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Emptied Spain: a big problem with solutions?

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The problem known as “empty Spain” is a problem associated to rural areas in inner Spain. However, it is a common matter in other countries in EU. In 2050 it’s believed that rural areas will lose 8 million inhabitants. In Spain, the depopulation affects more than 40% of the villages, nowadays.

That’s the reason why more people have become aware of this question. Even political parties are appearing around it.

But it’s an old matter that began during the sixties when big investments went to some cities and the coastline, especially Madrid, Catalonia or Basque Country. A lot of workers migrated from rural areas to new industrial or tourist regions. A development based on factories and hotels was created, whereas the farming was forgotten as in many West European countries.

Some years ago, governments tried to balance the inequalities. The investment of funds from EU has allowed to reduce differences between regions, but not the abandonment of wide rural areas.



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So, for example, in the inner Spain were built some airports in León, Teruel or Ciudad Real, but they were expenses without return instead of improving roads, local transports or services to help population remain.

Nowadays, a new "Plan" has been created to relieve the terrible consequences of pandemic COVID-19. EU will send a huge amount of money to Spain. They are the Next Generation Funds. Many people see them like a possible solution to the rural depopulation. However, there are 8131 villages/towns in Spain and 5000 of them have less than 1000 inhabitants. Another fact is that Burgos or Salamanca have more villages than Portugal.

All this, in addition to the hard conditions to apply for the funds, lack of prepared people to elaborate suitable projects... prevent a lot of small villages achieve money, or in many cases it only serves to buy wheelie-bins or change the public lighting for led lights.

It's obvious that these measures won't attract people to those villages. Even the investment is very different: € 121 million will be earmarked for farming or fishing, opposite 7225 for sustainable mobility (projects more focused on cities).

Also, if the PAC aids (in Spanish) are cut out, farmers will have a very difficult situation.

So, it's easy to think that only villages with historical or landscape interest (tourist resources) or possibility of making innovations in crops, increase the irrigated lands or new food industries, will have a future.

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