analysis, general conclusions and, finally, the definition of proposals and strategies. This report focuses on the part of the document that addresses the territorial issue.

## Analysis

On the one hand, the study structures the data collected in an analysis of Weaknesses (debilidades), Threats (amenazas), Strengths (Fortalezas) and Opportunities (oportunidades) (SWOT analysis). As

already pointed out in the first report, the comparison of the data has allowed, among other things, to establish three differentiated areas within the region in terms of their socioeconomic characteristics: the coast, the intermediate strip and the interior. Therefore, in the box that is shown, some of the items appear shaded: in blue, those corresponding to the interior area; in green, to the intermediate zone, and in yellow to the coastal strip. The rest are common to the whole region.

BALANCE DAFO - Población, territorio, infraestructuras y medio ambiente	
<p><b>DEBILIDADES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Despoblación preocupante en la zona interior de la comarca.</li> <li>-Población envejecida, por encima de la media provincial, autonómica y nacional.</li> <li>-Individualismo rural y municipal.</li> <li>-Necesidad de colaboración y trabajo en red para aprovechar los recursos de la comarca.</li> <li>-Degradación de algunas áreas ambientales como consecuencia del boom de la construcción.</li> <li>-Crecimiento de campos de labranza abandonados.</li> <li>-Deficiente conectividad de transporte público dentro de la comarca.</li> <li>-Alto coste para llegar a la Marina Alta (tren, AP-7).</li> <li>-Reducida oferta hotelera frente a apartamentos turísticos.</li> <li>-Infraestructura y servicios digitales insuficientes.</li> </ul>	<p><b>FORTALEZAS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Territorio con un alto valor paisajístico, climático y medioambiental, con un patrimonio natural y ecológico muy diverso.</li> <li>-Alto grado de conservación del entorno paisajístico, con 66 espacios naturales protegidos.</li> <li>-Convencimiento del valor del patrimonio lingüístico valenciano como elemento cohesionador y dinamizador de la zona.</li> <li>-Amplia oferta BICs y monumentos.</li> <li>-Posición estratégica clave de la comarca.</li> <li>-Amplia oferta gastronómica con una muy alta calidad.</li> <li>-Amplia oferta de alojamiento reglado, sobre todo, en apartamentos turísticos.</li> <li>-Notable oferta e infraestructuras en actividades como el golf y deportes náuticos.</li> <li>-Numerosas playas y calas, con 33 km. de longitud total. 15 banderas azules.</li> <li>-Amplia infraestructura en eventos (ferias, mercados, ...).</li> <li>-Red consolidada de agencias de desarrollo local.</li> </ul>
<p><b>AMENAZAS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Saldo demográfico amenazado por la despoblación y el envejecimiento de la población.</li> <li>-Falta de infraestructuras de transporte dificulta la expansión productiva de la comarca.</li> <li>-Dejar en segundo plano el valenciano, como seña de identidad de la comarca que es.</li> <li>-Aislamiento de la población por falta de transporte intercomarcal.</li> <li>-Posible regreso de un desarrollo urbanístico desmesurado que afecte al entorno paisajístico.</li> <li>-No desarrollar estrategias participativas y consensuadas para todo el territorio.</li> </ul>	<p><b>OPORTUNIDADES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Creación de un punto de encuentro de participación pública sobre el futuro territorial y laboral de la zona.</li> <li>-Desarrollo de estrategias comunes a todo el territorio, aprovechando la amplia oferta de recursos naturales.</li> <li>-Nuevas formas de desarrollo del turismo como factor de reequilibrio territorial y de compensación interior-costa.</li> <li>-Descentralización de las acciones y facilitar el acceso a los recursos.</li> <li>-Creación de un mapa de la red de recursos ecológicos.</li> <li>-Atracción de población foránea para equilibrar la estructura de edad.</li> <li>-Desarrollo de infraestructuras modales para multiplicar el valor y potencial del producto local.</li> <li>-La liberación de la AP-7 y la llegada del tren como tractores de desarrollo laboral y económico.</li> <li>-Mejora del transporte público como efecto cohesionador del territorio.</li> <li>-Desarrollar las actuales infraestructuras digitales, sobre todo, en la zona interior.</li> </ul>

This table summarizes these weaknesses, threats, strengths and opportunities in the field of Population, Territory, Infrastructure and Environment. Note, for example, of the "dangerous effect of depopulation" in the interior while public services and labour supply are "focused" on the coast. Or of the "constant" aging of the population, more accelerated also in the interior zone.

## General conclusions

From the SWOT analyses and citizen participation, the study extracts conclusions about the territorial scope and its resources. The most positive aspects are the potential of the region. Specifically, "an enviable landscape environment with a potential that few territories can choose." A total of 66 protected natural areas -4 natural parks among them- together with the "year-round climate, its strategic location, the wide range of Cultural Interest Assets and architectural monuments, since it combines 33 km. of beaches with mountainous formations in a small area, gives it an excellent tourist position ahead of its competitors".

It also highlights the existence of a "variety of native agri-food products -such as moscatell grapes, cherries, Bomba rice, ...- of an enormous quality, as well as an internationally recognized gastronomy with the presence of several Michelin stars among its numerous restaurants". At this point, the appointment of Dénia and the Marina Alta as City, Creative of the Gastronomy of Unesco stands out.

### **Transportation: neither out nor in**

However, not all are advantages, far from it. there are many obstacles to socioeconomic development. "The transport infrastructure that the region has is very deficient and slows down the growth of the potential of the region," says the document. "Getting to the Marina Alta is expensive, both in terms of money and time; the lack of rail access and the fact that the only fast route by road is paid, makes it difficult for visitors to flow and the expansion of economic activity in the region. "

These communications are also not adequate within the region, with an "insufficient" public transport between municipalities that hinders social cohesion "so necessary for the sustainable development of the area."

### **Human capital: depopulation in the interior and aging**

Regarding human capital, there are two identified features that "stand out from the rest". One of them is not good or bad in itself. Is that one in three inhabitants of the Marina Alta is foreign. The ratio of foreign population, in fact, is much higher than that of the province of Alicante (18%) or that of the Valencian Community (13%). By nationalities, in the region highlights the presence of English and Germans.

On the other hand, the other demographic feature is worrisome and has a special impact on the interior: the progressive aging of the population. The current average is 44.7 years - above the provincial, autonomous and state averages. In the interior of the region it is even greater, 51 years, "and that is in this area where there is a disturbing trend to depopulation, a serious problem in certain municipalities where you have to put the focus of attention," says the document.

### **The landscape, the great opportunity**

From all these notes the diagnosis establishes the conclusion that "in the Marina Alta the landscape resources must be exploited, while being conserved for the sake of a sustainable development of the territory that favors the appearance of economic activities that attract the settlement of families, especially in the interior area ". It adds that "this sustainable development together with improvements in both conventional and digital infrastructures, will help the overall progress of the region."