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**THE LOCAL DIMENSION OF
ACTIVE LABOUR
POLICIES IN SPAIN
THE ERSISI PROJECT
IN NAVARRA**

Grupo ALTER. Universidad Pública de Navarra
Spanish and English version



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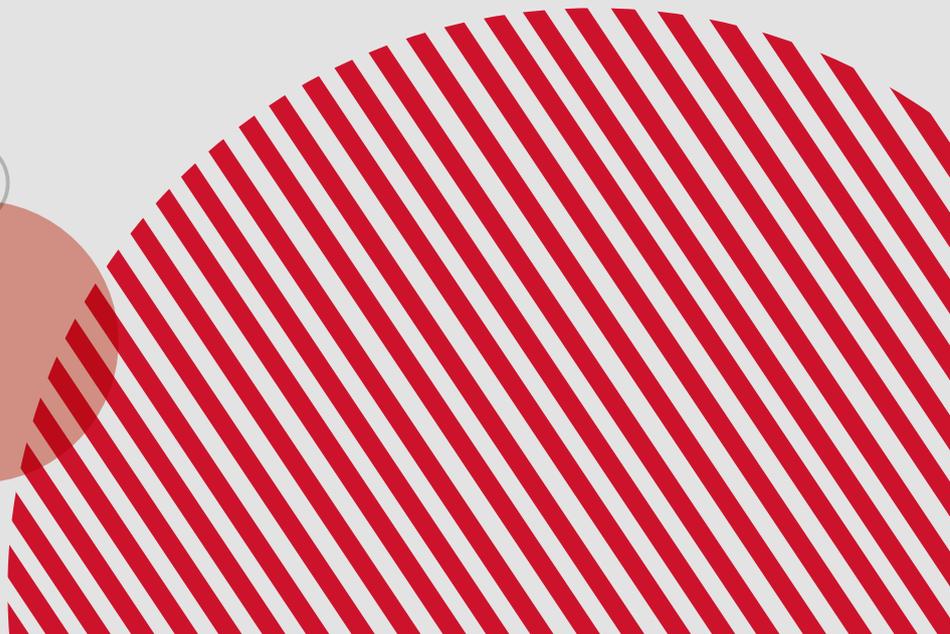
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Abstract

The ERSISI project has piloted a model of integrated delivery of social and employment services in two areas of Navarra. This document aims to evaluate the reform of the socio-labor inclusion measures carried out in the project. The reform is based on the assumption that the knowledge and participation of local agents is key to achieving a better adaptation of inclusion resources both to the contexts where they are located and to the profiles of the beneficiaries. This criterion has been embodied in the implemented Local Employment Groups composed of social agents and public administrations to favor their involvement in the design of Active Labour Market Policies.



INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

A fundamental issue understanding the social inclusion of vulnerable people is the institutional design of inclusive policies. Under this term, those related to social services, minimum income and Active Labour Market Policies are usually included.

In recent years, these policies faced the need to undertake changes and adaptation processes to a social reality characterized by new productive models, the ageing of the population, the transformation of families, the labour market and the increase of migratory flows. The debate on the preparation of Active Labour Market Policies is broad, but it is also clear that there is a consensus in academia regarding the importance of taking local agents into account. Despite this evidence, there is a coexistence between the decentralization at the regional level and the centralization of employment policies. (Monereo Pérez et al., 2016). Simultaneously, government regulation and financing of employment training are fundamental, but they are implemented at the regional level (Pérez-Eransas, 2010).

In this context, the need from the local level to be “taken into account” to improve the design of both activation policies in particular and inclusion policies, in general, is continuously recurrent. This would facilitate the creation of participative organizations, resource adaptation to people’s need and social networks in different local areas. We could say that the day-to-day life of stakeholders such as employment and social services, revealed the need to undertake changes in these policies in order to promote social adaptation by significant transformation processes.

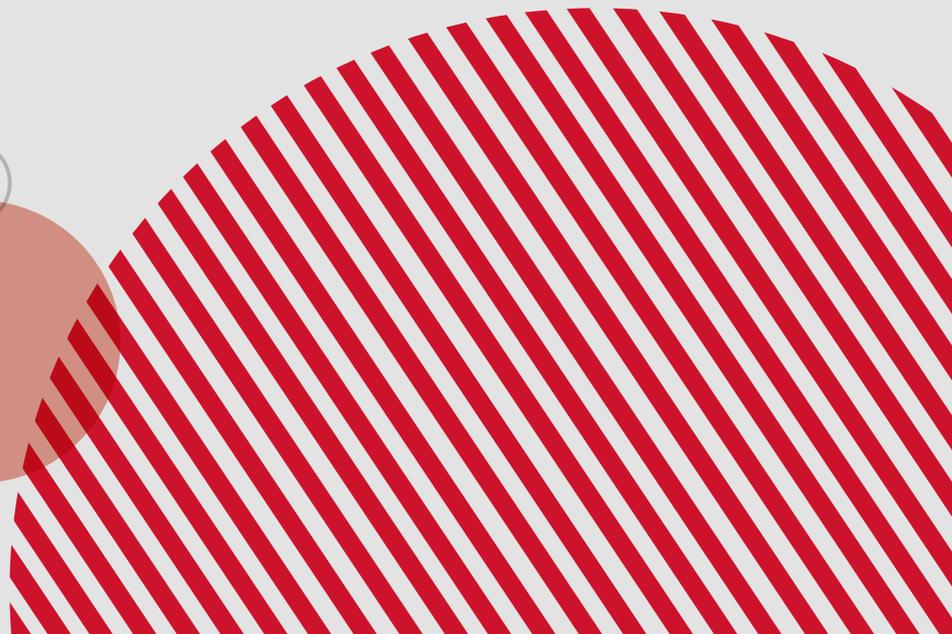
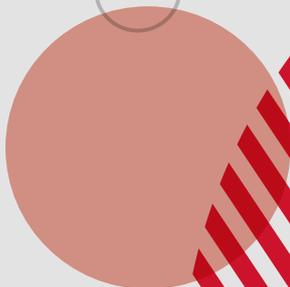
In the case of people with significant employment access difficulties, the integration of social and employment services is already included within the institutional response. One of the primary keys in service integration models involves a necessary adaptation of the resource portfolios and more specifically of the activation resources. This adaptation must include both the particularities of each service and the reality of the new user profiles (long-term unemployed people, workers and poor workers, single-parent families or migrants).

Starting from here, in the ERSISI project a pilot of service integration model has been implemented through the figure of the “case-managers” and the system of “One-stop shop”. This initiative was launched to strengthen local agents in their definition of Active Labour Policies. The experience has been carried out in two areas of Navarra: Western Sakana (Towns of Alsasua, Olazagutia and Ciordia) and Tudela.

Within this organizational context, the objective of the paper is to present the advances and limitations of the work experience reforming the socio-labour integration resources.



**CONTRIBUTING TO A BETTER
POLICY PLANNING FROM THE
LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL.
FOUNDATION OF THE PILOT
EXPERIENCE DEVELOPED IN
THE ERSISI PROJECT**



Contributing to a better policy planning from the local government level. Foundation of the pilot experience developed in the ERSISI Project.

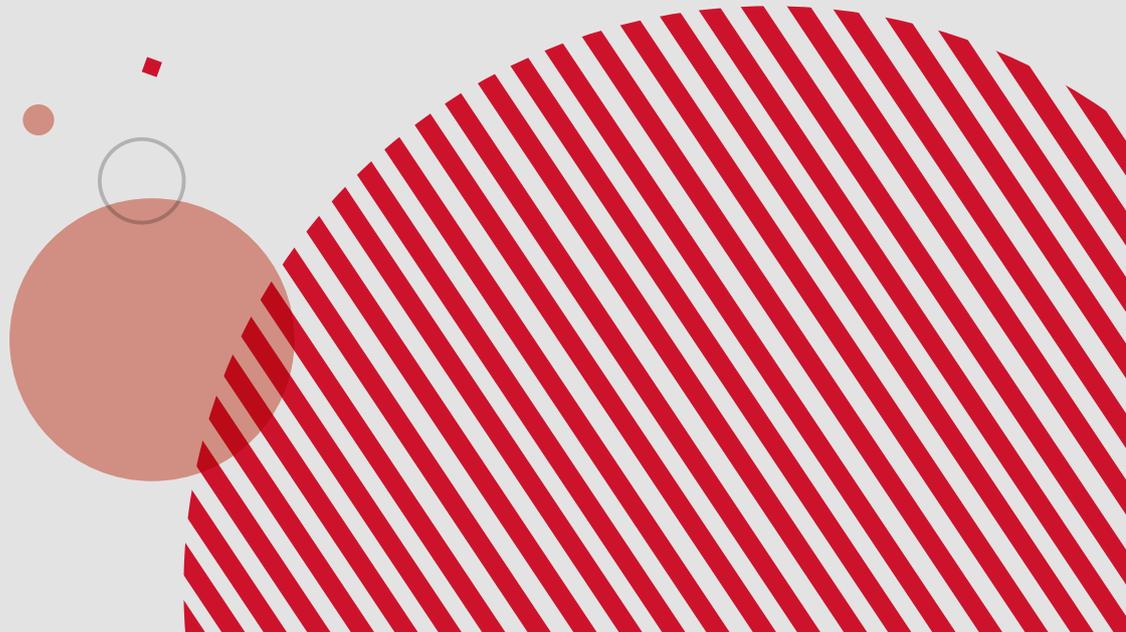
The second intervention scope, of the five included in the ERSISI project, addresses the need adaptation of activation measures to the characteristics of people and the territory. Person-centred care models, compared to other models traditionally designed from the service approach, require an adaptation to the needs and interests of people. This implies flexible resources compliant with diverse situations (Borja, 2013; Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2013). At the same time, the process of returning to the labour market requires a series of actions aimed at bringing unemployed applicants closer to job offers (Pérez Eransus, 2010). All this must necessarily start from the local level.

Finn (2000) pointed out that the implementation of adapted responses is crucial due to the absence of a local connection. He also exposed the importance of the local social agencies coordination, to improve policy impact. Künzel (2012), on the other hand, shows the activation measures must be adapted not only to the new potential beneficiaries but also to those who accumulate various social exclusion factors. The adaptation should be made from the local sphere since, as the author points out, this is the level at which the different actors intervene. The requirements imply a vital coordination effort between agencies (social services and employment) but also of different types of actors (public and private) and diverse professional profiles.

ERSISI has tested a new mechanism for the planning of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) through the Local Employment Groups (GEL) in Tudela and Sakana, composed of public, private and civil society stakeholders. The objective of these groups was to produce activation measure proposals- capacity building activities in particular - adapted to the needs and reducing the present labour incorporation barriers. The participation of local agents was fundamental to achieve an adequate objective definition and allowing socio-labour incorporation. These groups focused on designing a set of measures, especially those related to training, adapted to the needs of the economic environment and the profiles of the beneficiaries. For such, they applied employment diagnosis, researched demands in the area, needs of the employer and the training needs of the beneficiaries. These actions are more effective if they are designed and executed, considering the needs and characteristics of those who demand employment as well as the economic and productive characteristics of the territory. This involves a “bottom-up” approach in the design of activation policies in order to guarantee measures and resources adapted to the realities of the territories (Künzel, 2012).



**HOW HAS THIS EXPERIENCE
OF STRENGTHENING THE
ROLE OF LOCAL AGENTS IN
THE ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET
POLICIES BEEN EXECUTED?
IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL
EMPLOYMENT GROUPS, WITHIN
THE FRAMEWORK OF THE
ERSIS₆ PROJECT**



How has this experience of strengthening the role of local agents in the Active Labour Market Policies been executed? Implementation of Local Employment Groups, within the framework of the ERSISI Project.

The composition of the Local Employment Groups included “a condensed but plural representation of stakeholders from public administrations and social agents” (ERSISI Project Report). Resulting in the constitution of two groups, one for each area of action

(Tudela and Western Sakana), with the following composition:

TUDELA LOCAL EMPLOYMENT GROUP	ALSASUA LOCAL EMPLOYMENT GROUP
Director of employment office of SNE-NL Tudela City Hall. Social Services Area Tudela City Hall. Economy and Employment Area UAGN Union of Farmers and Ranchers of Navarra EDER consortium. Local Action Group of the Ribera de Navarra AER Association of entrepreneurs of the Ribera ANEL Association of Social Economy Companies of Navarra ERSISI case manager	Director employment office of SNE-NL President of the Commonwealth of Base Social Services Commonwealth of Base Social Services Cederna-Garalur Association. Local Action Group of the Mountain of Navarra AES Association of Entrepreneurs of the Sakana. CIP Director FP Sakana IIP LH ERSISI case manager

The initial objectives with which the Local Employment Group worked, focused on achieving the following goals:

- Facilitate the involvement of local employers and social agents in the definition of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs).
- Gathering the strategic information that employers and local social agents provide on the existing training offer/demand, the training of unemployed people concerning the employment needs of the area...etc.
- Generate local networks in the employment activation field.

This experience was created with the ultimate goal of *“developing a new planning system for Active Labour Market Policies based on an alliance of the public and private sectors that involves companies, unions and NGOs, in addition to the technical units of the corresponding government (at national, regional and local level) ”*(ERSISI Project Report).

In summary, the Local Employment Groups initiative has resulted in the following products:

- Preparation of a list of companies to facilitate intermediation within the framework of the ERSISI Project.
- Contact with other non-participating business associations.
- Sponsorship of training actions demanded in both areas.
- Identification of potential employment in the field of Insertion Companies.
- Development of preventive actions for school abandonment (Alsasua).

Especially noteworthy is the fact that the agents composing the Local Employment Groups have participated in the elaboration of a document that gathers all the proposals to improve the adequacy of the existing set of resources.

Together with the assessments collected through other instruments generated by the project itself and the case managers who have carried out the intervention, the final document was completed.



**HOW CAN THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE GELS BE ASSESSED? THE
METHODOLOGY TO EVALUATE THE
EXPERIENCE**



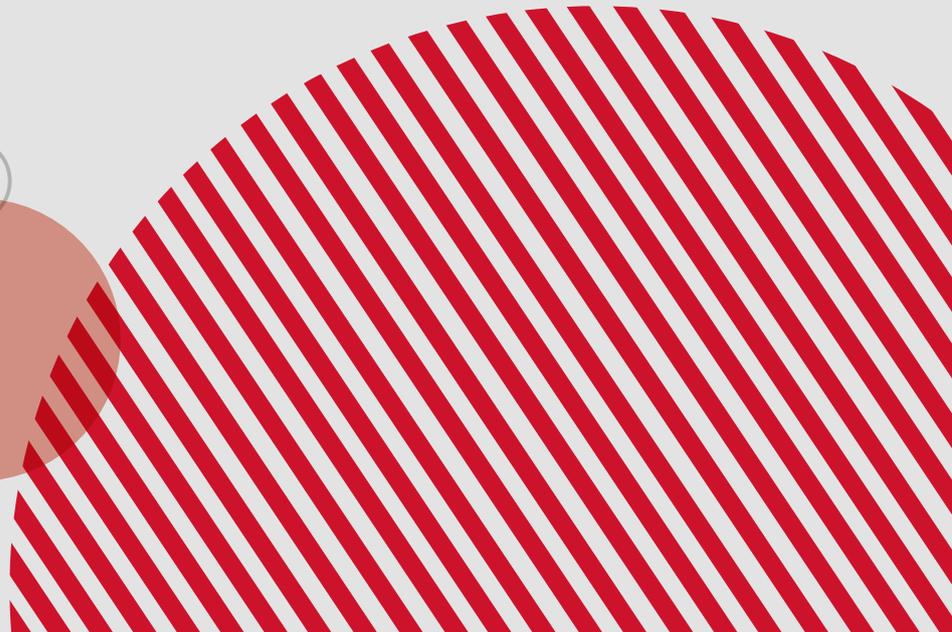
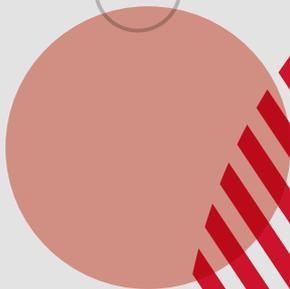
How can the implementation of the GELs be assessed? The methodology to evaluate the experience

The analysis of this experience has been carried out based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, and what could be called a triangular perspective that contemplates:

- **Documentary analysis - assessment based on the following documents:**
 - ERSISI project execution reports
 - Document compilation provided by the case managers and agents participating in the Local Employment Groups.
 - Documents prepared in the implementation of the ERSISI project.
 - 3 Reports of Employment Opportunities and Training Needs
 - Production Group 3 report, composed by experts in Activation Policies.
- **Qualitative analysis - interviews - participant observation and Group dynamics.**
 - Interviews conducted with:
 - Local agents (2 from each zone), in an intermediate phase of the project, to observe the assessment and expectations, and specifically on the operation of Local Groups as instruments in the AEPs planning.
 - 100% of the case managers, at the end of the Project
 - Participant observation: Participation of the evaluation team in 4 sessions of the Local Employment Groups.
 - Group dynamics:
 - 2 group dynamics with the participating agents in the local Groups of each zone, in the final phase of the Project.
 - 4 group dynamics with case managers
 - 2 group dynamics with professionals of the Tudela and Alsasua employment offices
 - 2 group dynamics with the Social Service professionals of Tudela and Sakana.
- **Quantitative analysis - evaluation surveys:**
 - Assessment survey conducted on 100% of the participating agents in the GEL.



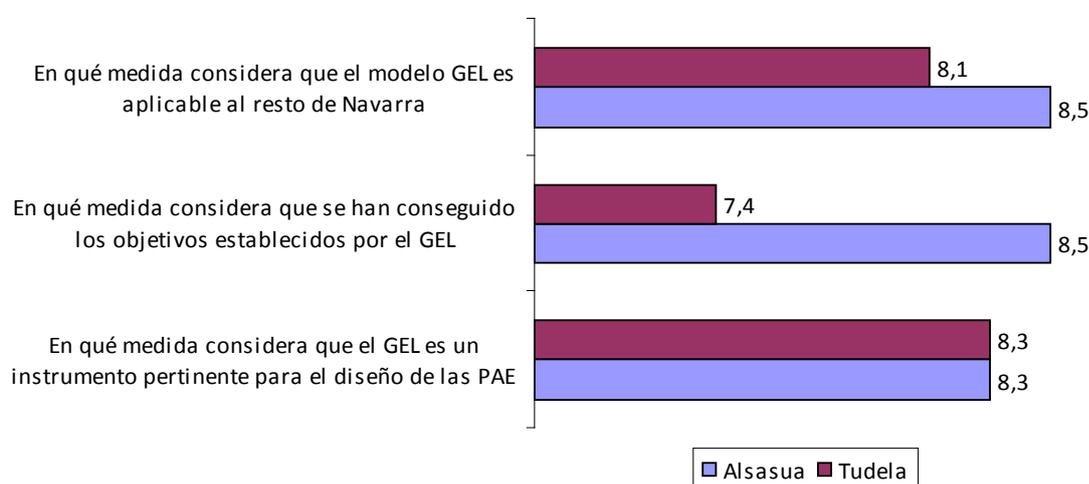
**WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE
LOCAL EMPLOYMENT GROUPS'
ASSESSMENT? PROGRESS AND
OBSTACLES IDENTIFIED IN THE
PROCESS**



What was the result of the Local Employment Groups' assessment? Progress and obstacles identified in the process.

The results of the evaluation conveyed the legitimacy of Local Employment Groups as crucial instruments in the planning of Active Labour Market Policies. Not surprisingly, the best-valued aspects stressed how the GELs allowed a new communication space between local actors with employment responsibility and the achievement of the objectives. They also had a very positive perception of replicating these groups in the rest of Navarra.

Graph 1. Assessment of the relevance, objective fulfilment and replicability of the GEL¹



Despite the positive general assessment of the local agent’s participation, this experience also made clear the importance of working towards a better definition of functions. We will now develop these questions.

ISSUES RELATED TO THE PRIOR ELABORATION OF A STRATEGIC DOCUMENT

In the first place, it is undeniable that the lack of a “strategic document of operational objectives” (GEL Group dynamics) was an essential obstacle to the

1 To what extent do you think the GEL model is applicable to the rest of Navarra; to what extent do you consider the objectives established by the GEL were achieved; to what extent do you consider the GEL to be a relevant instrument for the design of PAE.

start-up of the Local Employment Groups promoted within the framework of the ERSISI Project. A group, to become aware as such, needs to share a purpose.

“Perhaps the objectives of the GEL were not clear; we have been carrying out actions focused on the objective of expanding options for the incorporation of people from ERSISI”.

(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Alsasua).

“What I lacked were the objectives. I joined and what I have done is follow the path, little by little... we have contributed as much as we could ... And we took advantage when we saw the possibility of a synergy ... But those common goals, I missed them”.

(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Tudela).

This barrier was solved mainly through the tasks the ERSISI Project itself contributed within the sessions. However, this cannot be considered a definitive solution. Instead, it was a patch, that if not taken over by the group itself, it could have lead to failure. Thus, not generating the much-needed collective feeling essential for the teamwork and the synergy production.

However, after a few sessions, the GELs reinforced a satisfaction feeling among the participating agents, mainly for two reasons:

- The generation of specific responses to needs that arose from the intervention within the ERSISI Project framework,
- The consolidation of personal relationships between participants.

Initial difficulties belong to those starting a pilot experience, and in no case did these difficulties seem to call into question the relevance of the Employment Groups as a working instrument for the definition of Active Labour Market Policies.

“It is fundamental as a knowledgeable body of the territory, flexible and adapted” “It is the beginning of an important job”.

(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Tudela).

“... First experience of creating the foundations of coordinated work between different entities”.

(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Alsasua).

We could say that a positive assessment relays on the agreed evidence of the group's inability to generate predefined objectives;

“Definitely ... there have been no common goals” (GEL Group dynamics).

Thus, the potential of the groups is clear, but any proposal in the line of developing a GEL inevitably goes through the definition of a strategic agreement plan that anticipates:

- The definition of clear and feasible objectives.
- The proposal of concrete actions according to the objectives.
- The definition of leadership and the expectations of the role of each agent.
- The operative actions of the group: Group dynamics, peer work, periodicity, etc.

Based on the proposed actions, the need for a group's resource provision must be considered.

○ QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE CONCRETE AND ADEQUATE DEFINITION OF THE GEL COMPOSITION

The initial strategic plan took into account the territorial singularities. This led us directly to numerous reflections during the evaluation process. In both GEL groups, doubts arose regarding the complete territorial representativeness from the participating agents.

In the GEL of Tudela, many suggestions were made considering the participation of local social entities, representatives of the formal education system (as in Alsasua) or the financial sector. In Alsasua, it was proposed to have ANEL (as is done in Tudela) or worker representing associations (unions).

“I have missed some stakeholders — the education part, especially what has to do with vocational training. Here, the ETI centre has a lot to say “ “And concerning the business side, the AER was present, but I think there should be some local company representatives, the ones that will hire these people (ERSISI beneficiaries). Representation of agricultural/food companies, for example”.

“More than a company, I would go to an agricultural-food cluster...”

(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Tudela).

“We have not achieved the participation of important actors such as merchants in the area. Maybe consider the idea of union representatives”.

“Extensions could be proposed to include the Association of merchants and unions with representation in the area and to the Women’s Classroom”.

“We missed some business cooperatives”.

“The unions have not participated and possibly are important agents to consider. However, the group’s operations require maximums”.

(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Alsasua)

However, as the sessions evolved, the group itself was reluctant to incorporate other agents. The incorporation of new agents was blocked with arguments such as “the need to look for contribution models that do not collapse the group” (GEL Group dynamics). The operability of the group prevailed over the stable incorporation of other entities.

“(The composition of the GEL) I think it has been adequate for the beginning of the work; it is clear that there are precious visions such as those of NGOs and trade unions. For this, we would have to organize a participation model that avoids assemblies, which are rarely productive, and that debates became spaces for productive confrontation”.

(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Tudela).

It is understandable that when the group becomes aware of itself, it closes towards the “intrusion” of other agents, in this case with arguments such as operational difficulties. Therefore, the composition (the permanent or punctual participation of each agent) must be configured before it begins to function, which requires an analysis of the existing local agents that guarantee:

- The full adaptation of this instrument to each territory.
- A complete and plural vision of the work area.

○ ISSUES RELATED TO THE AGENTS' INVOLVEMENT CAPACITY

In addition to the above aspects, the composition of the groups must contemplate the capacity of the participating agents as direct “proxies” of the reality they represent (employer, social network...). This aspect was essential to the experience's success. The continuity of the group beyond ERSISI (in the case it occurs), is a direct consequence of the leading capacity of the participating agents, assuming their role and accepting themselves and the rest, as “authorized” strategic informants to diagnose and elaborate proposals. Indeed, having “incorporated the GEL as their own” (GEL Group dynamics).

On the contrary, when the group's attitude focused on the external demand for information and did not take the initiative to generate their knowledge, no synergies were to be found.

○ ISSUES RELATED TO THE GENERATION OF MECHANISMS/ PROTOCOLS FOR TRANSMITTING PROPOSALS

Once a group has been set up capable of generating proposals, it will be essential to facilitate the definition of mechanisms/protocols for spreading such proposals to the decision-makers. This will guarantee that they can provide options, not only the resolution of the identified needs but also the establishment of feasible alternatives.

The organization of external communication actions (the definition of a Communication Plan may be somewhat exaggerated) will be essential to provide external feedback that generates a satisfactory response to the work produced.

Initially, there were some shortcomings in the agent's role transmission within the ERSISI framework and the GELs themselves.

“We replied to the request. When they contacted us, we answered, but then I did not have that feeling of working together. “

“We worked in some way to follow ERSISI, we gave opinions and evaluations, but I think we did not finish establishing a working system...”

(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Tudela).

As the meetings happened periodically, the “complaints” of misinformation decreased considerably. The case managers of the ERSISI Project participating in the GELs, who contributed content to the working groups, played a fundamental role. Once this information deficit was corrected, internal communication flowed; even considering timely bilateral contacts between entities that did not involve the entire group. However, once the project is finished, and without its support, there is no doubt it will be necessary to strengthen the leadership and coordination role the employment agents should play.

Likewise, external communication seems to have suffered a lack of enough dedication or resources. Instruments provided by ERSISI such as “Business Breakfasts” did not cover this area of communication although it was not a priority either.

“I think many people at the local level do not know about it (the project)”.

“... it would have been interesting to have greater external dissemination”.

“Perhaps, external communication failed. However, it is a double-edged sword. Expectations should be taken care of”.

“Despite being part of the group, I believe that I did not spend time in dissemination, we focused on other actions ...”.

“External dissemination has not been important but perhaps sufficient... The dissemination of results would be convenient”.

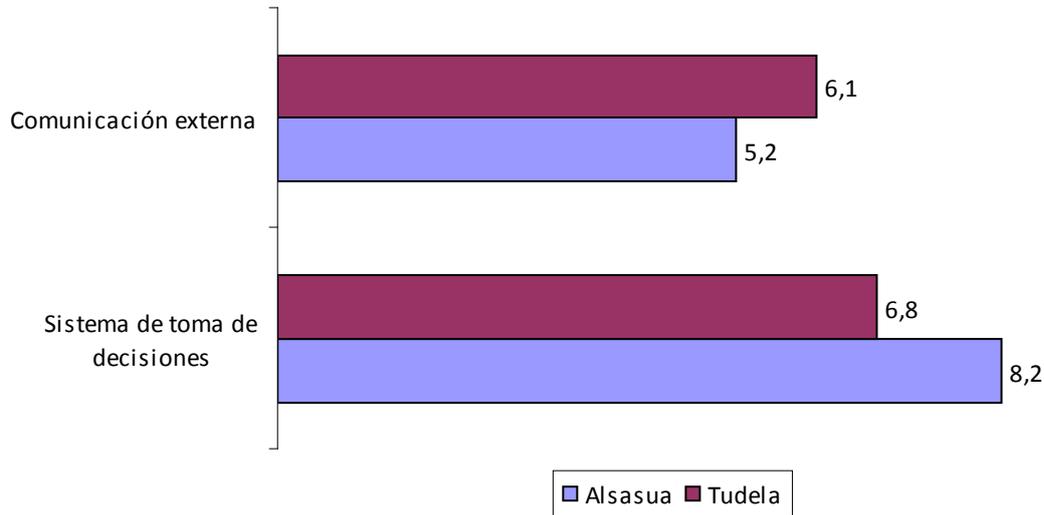
(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Alsasua).

“Communication, at the city level, did not stick. This project was not well known. The external communication did not penetrate at the citizenship level nor the enterprise level”.

(Group dynamics and surveys, GEL Tudela)

In fact, in aspects such as external communication and the decision-making system, except in this case Alsasua, the worst GEL operating system assessments were produced.

Graph 2. To what extent the operation of the GEL has been adequate²



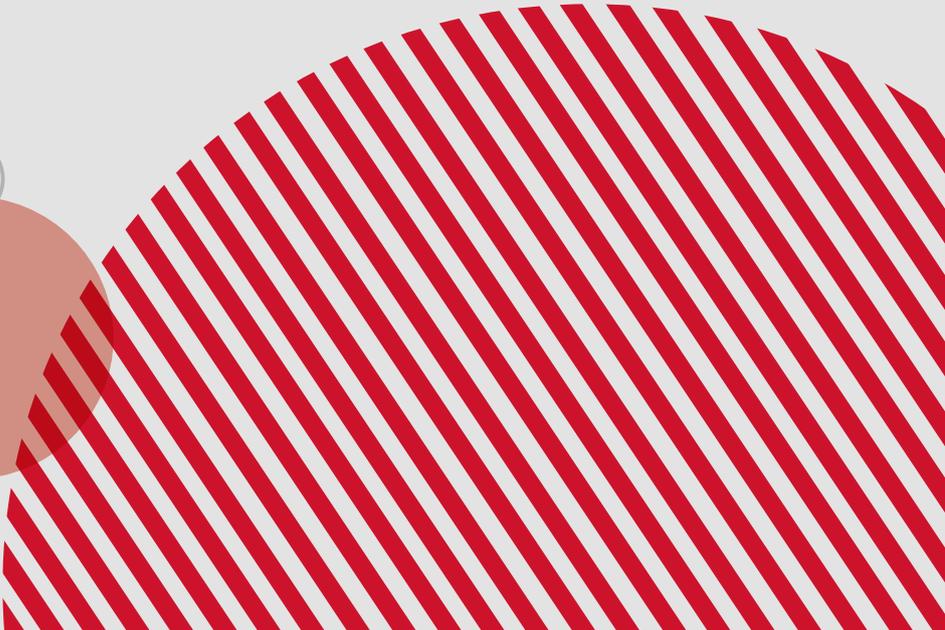
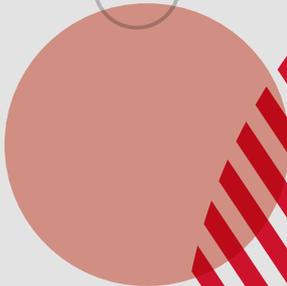
Source: Local Agents Evaluation Surveys. ERSISI project

In any case, it seems unquestionable that participation in the groups enabled contact between agents that otherwise would not have established such fluid communication. The knowledge and communication between agents have given rise to synergies and collaborations that without this space would not have occurred. The clearest example is the synergy between ERSISI and the ETESS Project; through the participation of ANEL (Social Economy Enterprise Association) in both, for the promotion of an entrepreneurship project, specifically the creation of a socio-labour inclusion company in the ecological agriculture field.

² External communication, Decision making system.



CONCLUSIONS



CONCLUSIONS

The issue of local agent enhancement is, as we have seen, the key to the correct design of activation policies. The added value of understanding the correct adaptation to the frameworks and the profiles, to which those policies are directed, could not be found elsewhere. This document has collected some of the keys to a pilot experience in the active employment policy design from the local level.

This process indicates some limitations but also important advances. As a conclusion, we will point out that the reflections on the functioning (the “how”) of the GELs, do not seem as conditioning for the satisfactory evolution of the groups as the rest of the factors anticipated: the definition of a strategic plan, the correct initial configuration of the group, the involvement of the agents and the transmission mechanisms for proposals and communication actions. We might conclude that if these aspects are defined correctly, the group consolidates and generates its internal work group dynamics (such as periodicity and coordination of the sessions).

The agents’ reflections on the GEL’S future were not related to practical issues, nevertheless they focused on what was necessary to “overcome the ERSISI”, providing the groups “a holistic and territorial look at the employment ” that directs its work towards *the “set of Active Labour Market Policies and the unemployed and business group as a whole ”*. This suggests a vital optimism transferring the pilot experience to other contexts.

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