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Contributions to the eternal debate between rural and non-rural. A view from the employment perspective

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Abstract: In a territorial development model such as that of Valencia (Spain), in which limitations, resistance and difficulties are observed as a result of the dualization that it has undergone in these almost 40 years of operation, we ask whether these obstacles have had an effect on the evolution of employment. This is understood as the basic indicator, the primary aim of any action undertaken for development of the territory. To this end, we set out from the methodological articulation of various techniques (survey by means of a pre-coded questionnaire, application of the READI® methodology) based on the primary information collected from the AEDL (Employment and Local Development Agents) technical staff of Valencia province, which showed us their perception of the dualization to which the model is subjected and the difficulties that this generates when carrying out their professional activity. Statistical and documentary sources were also analyzed. With all this, the evolution of employment in these territories over the last five years was studied in order to validate, or not, the initial hypothesis: Whether this reality of the model (duality) responds to short-term or structural parameters.

Keywords: territory; rural; non-rural; employment; local development

1. Introduction

The starting point for this article is the actual model of local development applied to the territory since the mid-1980s. With the passing of time, this model (up and running for almost 40 years) has undergone an evolution that has given rise to its gradual dualization, as evidenced by the emergence of two different realities of the same local development system. On the one hand, a model with a certain internal structure, with “sufficient” resources to face the challenges, capable of generating its own instruments and methodologies that allow it to plan and organise its actions. And, on the other hand, a system, common in small municipalities, which is characterised by more limited resources, without defined intervention methodologies, in which anything goes for development, which means that work is done on a day-to-day basis, with no medium or long-term vision, with very little questioning of the process and the methodologies applied, covering the objectives in a basically quantitative manner. On this basis, this article delves into this territorial reality, adding to the debate the dimension of inland (rural) versus non-rural (intermediate or coastal, peri-urban) territory. (Calvo et al., 2023; ETCV, 2012).

This dualization, studied by the authors previously (Aguado et al., 2023), is closely linked to a key factor: The availability (the existence) of methodologies for territorial analysis and prospection. This is an essential question that the authors have been working on, and providing insights into. It is worth mentioning, in this sense, the

design of the READI® (Resources-Stakeholders-Dynamics) matrix¹, which provides agents specialised in local development with a methodology that determines the degree of competence of a given territory and its possibilities of successfully undertaking future development processes. The matrix is based on three main axes: The availability of resources, the presence of stakeholders and the dynamics between them. The matrix can be consulted in previous works published by the authors (Calvo et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2023).

Both this dualized model of local development and the availability of methodologies that favour its correct implementation converge in the ultimate aim of any territorial development action, programme or policy: Improvement of the employment level of the resident population. Employment, understood as a key indicator of this development, in its quantitative and qualitative dimension, is therefore an element that validates, or not, the actions undertaken on the territory. This importance of work and livelihoods comes to the fore in the debate on the Millennium Development Goals agenda, where the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is calling for employment and social protection to be at the heart of the development agenda, with the message that “Development comes with employment”². Our goal is therefore to find out what effects the existence of these situations of dualization has had on the level of employment in the territory.

To this end, we propose an empirical approach to this situation centred on four *comarcas*³ in the province of Valencia (Spain), two inland (rural) and two non-rural (intermediate or coastal, peri-urban). On this basis, the analysis of employment behaviour in these territories will make it possible to determine whether the dualization/polarisation of the territorial development model generates effects on employment-related indicators. This will involve the methodological articulation of different techniques (survey by applying a pre-coded questionnaire, application of the READI® methodology) based on the primary data collected from the AEDL (Employment and Local Development Agents) technical staff in these counties, revealing their perception of the dualization of the model and the difficulties that this generates when engaging in their professional activity. This way, together with the analysis of statistical and documentary sources, we examine the evolution of employment in these territories over the last five years.

2. Theoretical framework: The territorial dimension of local development and employment as a key element

Since the 1980s, alternative ways of understanding development processes have arisen as a result of the ineffectiveness of the actions to control macroeconomic imbalances articulated “top down” in the 1970s and 1980s to achieve equity in the distribution of wealth, while generating territorial inequalities due to the grouping of public investments in development poles (Calvo et al., 2017; Vázquez Barquero, 2012). Following the example of the United Kingdom, France and Italy, this macro outlook gives way to a micro perspective to alleviate the effects of the crisis, and local authorities implement actions to counteract the effects of the depression, encouraging the creation of businesses and fostering employment, giving rise to the current model of local development in which active employment policies are framed (Angeleri, 1999;

Calvo et al., 2017; Carboni and Orazi, 2020; Greffe, 1990; Iacobucci and Perugini, 2021; Sese, 1999; Szopik-Depczyńska et al., 2020). The increase in employment evidences the economy's dynamism and its ability to compete advantageously in the existing spatial division of labour, while the increase in unemployment or problems of labour market insertion reflect the opposite. On this basis, these "endogenous" local development strategies (Ponsiglione et al., 2018) have an alternative perspective to that of welfare policies. They seek to influence the generation of employment and income by improving the productivity and competitive edge of local production systems (Albuquerque, 2016; Bassi et al., 2021). They constitute an emerging way to address local development processes effectively (Esparcia, 2009; Gatto, 2020) and respond to the different territorial challenges (Lutsak-Yaroslava and Perez, 2017). First, by devising imaginative responses to the problem of unemployment, including "local employment initiatives", and then by developing local development strategies that offer new horizons for the promotion of their communities (Dolislager et al., 2021; Rodriguez-Pose, 2020).

To this end, they revalue the territory, understood as a dynamic element and enabler of wealth, which becomes the main asset of the new positioning to ensure competitive and sustainable economic growth (Hermosilla, 2018, 2020; Lutsak-Yaroslava and Perez, 2017). They thus aim for a structural change of the local productive fabric, at the "micro" level, in a "bottom-up" approach that returns the protagonism to the citizens to lead their own development (Albuquerque, 2016; Campos and Zapata, 2023; Esparcia, 2009; Nilsen et al., 2023), interpreting local development as something integral, integrated and integrating (Bramanti and Ratti, 2019; Calvo, 2011).

Geographical space (where socio-economic activity takes place and evolves) has for decades been a variable not taken into consideration by mainstream economic analysis (Cuadrado, 2014). However, in order to understand labour market trends and to implement policies consistent with them, it is essential to consider the territorial dimension, so as to allow the necessary adjustment between the needs of the territory and the provision of actions to be considered (Governa and Salone, 2004; Hermosilla, 2018). On this basis, organisational problems of the territorial management system can be identified, as well as innovative tools for the public management of local community development (Angeon and Lardon, 2008; Kettunen et al., 2020; Rodriguez-Pose, 2020; Mordvinov et al., 2021; Salom et al., 1999; Wafa, 2023).

This territorial dimension has been assumed for years by the European Union and its member states, on the basis that the objectives set in employment policy cannot be achieved without participation of all the administrations involved (Commission of the European Communities, 2001; OECD, 2008; Ugarte et al., 2006). As stated by Berdegué and Schejtman (2004), institutional development is crucial in territorial development. At the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Cohesion in December 2020, the Ministers, in collaboration with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Investment Bank Group and relevant European and national associations, adopted and endorsed the Territorial Agenda 2030 "A Future for Every Place". (European Commission. A European Green Deal. 2021. Available online:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en (accessed on 23 October 2024)). Europe must therefore ensure positive future prospects everywhere and for all.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 continues the alignment of the European Union's territorial development objectives with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Green Pact (European Commission. *A European Green Deal*. 2021. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en (accessed on 23 October 2024)). It also underlines the importance of and provides guidance on strategic spatial planning, while bolstering the territorial dimension of sectoral policies at all levels of governance. It aims to promote an inclusive and sustainable future for all places. In this line, one of the most important current challenges is the creation of employment and of a territorial cohesion policy that facilitates a balance in territorial employment and sustainability, since, as Von Meyer and Muheim (1996) point out, employment is a territorial issue.

Spanish legislation has also echoed the importance of the local dimension of employment policy in the constitutional principle of Article 40.1 of the Spanish Constitution, in Article 4 "The local dimension of employment policy" of Law 56/2003, of 16 December, on Employment, in its subsequent development in Royal Decrees Law 3 and 14/2011, or in the different Spanish Employment Activation Strategies from 2017, with Royal Decree 1032/2017 repealed in favour of current Royal Decree 1069/2021, for the period 2021–2024. For decades, Spanish regulations on territorial development have been moving in this direction in conjunction with international organisations such as the OECD (1984, 2008), the European Commission. *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities*. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/12-08-2020-new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good_en (accessed on 12 February 2024), Territorial Agenda of the European Union (2011), professional associations (Adlypse, 2015) and academic experts in the field (Chemezova, 2013; Glinskiy et al., 2016; Ioppolo et al. 2012; López Jiménez, 2016; Mantero and Hernández, 2002; Pérez and Lutsak Yaroslava, 2017; Sanchis and Melián, 2010).

On the basis of the territorial dimension, despite the significant operational problems of the local development model, the local agencies that develop these policies have played a strategic role as mediators, in direct contact with the territory-population binomial, leading two thirds of the employment-related actions (Nilsen et al., 2023; Sitnova et al., 2023). This point was also noted by Canzanelli (2011) in his research on models of territorial development agencies in Europe. As in their early days, these policies are positioned as a basic tool for efficient public action (García Pérez, 2017). Local development policies are also one of the most efficient, sustainable and cost-effective (in terms of the return on public spending) for public investment, due to their enormous impact and the multiplier effect they generate (Zapata, 2012). Investment and spending in R&D&I and active employment policies translate directly into more demand, their impact is greater than that of tax cuts in the short term, and their effects are more lasting in the long term, as they increase the growth potential of the economy (Boisier, 2004; Martín and Zarapuz, 2017; Rodríguez-Pose, 2020).

In short, the territory, and contextually the Valencian Community (Spain), has been the subject of many studies and approaches by authors from disciplines such as Geography (Esparcia, 2009; Martínez-Puche, 2021), applied Economics and Business Management (Doménech and Ybarra, 2014; Novell and Sorribes, 2017; Sanchís, 2006), Social Sciences (Aguado et al., 2023; Akimova et al., 2020; Calvo et al., 2017, 2020; Rodríguez-Pose, 2020; Sigalat et al., 2023) or from a multidisciplinary perspective (Calvo et al., 2021b, 2023; Delgadillo et al., 2021; Herмосilla, 2018). There are also studies on good practices and the results of active labour market policies, among others: Aguado (2019); Alujas (2018); Esteban and Serrano (2013), González-Blanch et al. (2017) and Sagardoy (2014). However, although these studies consider employment as a key indicator of this development, they do not approach it as an element that validates the actions undertaken in this area, whether from the dualization of the characteristics of the actors who implement these policies in the territory or from the eternal debate on inland (rural) territory versus non-rural territory (not inland, intermediate or coastal), as the present research does.

3. Methodology

3.1. Application scope

Based on the elements presented in the theoretical framework, the fieldwork was carried out in four *comarcas* out of a total of 17 in the province of Valencia (Spain) in the 2022–2023 period. Two rural inland *comarcas* (La Serranía and El Rincón de Ademuz) and two corresponding to intermediate and coastal (peri)urban areas (El Camp de Morvedre and La Vall d’Albaida), the main characteristics of which are set out below (**Figure 1**):

- La Serranía. Integrated municipalities: 19, 1405.28 Km², population: 17,115 (2023), population density: 12.18 Hab/km².
- El Rincón de Ademuz. Municipalities: 7, Surface area: 370.22 Km², population: 2221 (2023), population density: 5.91 Hab/km².
- El Camp de Morvedre. Municipalities: 16, Surface: 271.20 Km², population: 97,826 (2023), population density: 360.72 Hab/km².
- La Vall d’Albaida. Surface: Municipalities: 34, 722.22 Km², population: 88,114 (2023), population density: 122 Hab/km².

The classification of these four *comarcas* into inland-rural and intermediate-coastal is based on the ETCV classification (2012).

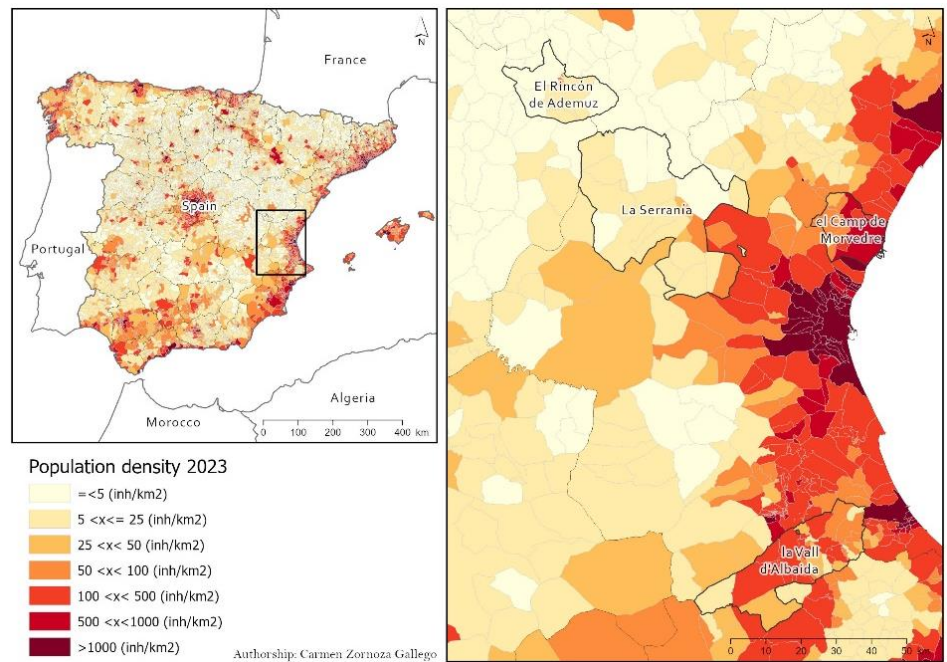


Figure 1. Map of the province of valencia showing the 4 *comarcas*, out of a total of 17⁴.

3.2. Methodological design and techniques

The methodological design of the research consisted of the articulation of various data gathering and analysis techniques: Analysis of statistical sources, a questionnaire administered to the 37 AEDL technicians of the territory and application of the READI[®] methodology. In detail:

3.2.1. Analysis of statistical and documentary sources

In order to reach well-founded conclusions on employment, it is necessary to contextualise them comparatively with the evolution of the indicators of its social configuration as a set of basic features that characterise the labour market of a territory in a given period (Prieto, 2013). Although it is true that more employment and labour market policy variables could have been included, it was considered that, for an initial approach and in view of the data available to check their evolution over the last five years, those used are sufficient.

The analysis incorporates various statistical and documentary sources related to employment, demographics, business activity, and the labour market. Specifically, the following were considered:

- Demographic data: Total population, percentage of women, population trends relative to the province and region, and population density (inhabitants per km²).
- Business data: Number of companies registered in the Central Directory of Companies (DIRCE) and those listed in the Social Security system.
- Labour market data: Registered unemployment, unemployment rate for the month of March, unemployment among women, number of contracts (overall and for women), Social Security affiliation rates at the regional level, affiliation rates for residents in the territory, and the number of resident women affiliated with Social Security.

3.2.2. Pre-coded questionnaire survey

A survey was carried out among the AEDL technical staff of the four *comarcas*, in which they were asked questions about their professional profile, that of the agencies in which they work and the local development model. The questionnaire was based on pairs of bipolar items, similar to Osgood et al.'s (1957) Semantic Differential, using pairs of adjectives with opposite meanings, with five intervals between the two. As professional figures who have marked the evolution of the model, they are its main protagonists of the model (Castillo, 2019). These are expert personnel who are located “within” the reality being analysed (Kvale, 2011), with extensive theoretical and practical training and experience of the same, as a result of their technical-professional activity in the society-territory in which they work. Therefore, they have primary, unmediated knowledge of the subject matter (Fernández and García, 2008), which is necessary to constitute the structural pattern of territorial development (Mejía, 2002).

3.2.3. Application of READI® methodology⁵

To gauge the capacities of these territories to undertake future local development processes, this methodology, based on the READI® Matrix, consists of a battery of 165 indicators (Calvo et al., 2021a). This matrix allows an evaluation of the situation of the territories by providing an overall, detailed score for each statistically validated element or grouping of indicators (Sigalat et al., 2021). It is based on the observation that the development of a territory depends on the convergence of three key elements: Resources, stakeholders and dynamics. For a more comprehensive analysis of the capacity of these *comarcas* to generate employment, the detailed assessment of “productive” resources is also shown (Table 1). For greater reliability of the results, they were compared with the outcomes of previous research in Valencia province (Aguado et al., 2023; Calvo et al., 2017, 2020).

3.2.4. Sample

The study sample consisted of four of the 17 *comarcas* in the province of Valencia (Spain). The survey was carried out among 37 AEDL, 69.8% of the total of 53 agents in the four *comarcas*.

Table 1. AEDL sample.

Comarca	Men	Women	Total	Comarca total	Comarca (%)
El Camp de Morvedre intermediate-coastal (non-rural)	2	7	9	10	90.0
La Vall d'Albaida intermediate-coastal (non-rural)	3	10	13	22	59.1
El Rincón de Ademuz (inland-rural)	1	4	5	5	100.0
La Serranía (inland-rural)	1	9	10	16	62.5
Total	7	30	37	53	69.8

Source: Own creation.

As can be seen, the feminisation of the profession is a fact. Some 81.1% of the technical staff are women, so we understand that the responses include a gender perspective. In fact, this percentage is consistent with other studies that show that more than 70% of the technical staff in local development are women in the region

(Martínez-Puche, 2021) and over 60% in Spain (Melián and Sanchis, 2010) and other sources consulted. (Diputació de València, 2021).

4. Results

4.1. Demographic and occupational profiles

The demographic and professional profiles of the people surveyed are as follows (Table 2):

Table 2. AEDL profile.

Comarca	Zone	Average age	Current work experience	Total AEDL experience	Agency experience	Agency size
El Camp de Morvedre	intermediate-coastal (non-rural)	44.1	13.1	16.4	21	1.2
La Vall d'Albaida	intermediate-coastal (non-rural)	44.2	9.9	16.5	24	1.5
El Rincón de Ademuz	(inland-rural)	43.5	9.5	18.5	19	1.0
La Serranía	(inland-rural)	44.2	11.2	16.0	27	1.6

Source: Own creation.

Based on the demographic data of the group under study, no significant differences were found between the *comarcas* analysed. The average age of AEDL staff is between 43.5 and 44.2 years, which shows an important trajectory in the workplace. Consistently, this is a professional group that is also evolving towards consolidation, with experience ranging from 16 to 18.5 years. The agencies in which they work are largely established, with an average age of between 19 and 24 years. However, it appears that they do not have sufficient human resources, as the size of the agencies varies between 1 and 1.6 staff.

4.2. The dual model

In terms of the responses to the questionnaire on the dualization of the model, the survey based on pairs of bipolar items provided the following results by *comarca* (Table 3):

Table 3. Local development model by *comarca*.

	La Serranía (inland-rural)	El Rincón de Ademuz (inland-rural)	El Camp de Morvedre intermediate-coastal (non-rural)	La Vall d'Albaida intermediate-coastal (non-rural)	
Practical	3.0	4.5	4.0	3.1	Theoretical
Improvised	3.1	2.5	3.4	2.7	Planned
Unclear	2.8	2.5	2.8	2.8	Clearly-defined
Informal	3.3	3.0	3.2	3.3	Formal
Decentralised	2.3	3.0	3.2	2.5	Centralised
Invisible	2.8	3.0	2.2	2.1	Visible
Short-term	2.7	3.0	2.8	2.7	Long-term
Generalist	2.9	3.5	2.6	2.7	Integrating

Table 3. (Continued).

	La Serranía (inland-rural)	El Rincón de Ademuz (inland-rural)	El Camp de Morvedre intermediate-coastal (non-rural)	La Vall d'Albaida intermediate- coastal (non-rural)	
Rigid	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.8	Flexible
Partial-localist	2.6	3.0	2.8	2.3	Integral
Static	3.3	3.0	2.8	3.0	Dynamic
Dependent	2.4	3.0	2.4	2.2	Autonomous
Technical outlook	2.8	3.0	2.4	2.9	No technical outlook
Political vision	3.3	3.5	4.0	3.9	No political vision
Conventional-continuist	3.0	3.5	3.0	2.9	Innovative
Insufficient resources	3.0	2.5	2.0	2.0	Sufficient resources
Volunteer	3.3	3.0	2.6	2.8	Systematic
Micro vision	3.2	3.0	3.6	2.6	Macro vision
Addresses needs	2.8	3.0	3.0	2.7	Fails to address needs
Non-participant	2.7	3.0	2.8	2.8	Participant
No synergies	3.4	3.0	3.2	3.2	With synergies
Non-structured	3.3	3.0	2.8	3.1	Structured
No specific methodology	3.3	3.0	3.8	2.8	Specific methodologies
Individualised methodologies	3.0	2.5	3.2	2.7	Shared methodologies
Average	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.8	Average

Source: Own creation.

In contrast to the inland-rural *comarcas*, which, as can be seen, characterise the model as decentralised and dependent, the intermediate-coastal *comarcas* state that it is a visible model, in which there is no political vision, but that it has sufficient resources.

4.3. READI® methodology: Resources, actors, dynamics

As a result of the application of the READI® matrix, the capacity of a territory for development is evaluated based on the observation that a territory's development depends on the convergence of three key elements: Resources, stakeholders and dynamics. There is no point in a territory having resources if there are no actors who know how to use them. Or stakeholders who fail to cooperate and do not establish dynamics of interaction among themselves. Territories are therefore competent to the extent that they take advantage of the resources available, through the actors present and by generating dynamics among them. However, not all factors influence territorial development to the same extent and are therefore assigned different weights in the matrix (Calvo et al., 2021a). Applying the READI® matrix, the results on the total score per *comarca* are as follows (**Figure 2**):

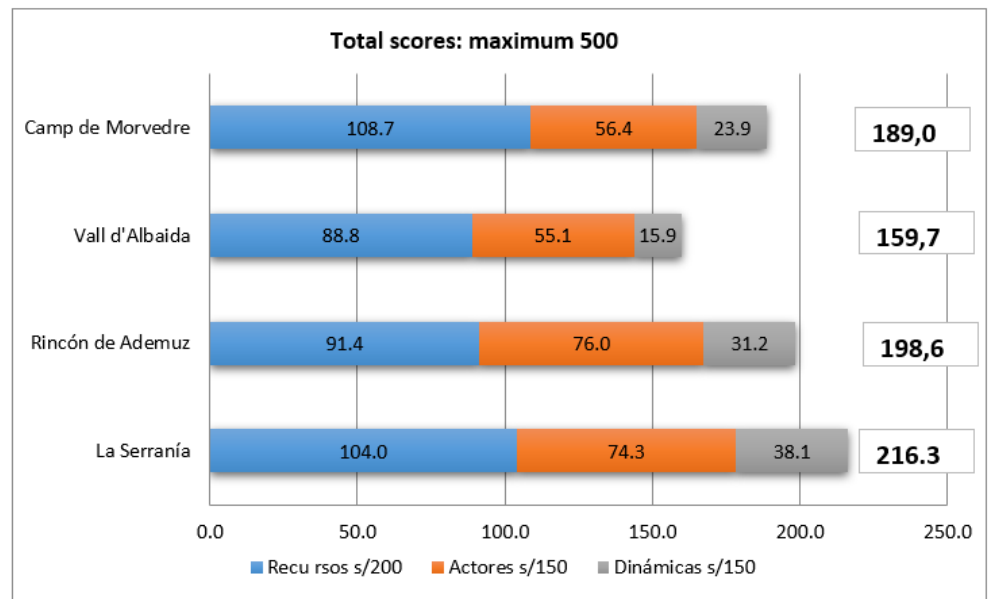


Figure 2. READI® matrix results: Total scores⁶.

Source: Own creation.

Comparing the scores for each of the three dimensions analysed, there are no significant differences in resources between the inland and coastal-intermediate areas. However, in the dimensions of actors and dynamics, there are differences between zones.

The stakeholder dimension refers to the existence of people and organisations (economic, political, social and technical), both public and private, with a direct or indirect interest in development of the territory. In this element, the rural *comarcas* scored between 74.3 and 76 points out of 150, with a fair pass mark for the potential of these agents for development, 49.5% for La Serranía and 50.7% for El Rincón de Ademuz. In contrast, the intermediate-coastal *comarcas* score was 55.1/150 points for La Vall d'Albaida (36.7%) and 56.4/150 (37.6%) for El Camp de Morvedre, far from a pass mark.

In terms of dynamics, this dimension is closely related to that of the actors. For interactions to take place in the territory, not only must the territorial stakeholders be detected and diagnosed, but there must also be spaces for meeting and exchange. In the territories analysed, these issues have a wide margin and scope for improvement, with results that barely exceed 25% of their potential in La Serranía.

4.4. READI® methodology: Productive resources

In relation to the object of study, in order to analyse the capacity of these counties to generate employment in greater detail, the detailed evaluation of the productive resources of the “resources” dimension of the READI® matrix (quantity and quality of employment generated, productive fabric, number of productive sectors and size of companies) is shown in **Figure 3** below:

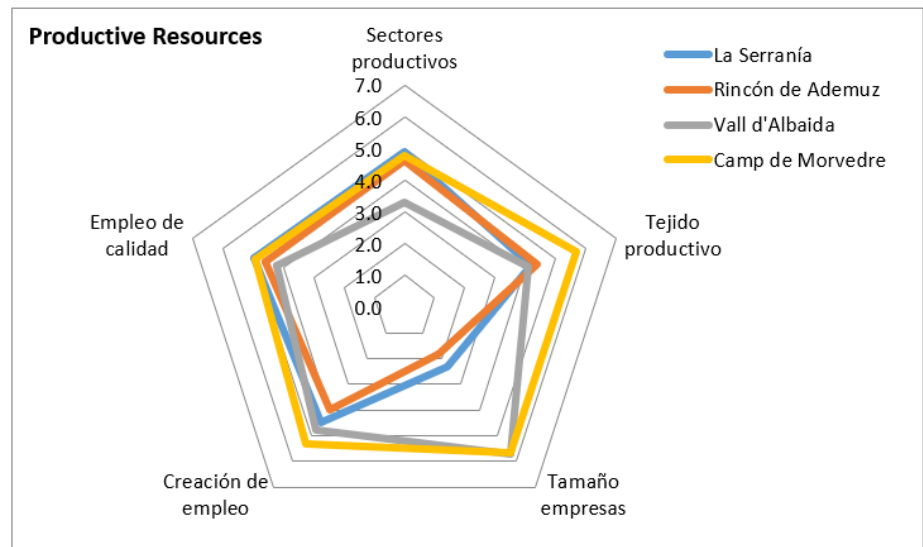


Figure 3. READI® matrix results: Productive resources⁷.

Source: Own creation.

Specifically, the items referring to the productive sectors (agriculture, industry, construction and services) available in the territory and their level of representation over the total number of companies do not show significant differences between rural and urban areas, with the potential of the *comarcas* standing at around 50%, except in the case of La Vall d'Albaida, with 33%. In the case of the type of productive fabric and its degree of innovation, there are no differences between *comarcas* either, with mostly traditional companies or companies in transition that do not exceed 44% of their capacity for development, except in El Camp de Morvedre, with more innovative companies and 57% of possibilities for development. All this, despite the great difference in the majority size of companies in the territory (micro, small, medium or large companies) and the effects they have on it (territory in equilibrium, neutral or with an imbalance between the different types of companies). In this case, the inland *comarcas* have a 23% capacity to promote the territory in the case of La Serranía and 18% in El Rincón de Ademuz, compared to 57% in La Vall d'Albaida and El Camp de Morvedre, where large companies have a greater importance and influence.

The amount of employment generated is between 40% and 45% of its capacity in the inland *comarcas*, while in the intermediate-coastal regions it is between 18% and 53%, so it can be said that more employment has been generated in these areas.

However, in the case of employment quality, it is similar in both areas, although slightly higher in rural areas, at between 46% and 50% of their potential, compared to 42% and 49% in the more urban *comarcas*.

4.5. Sociodemographic indicators

The sociodemographic, demographic, business and labour market data of the four *comarcas* considered are analysed below (**Table 4**):

Table 4. Sociodemographic indicators of the *comarcas*.

Indicators (Series start year in brackets)	El Rincón de Ademuz (inland-rural)			La Serranía (inland-rural)			El Camp de Morvedre intermediate-coastal (non-rural)			La Vall d'Albaida intermediate-coastal (non-rural)			Communitat
	Series start	2017	2022 2023	Series start	2017	2022 2023	Series start	2017	2022 2023	Series start	2017	2022 2023	
Demographics													
Population (1996)	3.013	2.289	2.221	17.169	16.237	17.115	74.302	90.370	97.826	81.012	87.789	88.114	5210.600
Women (%) (1996)	48.79	47.01	46.23	49.08	47.50	47.42	51.19	50.59	50.81	50.27	50.07	50.10	50.77
Regarding Province (%) (1996)	0.14	0.9	0.8	0.79	0.64	0.64	3.42	3.56	3.68	3.73	3.46	3.32	
Regarding AC (%) (1996)	0.08	0.05	0.04	0.43	0.33	0.33	1.85	1.83	1.88	2.02	1.78	1.69	
Density (Hab./Km2) (1996)	8.14	6.18	5.91	12.22	11.55	12.18	273.97	333.22	360.72	112.17	121.55	122	224.07
Companies													
Companies (DIRCE) (2012)	180	174	162	1.084	1.005	1.015	4.963	4.930	5.079	6.767	6.628	6.647	374.917
Companies registered with the Social Security (2012)	64	58	75	408	435	459	1.898	2.059	2.102	2.564	2.703	2.753	150.491
Work													
Registered unemployment (1996)	134	131	130	701	1.092	919	7.975	6.985	5.837	5.661	6.688	5.155	340.298
Unemployment rate March (%) (2006)	5.93	9.59	10.02	6.15	10.79	9.01	6.28	12.14	9.64	5.97	11.54	9.01	10.26
Registered unemployment Women March (%) (1996)	60	58.02	54.62	58.64	54.67	59.19	62.56	56.11	60.34	59.4	61.39	63.63	60.87
Contracts (2006)	1.659	1.093	1.295	4.010	4.033	4.006	31.866	36.497	30.179	25.609	32.022	27.551	1777.634
Contracts Women (%) 2006	55.27	51.14	62.39	44.69	41.36	44.61	37.20	37.99	42.49	40.31	39.85	43.89	45.18
Social Security registration rate IN <i>comarca</i> March (2012)	29.84	32.43	37.32	32.5	38.13	43.03	34.37	35.34	38.1	41.54	48.94	54.67	62.25
Social Security registration rate Residents (2012)	42.11	46.63	52.81	47.87	54.43	62.89	49.34	52.63	58.79	46.86	54.6	61.34	57.87
Women affiliated to the SS Residents March (2012)	39.15	40.66	44.67	39.92	39.56	42.62	44.7	45.74	46.59	40.86	41.62	44.5	46.62

Source: Own creation. Data extracted from the National Statistics Institute (INE), the Valencian Statistics Institute (IVE), the Valencian Employment and Training Service (LABORA) and ARGOS, the information service of the Generalitat Valenciana (Regional Government); period consulted 2017–2023.

The novelty of this study lies, first, in its methodological approach, which integrates multiple tools: A pre-coded questionnaire survey, statistical and documentary analysis, and the application of the READI® methodology, a self-assessment measurement tool for territories. Second, this triangulation enables a comparative analysis of various districts across different contexts—rural and non-rural—examining whether territory serves as a key factor in their development. It also explores whether local development model polarization—aligned with dualization theory—is driven by economic or structural parameters impacting employment levels.

5. Discussion

If attention is paid to the problems of the Valencian local development system indicated in the theoretical framework, the model considers the location of the territory as one of the key elements for its development (inland/rural territories vs. coastal-intermediate/(peri-) urban territories). Analysing the profile of the AEDL staff studied in the counties in which they carry out their development work, according to the ETCV (2012), 30.2% of the total of these professional work in the rural system, which has 1.5% of the population and 2% of the GDP of the community. These figures show, at first sight, a commitment to the development of the territories with the worst economic situation.

Regarding the demographic data, the difference between rural and (peri-) urban *comarcas* is well known (Calvo et al., 2023). In the case of the evolution of the population, it is possible to speak of residential trajectories and population density based on diversification in the interior and an increase of inhabitants in coastal areas, although not very important. However, in the specific case of women, significant differences are found between rural areas, where they do not account for half of the residents, and urban areas, where the opposite is the case. Moreover, in inland areas, the percentage of women has decreased over the last five years, while the percentage of women in coastal and midland areas has increased.

On the other hand, if we look at the demographic data of the AEDL technical staff, we do not find significant differences between the *comarcas* analysed (average age around 44 years, and a wide range of professional experience between 16 and 18.5 years). The agencies in which they work are also largely consolidated, with more than 20 years in operation.

Consequently, according to the dualization thesis (Aguado et al., 2023), the model has generated various actions in the territory, some with their own resources, instruments and methodologies that allow them to plan and organise their actions and others with very limited resources and no defined intervention methodologies, which obliges them to work on a day-to-day basis, with no medium/long-term vision. In this sense, according to the responses to the survey on the dualization of the model, both inland and (peri) urban *comarcas* consider that it is a dependent and theoretical model, rather than a practical one, which does not have sufficient autonomy to meet the objectives, ratifying the theoretical contributions. This is due, in the case of inland areas, to the fact that it is a decentralised model. In the case of the intermediate-coastal areas, although it is a rigid (not flexible) model, in which the micro (as opposed to macro) and localist (partial) vision prevails over the integral, which does not have

specific methodologies for its purpose, this is because it is a visible system in which the technical and not so much the political vision prevails, but which has sufficient resources.

This profile shows that agencies and technical staff, with years of experience behind them, in many cases generate their own methodologies or ways of doing things (derived from the institutional absence of these), not waiting for the model to provide them with the tools they need. It is a selective, fine-tuning phase, where objectives are covered by operational efficiency. This implies a better use of resources and more integrated actions in line with the needs of the territory and aligned with broader objectives and strategies (local or supra-local, solely from local development or linked to other municipal areas), as can also be seen in the analysis of the READI® matrix.

However, in all the *comarcas* there are not enough “human” resources, as the size of the agencies varies between 1 and 1.6 AEDL. The presence of a significant number of entities of a one-person or two-agent character has remained for the last decade at around 80% of the total number of entities in the local development model (Calvo, 2011; Cantarero et al., 2011; Martínez-Puche, 2021). In this sense, consolidation of the system in line with the seniority of the agencies and the experience of the actors would directly influence the effectiveness of the actions. The size of the agencies is not a decisive element in the management of labour and social insertion projects (Ribeiro and Sanchís, 2010), and specialisation can even give rise to the loss of a global perspective on the part of technical personnel (Cantarero et al., 2011). However, a certain organisational size is required to access the technological and human resources needed to be efficient (Ribeiro and Sanchís, 2010), so this variable would corroborate the hypothesis of dualization of the model (Aguado et al., 2023).

Based on these two premises (thesis of the dualization of models of action on the territory and thesis of the territory as one of the key factors for its development - inland/rural vs. coastal-intermediate/(peri) urban), from the perspective of knowing its potential to handle future processes of local development, the different geographical areas have differentiated resources, stakeholders and dynamics for this purpose. In this sense, application of the READI® matrix shows as a result that in the specific factor of resources it is not possible to speak of a differentiated pattern between rural and non-rural *comarcas*, since, as has been indicated, these veteran agencies/agents have sufficient resources in general, except for the “human” ones, which are clearly insufficient in a dependent model, and theoretical rather than practical, which lacks sufficient autonomy to fulfil the objectives.

However, in the dimension of the “stakeholders” with an interest in the development of the territory, the rural districts, with a decentralised model, obtain a fair pass mark for the potential of these development agents (presence, cataloguing and contact between them). On the contrary, in the intermediate-coastal areas, with a model in which the micro and localist vision takes precedence, the technical vision prevails, being placed far from a pass mark. This can be attributed to the proximity between actors in rural territories and the greater social complexity of non-rural ones. In other words, although in the intermediate-coastal areas there are more specific actors and interest groups (specific resources for development) and they are more varied, in the inland areas there is a greater process of detection, contact and proposals for collaboration between them.

In this sense, it is necessary to consider the relevance of “social capital” and the cooperation links between stakeholders (human, technical and organisational resources, among others) as a source of relationships where the dynamics that generate development strategies take place. According to Gallicchio (2003), social capital is relational and, in order to possess it, a person or an organisation has to link up with another person or organisation. Social capital only exists when it is shared. Consequently, even if there are actors, if there are no exchanges and interactions between them, no dynamics are generated. In short, this social capital is not used by both territories for possible territorial development strategies.

As for the “dynamics”, as in the case of the agents, there are also significant differences between the territories. In inland areas there are socio-institutional networks of interaction between the different social actors or interest groups for development at local level with a low degree of institutionalisation, but these interactions, forums and meeting points are even less in the intermediate-coastal areas. As in the case of actors, this can be attributed to the proximity of stakeholders in rural territories and the greater social complexity in non-rural ones.

To determine whether the dualization/polarisation of the model and the rural/non-rural areas have an effect on the level of employment in the territory, if we look at the detailed evaluation of the “productive resources” of the READI® matrix, due to the internal heterogeneity of the *comarcas*, no significant differences are observed between rural and urban areas in the items referring to the productive sectors of the territory and their degree of representation, nor in the type of productive fabric and its degree of innovation, except in El Camp de Morvedre, with more innovative companies.

However, according to the matrix applied, there is a difference in the majority size of companies in the territory and their effects on it, as the inland counties present an imbalance between the types of companies, with a low capacity for economic momentum, compared to the intermediate-coastal counties where large companies have a greater importance and influence. Indeed, according to the secondary data on companies from the DIRCE, the evolution of the business fabric is diversified, but in the case of companies registered with the Social Security, although all the *comarcas* have increased the number of their businesses over the last five years, the rural areas have increased significantly compared to the non-rural. These results are consistent with the dimensions of the READI® matrix and the greater dynamism of the actors in the hinterland populations.

Labour market indicators also show differences between inland and mid-coastal areas. In the case of the regional Social Security registration rate, it is diversified and its trend is upward in all cases, with no significant differences between rural and (peri-) urban areas. However, the inland counties have experienced higher rises than the rest in all cases over the last five years, whether or not the workers are resident in the area. Likewise, in rural areas, recruitment is increasing, although with significant differences according to region, as opposed to the (peri-) urban area, where it is decreasing. These data are in line with the amount of employment generated, according to the results of the READI® matrix, where this is located between 40% and 45% of its capacity in the inland counties, while in the intermediate-coastal ones it reaches between 18% and 53%, so it can be stated that more employment has been

generated in these areas. Nevertheless, in the case of employment quality, it is similar in both areas, although slightly higher in rural areas, compared to the more urban *comarcas*.

Disaggregating the data by gender, although women's contracts increase in all the *comarcas*, in the case of women affiliated to Social Security, although the rates are significantly lower than those of men, the same positive trend can be detected, higher in the inland area than in the coastal-intermediate area. On the other hand, there are no significant differences in the unemployment rate in all the *comarcas* where, moreover, its trend is downwards. However, unemployment decreases more sharply in the intermediate-coastal areas, with no significant differences by gender.

6. Conclusions

The aim of the research was to discover whether the situations of polarisation of the local development model (dualization theory) and of the territory as a key factor for its development (rural/non-rural area) have effects on the level of employment, understood as the key indicator of any action for development; and which, therefore, validates the actions undertaken on it. The proposed methodological approach (survey triangulation, READI® methodology and socio-economic data) in the four *comarcas* studied shows an improvement in the business fabric and the labour market in rural areas, exemplified by the greater growth in the number of businesses registered with the Social Security, the greater increases in Social Security affiliation, the increase in recruitment and a slightly higher quality of employment, also in the case of women, compared to (peri-) urban areas, despite the fact that in the latter unemployment is decreasing more sharply. This reflects a commitment to the development of those inland areas in the worst economic situation. This statement is corroborated in the analysis of the reality of the AEDL staff and of the *comarcas* in which they work, in coherence with the dimensions of the READI® matrix and the greater dynamism of the actors in rural populations.

In the light of what has been observed, we are in a position to affirm that the duality of the model simply coexists with the reality of the territories and, in cases such as those observed, structurally affects their functioning and results.

Finally, we present recommendations and suggestions based on recent studies conducted by the research group, which align with the findings of this study. These proposals aim to address the existing dualisation, foster the development of both rural and non-rural regions, and promote employment growth. Key actions include: Emphasizing the importance of local strategies during crisis situations (Calvo et al., 2017); transitioning from functional, operational, or administrative pseudo-decentralisation and delocalisation in territorial development to genuine decentralisation of actions at the micro level (Aguado, 2019); enhancing territorial coordination among administrations involved in local development (Calvo et al., 2020); and adopting new development methodologies grounded in a comprehensive, integrated, and inclusive territorial perspective (Calvo, 2011; Calvo et al., 2021a, 2021b).

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Notes

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- ² ILO Concept Note No. 1 on the development agenda post 2015.
- ³ Comarca is a territorial unit in Spain and Latin American countries comparable to a county. It provides an accepted spatial framework and constitutes the highest administrative level for which there are complete and official statistical data, adapted from Brenner et al. (2006).
- ⁴ We would like to thank Professor Carmen Zornoza for her collaboration in drawing up the cartography of the article.
- ⁵ The explanation of this methodology is not discussed in this paper and can be found and explained in detail in other works by the authors (Sigalat et al., 2021).
- ⁶ El Rincón de Ademuz and La Serranía are inland-rural areas, El Camp de Morvedre and La Vall d’Albaida are intermediate-coastal (non-rural) areas.
- ⁷ El Rincón de Ademuz and La Serranía are inland-rural areas, El Camp de Morvedre and La Vall d’Albaida are intermediate-coastal areas (not rural).

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