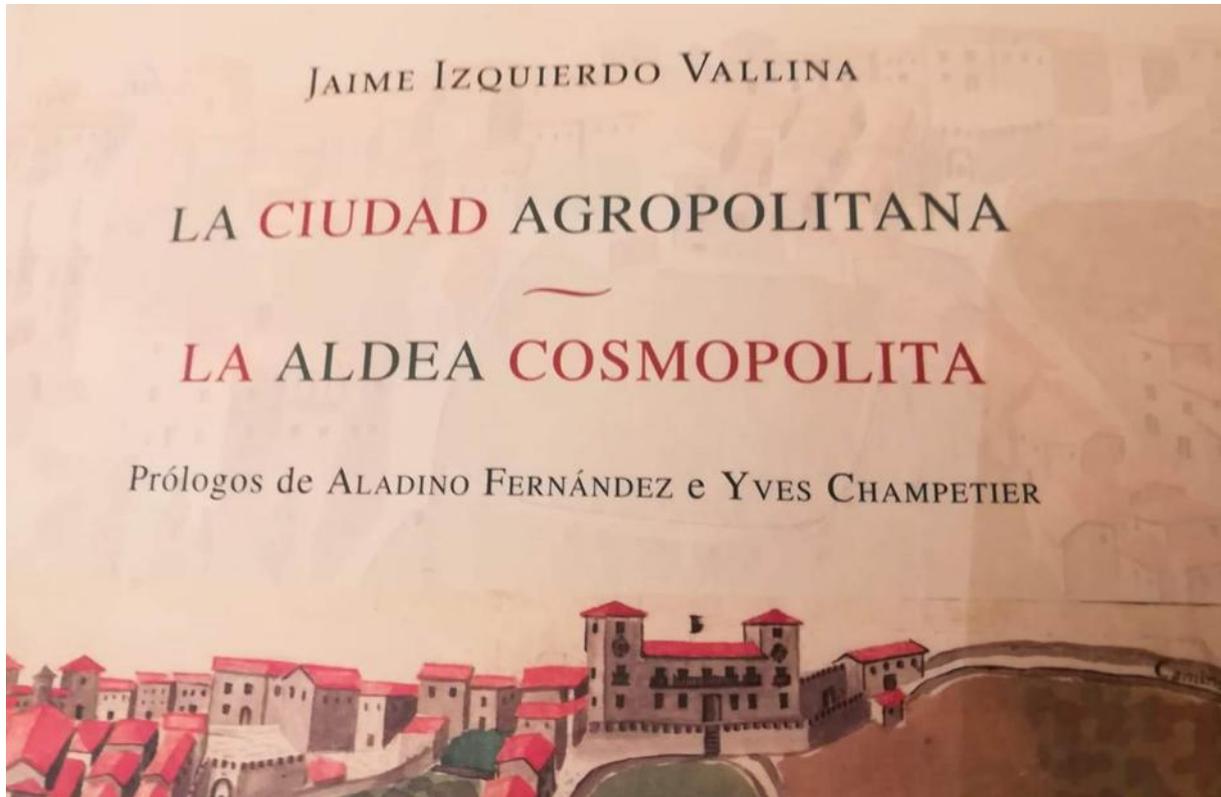


The agripolitan city, the cosmopolitan village

“La ciudad agropolitana. La aldea cosmopolita” (The agripolitan city, the cosmopolitan village) is the latest book by Jaime Izquierdo Vallina.



Jaime Izquierdo Vallina has been working in and writing about rural areas for 30 years. He played a major role in the Asturias region of Spain in the implementation of the first stage of the EU LEADER programme and followed its successive stages through his various responsibilities. Based on this experience, he made a central contribution to the drafting of the Spanish Rural Development Act, which entered into force in 2007.

Throughout his career, Jaime has written numerous books on urban-rural issues, nature conservation, and new perspectives for approaching rural areas.

In September 2019, Jaime was appointed policy officer to the President of the Principality of Asturias, in charge of meeting the region's demographic challenge. The problems of desertification in rural areas concern a large part of Spain. Today, on the initiative of the national government and some autonomous communities, first measures are being taken. It is likely that Asturias will play a pioneering role in this field.

The book was presented on 21 October, 2019, in Oviedo, to 230 attendees. Yves Champetier (AEIDL), who wrote one of the book's forewords, took part in the event.

This date of 21 October was also the 20th anniversary of the Asturias Rural Development Network. On this occasion, a conference bringing together the 11 LEADER groups of Asturias and the main public stakeholders made it possible to take stock of LEADER in the region, of the profound transformations of the rural environment that the initiative has accompanied, and of the challenges for the future. Yves Champetier was invited to speak on the same theme, giving a

European vision of what had happened since the launch of LEADER. He highlighted the need for animation, dynamisation, experimentation and 'laboratory' to be put back on the agenda given the many challenges facing the rural environment.

Below is the foreword written by Yves Champetier, which gives an overview of Jaime's latest book. For those who would like to purchase it, it is available from the publisher, [KRK Ediciones](#).



20th anniversary of the Asturias Rural Development Network (Oviedo, 21 October 2019). From left to right: Aladino Fernandez, María Jose Iglesias (La Nueva España), Jaime Izquierdo Vallina and Yves Champetier.

Foreword

Yves Champetier (AEIDL)¹

Over the years, Jaime Izquierdo Vallina has deepened his work, refined his ideas and now offers us a vast panorama of what the world of tomorrow could be and what our world should be. New rural-urban interrelationships need to be developed to meet today's challenges, such as climate change and the alarming erosion of biodiversity. It is a scholarly overview, combining historical analysis, multiple intellectual references and proposals for action.

¹ Former director of the LEADER Co-ordinating Unit and Observatory (1992-2000), expert for the European Network for Rural Development and FARNET.

A new rural-urban pact

It is quite striking that before approaching the rural environment, Jaime talks to us about the city, the heart of the world economy today. He proposes to reinvent the interrelationship between cities and their surrounding countryside, by rediscovering coherence, complementarity and harmony.

In France, since 2015, 'reciprocity contracts' have enabled metropolitan areas to develop their interactions with surrounding rural areas. Today, it is a modest measure, with few financial resources, but which could, if the political will is there, take on a completely different dimension in the future. In Montpellier, a city that signed the Milan Pact mentioned by Jaime, reciprocity contracts have been signed with the surrounding inter-municipalities, in particular around a 'territorial food pact' and an approach to promote local products, called 'BoCal, good and local'. Montpellier has also signed a reciprocity contract with two territories in the Massif Central, very far from the urban periphery. The objective is to promote the use of the region's wood in construction, but also in the city's collective heating system; it also aims to promote the forest as a tourist destination for city dwellers.

Cosmopolitan, multicultural

In the second part of his book, Jaime develops what could be the village of tomorrow, the 'cosmopolitan village'. Our LEADER friends in Finland believe that in their country, in a few years' time, everyone will live in villages, including urban dwellers, and that LEADER will provide the means and instruments for rural and urban development. They do not use the term cosmopolitan, but a resolutely positive synonym, which is 'multicultural Finland'.

I like these designations of 'cosmopolitan' and 'multicultural'. I was 17 years old in May 1968. Among the slogans of the major demonstrations which took place that year were "living and working in the country" and "returning to the land". Thousands of young people (often referred to at the time as hippies by local populations and now more commonly referred to as 'neo-rural'), mostly urban, moved at that time to difficult rural areas, such as certain Pyrenean valleys and remote areas of the Massif Central and the Southern Alps. Many failed, as their utopia was so unrealistic, but those who remained showed tenacity, an unparalleled spirit of innovation, and territories previously condemned have now become places of innovation, resistance and alternative ways of living. We're not far from Jaime's cosmopolitan villages! And this movement has not been limited to France. Today it continues throughout Europe, and this is a great opportunity for the rural areas concerned.

The end of the peasants and... the new peasants

In 1972, I studied development economics at the University of Grenoble. We had the chance to follow a 30-hour module on peasant agriculture. Jerzy Tepicht, who was in charge of this module, had been responsible for Polish agricultural policy for 20 years. He highlighted the sophistication of this type of agriculture, its adaptation to the environment, the indispensable role it played in feeding the daily lives of populations, and the danger, or even the impossibility, of trying to make it disappear as part of collectivisation or nationalisation processes.

Henri Mendras, a well-known sociologist and agricultural specialist, has written extensively on the end of the peasants to be gradually replaced by farmers who organise their production in line with the capitalist model. In 1979, he published 'Le voyage au pays de l'utopie rustique' (Travel in Rustic Utopia). In the form of a philosophical tale, he proposes, without thinking this possible in the near future, another educational model, another organisation of the family, another

relationship to work, another conception of political life – in short, another civilisation. There is a little bit of Henri Mendras in Jaime's writings and proposals, but Jaime is not in the field of utopia. Rather, he proposes that we take resolute action.

Resettling and/or repopulating the countryside

The movement initiated in the 1970s with the arrival of new populations in rural areas has continued, diversified considerably and extended to the borders of many regions in many countries – from the Scottish islands to Scandinavia, from Alentejo in Portugal to the Mediterranean islands, in most mountain ranges.

It is interesting to mention that these new populations welcomed the arrival of LEADER in 1992, took this opportunity to develop a wide range of innovative actions, became involved in local action groups and, in a number of cases, even chaired them.

However, for multiple reasons, not all territories are placed on the same footing. A large part of rural areas continues to experience population loss.

Welcoming new populations has become a major strategic focus in many rural areas, and I am delighted to see that today several Spanish LEADER groups, particularly in Aragon, are beginning to initiate active policies in this area.

The agricultural decline has wreaked havoc in many territories, forests have taken over from crops, landscapes have closed... We are very far from the agro-ecological management proposed by Jaime. Rural areas have emptied themselves of their population, but access to property and housing is still complicated, and many skills have been lost. What Jaime proposes is the reoccupation of these abandoned spaces.

The villagers, or the reintroduction of the peasant

Jaime's 'aldeonauta' (villager) reminds me a little of Hector Oesterheld's 'eternauta'² Like him, he faces immense challenges!

Good news: at least in several countries, there is no shortage of candidates for settlement in rural areas, offering an opportunity for rural areas. But they often have many of the following characteristics: they were not born and have no family in a rural environment; they have no agricultural training and they have no or little capital. But they have will, endurance, other professional experiences, they have significant cultural capital, they are often cosmopolitan and they want to change their lives. Furthermore they do not seek to make a fortune, but simply to live their lives fully in harmony with their values. They are in search of "happy sobriety", as the peasant philosopher Pierre Rahbi, originally from the Sahara and settled in the Cévennes (southern France), has kept on saying for more than 45 years now.

LEADER groups in Catalonia and Extremadura are currently experimenting with the implementation of 'test spaces'. These are agricultural lands made available to candidates for settlement for a certain period of time, allowing them to check their ability to engage in agricultural activity while being coached, trained and networked with others in similar positions. This type of approach deserves to be continued, diversified and expanded. Financing tools must be invented in order to free "aldeonauts" from the weight of the price of land. And then, the "commons", dear to Elinor Ostrom, need to be reinvented, and extended to multiple uses of the rural space.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Eternaut

'Ecovillages', 'cosmopolitan villages', 'smart villages'

In recent years, the notion of the village has been returning in force. This return to the village is certainly beneficial for reinventing the agro-ecological functions that will make it possible to reclaim abandoned territories, as Jaime proposes.

The village is a good level to foster citizens' initiatives. It is also a good level to reinvent the local services necessary for the quality of life of local populations, which is an important aspect of the 'smart village' approach.

All these approaches are intended to be mutually enriching. Jaime's contribution is to highlight the collective intelligence that has enabled once large populations to live humbly in remote territories, through the multiplication of forms of pluriactivity, individual, family, village, seasonal, temporal and through subtle and refined management of their ecosystem. By highlighting this link with the history of the territory, its agro-ecological and landscape specificities, he calls for a new collective intelligence, connected to the world, for the restoration of areas that are often abandoned today, an agro-ecological reoccupation.

Each of these approaches has the merit of enriching reflection and providing additional assets for more effective territorial development approaches – we are all aware of the contributions that territorial development policies have made in recent years, but we also know their limits. Social and territorial disparities have taken on new forms, but they are still there, maintained by the steamroller of globalisation. And our countries are not up to either of the challenges of climate change or biodiversity loss. So, we must certainly do more and better, at all levels – from the inhabitant, the citizen, the village!

From village to territory

LEADER will soon be 30 years old, and the territorial approach is one of its seven specificities. It has made it possible to move away from traditional sectoral approaches and purely local approaches, which are insufficient and often depressing. LEADER's objective is to create agreed, wanted, coherent, 'unwalled' territories with a critical mass sufficient to support a transformation strategy developed by and for local populations. Of course, we are aware of the limitations that this approach has often faced. With regards to demographic delimitations, the desire of regions and states to cover the entire rural space has often resulted in territories that are too large, decided from above, and increasingly distant from citizens. So 'yes' to the village that is smart, ecological and cosmopolitan so that it inspires, irrigates and reinvents the territories of tomorrow, connected territories, and territories with variable geometry according to the objectives pursued. Rebuilding the territorial approach from the villages also means strengthening this other LEADER specificity, i.e. citizen involvement, the bottom-up approach.

LEADER, an innovation laboratory

Over the years, the implementation of LEADER has become considerably more complex and has disrupted much of the initiative's innovative capacity. "Innovation and bureaucratisation are antagonistic terms," says Jaime.

And yet, much dynamism remains within the local action groups, among local actors. Among thousands of interesting but classic projects, deeply innovative actions continue to be supported by LEADER. The programme remains the spearhead of innovation in rural areas, but it can and must do much better. To this end, administrative constraints must be considerably reduced.

A great deal of work has been done by the European Network for Rural Development in recent years to analyse the implementation systems and identify the reasons for the difficulties encountered. Today, proposals are on the table that could considerably reduce the implementation procedures and free up local creativity. It will be up to the Member States and local groups to take up this issue so that LEADER can regain its primary function of innovation.

My dream would be that a future European LEADER network would be the "NASA village" that Jaime calls for and that LEADER on the ground could support a thousand initiatives that will gradually help 'cosmopolitan' villages to flourish.

My conviction is that the European project will not be able to find a new lease of life, will not be reinvented without the involvement of citizens and without the involvement of the territories. It's a vast project that will take several years to complete, with new generations rebuilding it around the values of openness, inclusion, solidarity, ecological diversity etc. Cosmopolitan villages will be an essential part of it. Thank you, Jaime, for your exciting contribution!

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