

EMPOWERING RURAL COMMUNITIES IN URUGUAY

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Abstract

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<p>Currently, Uruguayan communities with less than five thousand inhabitants are affected by the lack of development. It is causing high levels of poverty in the country and the migration of young people to larger cities or other countries in search of better possibilities. Despite all the efforts from the last Uruguayan governments to counteract this situation, the rural communities and their members have not managed to develop and have been stagnant for several decades.</p> <p>Identifying and understanding their own community challenges is essential for the members of the communities find ways to change. This change can be possible to achieve by empowering rural communities. In other words, engaging, motivating and enhancing their self-confidence. Participatory methods and co-creating with the community members is essential for successful empowerment and development projects and focusing on helping them find solutions for improving their living conditions in a sustainable manner. With this purpose, this research project aims to identify the challenges that rural communities face for development; and find pathways to empower community members to achieve their dreams and goals in order to improve their lives. Communities' leaders are playing a key role in empowering communities and the ways how they can foster their communities' development.</p> <p>Therefore, the research question of the present master thesis investigates: How can local leaders empower and develop their communities?</p> <p>For further investigation, the thesis writers recommend for research the empowerment of women and its impact in the Uruguayan society. As important as empowering of women, for further work is suggested to study how changing the mindset of people can positively affect their lives and their situation; how trained leaders can influence positively in the development of members and the community; opportunities generation for rural youth; detention and development of personal and collective skills in rural communities; and innovation and business idea generation in rural areas.</p>		
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1 INTRODUCTION

To be able to promote inclusive rural development, we must foster it. It does not happen automatically - Joaquín Lozano

This research originally focused on solving rural community challenges in Uruguay with participatory co-creation methods. Purpose was to empower communities, their members and especially women. Focus was on giving the community members purpose and helping them to gain economic empowerment through innovating new business ideas and creating jobs. During the process of the research, the focus point shifted towards leadership and how the community leaders can help to empower and develop the communities.

In this project the definition for community is a group of people living in rural parts of Uruguay. They might be small towns or villages with population under 5000 people. They have in common the similar living conditions and challenges around the country. Community leaders are in this thesis, individuals skilled with different styles of leadership, impacting directly or indirectly the development of the Uruguayan rural communities.

According to Törrönen, Borodkina, Samoylova and Heino (2013, 1) it is important to define empowerment as it is seen in context. When talking about empowerment in this project, it is seen as a way of giving voices to community members and giving them a chance to be heard. In this case empowerment aims for helping the rural communities find also motivation and believing that they can take control of their lives. The key to defining and solving problems is seen as a result of empowerment. For this the research team is seen as an outside facilitator who tries to help people to acquire power for making a change.

Empowerment encourages people to take action and to be an active part of community development. This can benefit the communities and create more sustainable solutions to the challenges they are facing. Recognizing those people in the communities who are willing to commit and be active to change, will be the key agents for empowerment and development.

Known as one of the safest, greenest, peaceful and democratic country in the world, Uruguay has the highest literacy rate and best human development indices in the Latin American and Caribbean region. It has egalitarian society and lowest corruption level in the region. Uruguay is considered as one of the most socially progressive nations in the area due to being pioneer in establishing of social safety laws, women's suffrage, abortion law

and same-sex marriage. It was also the first country to give a laptop computer with internet connection to every child in scholar age and one tablet computer to each of the Uruguayan retired person. (Barrán 1995). Despite of all these advances, there is still a need and place for development.

This research project focuses in development of sparsely populated, rural areas. These areas have many small, communities that suffer from poverty and lack of opportunities, such as employment and education. Lack of opportunities leads to emigration of young people to cities. When people leave, instead of developing their surroundings, this can lead to circle of decreasing opportunities that are available locally. This thesis studies what are the challenges the communities are facing and what things are holding back the development. Leaders of these communities face huge challenges on developing the communities, creating people the opportunities they need and keeping the communities vital.

Many of the rural communities face also major changes because of foreign investments, such as building of pulp mills and creating new industries in the area. These investments transform whole areas and at their best can offer major opportunities for the development of the communities. Understanding what these changes can offer, what can be learned from the existing investment projects and how can they benefit empowerment and development of the communities is important for future development plans. There is a need for better planning and involving community members for the change in the areas that are affected by these investments.

Topic of the research has importance on an individual level for the community members, but it has also significance on a larger scale since development of the rural communities is a challenge on a national level. When examining complex issues such as these it can't be done just from the perspective of business research, it involves also the political and social aspects.

Originally the research project focused on three point of views: leaders, community members, and children of the rural communities. The research project started from grassroot level and working together with the communities. The way the research moved forward, and the data set unfolded, focus became more on perspective of the leaders.

The research methods include workshops, discussions, and interviews with the community members from the grass root level. Data is also collected through interviews and questionnaires for the local leaders and influencers.

1.1 Objective and purpose

Objective of this research is to give the local leaders guidelines and tools for helping to empower communities and improve development. Goal is to define the challenges that rural communities face on their daily lives regarding employment, entrepreneurship and other opportunities, and finding out what are the things holding them back from reaching their goals or improving their living situations.

Purpose of this research is empowerment of the people by defining challenges and giving the community members a voice to speak out.

Research question

How can local leaders empower and develop their communities?

Lines of discussion:

- Empowering communities – What are the challenges of empowerment for communities? What should be the focus for empowerment?
- Leadership – How can the leaders improve development in the communities?
- Community development – How to create more opportunities to rural communities?

2 RESEARCH FRAME

2.1 Empowerment of individuals and communities

Theory of empowerment links individual well-being to larger social and political environment. Empowerment research emphasizes on identifying competences of individual or group and investigates the environmental influences of social problems. At community level empowerment refers to taking collective actions for improving quality of lives in the community. Empowered community however is not simply a group of empowered individuals. (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995, 570-571.)

According to Al-Haj and Mielke (2007, 2) empowerment is a process where individual gains an ability to influence their own life and make a difference or participate on making a change on an individual level or community level. By definition, empowerment means giving power to individuals. There is a change from powerlessness to gaining power. Empowered people gain control of their lives and can find ways to act in society.

According to Laverack (2008) individual can't be empowered by others, they can only empower themselves. This means that the people have to realize their abilities for gaining power themselves and start to take action. They can be supported for the process from outside facilitator, but at the end empowerment happens only when the individual has belief on their own capabilities and can stand on their own.

Community empowerment is a process where communities are enabled to take control over their lives, have effect on the decision-making process. Empowered communities can make more sustainable decisions and actions concerning development (Al-Haj & Mielke 2007, 2) Important for empowering communities is to involve and engage the communities for decision making. (World Health Organization, 2019.)

According to Mayo & Craig (1995, 1-3) community empowerment with participation can promote sustainability and people-centered development. It also creates equal opportunities for people. These are all common factors regardless if the framework for empowerment is political, economic, social or cultural aspects. However, it is important to look at the objectives for community participation projects.

2.2 Empowerment of rural women

Empowerment of women has positive effect also on families and communities. That is why it is important to review it separately in this context. Supporting women's' empowerment economically and politically supports democracy and economic growth of families and communities. Women as decision makers in politics can benefit whole societies. The Inter-Parliamentary union states that women as decision makers improve trust and they focus more on things that effect social welfare and legal protections. (UN Women 2018; Women's Empowerment Principles 2011.)

According to UN Women (2018), women in rural areas are key agents for achieving sustainable development through economic, environmental, and social changes. Empowering women in rural areas enhances well-being of individuals, families as well as whole communities. Getting more women to workforce and increasing education for women and girls will also result in faster economic growth. (UN Women 2017).

Economic empowerment gives women power to transform their lives and influence their communities. It gives them ways to take part in things that affect their economic independence, such as labor market. Economic empowerment also helps ending violence against women and increases their participation in politics. Empowering women supports also gender equality in many areas. (UN Women Americas and Caribbean 2018a.)

2.3 Social sustainability and development

United Nations (2019) define the goal of socially sustainable development to guarantee the conditions for human well-being now and in the future. The aim is to eliminate inequalities between people and to ensure adequate income, health care, access to education and the protection of fundamental rights for everyone.

Global challenges to achieving sustainable social development and well-being include population growth, poverty and inequality. Gender inequalities, the organization of education and the safeguarding of health care are also global challenges that require efforts from both individual states and the international community. (UN 2019.)

According to Wiman (2009, 71) more interventions in form of policies is needed from governments to support development of social sustainability. It is important to support public policies that bring forward equality and dignity for all people. Equal access to basic

services, such as health, education and housing is needed. Many occasions people do not have access to basic security, opportunities or empowerment.

These three things are also the enabling factors for managing lives and having effect on peoples own actions and the future actions for the individual themselves, their families and the communities they live in. Opportunities include education, culture, economic and social aspects. Empowerment gives the people a chance to be heard and to be included as a part of the community and society. (Wiman 2009, 72.)

Social development can be explained as development that is available for all and it aims to create a society that gives the same opportunities for its every member. Essential for social development is that people are considered agents of action instead of objects. (Wiman 2009, 72.)

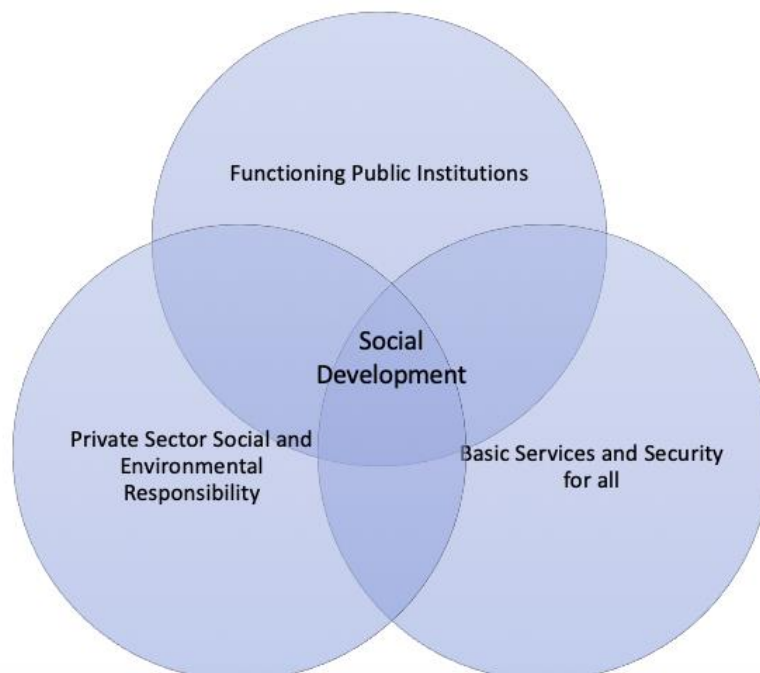


Figure 1. The social dimension of sustainable development according to Wiman (2009, 74).

According to Wiman (2009, 72-74) social sustainable development (Figure 1) should aim for creating a society for all. For this to happen public institutions must provide security and functions for all without discrimination. Basic services, such as health, education, infrastructure and social security have to be available for everyone. Private - and public – sector must carry their social and environmental responsibilities. Vision, where all the social dimensions of sustainable development materialize does not fully occur anywhere in the world. More often, especially in developing countries society is for few people, where the wealthy capture state and social services. This kind of societies are in risk of losing population to loss of birth rates and emigration.

3 EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL URUGUAY

3.1 Background for empowerment in rural communities

In accordance with J. P. Barrán (1995), the history of Uruguay has molded the Uruguayans and marked their characteristics. Population of immigrant origin shaped Uruguay as a country of easy reception of European models with prudent mentality giving an image of modern a Europeanized country and not as Latin American one.

The spatial, cultural and educational segmentation have characterized Uruguay from the 1990's (Clemente, 2008). The high poverty level in the beginning of 2000 after the accumulation of several crises, resulted in unemployment, dissolution of the family bringing new family roles. The poverty impacted mainly children and women. As important factor appears the female role as a head of household.

Because of the poverty, social exclusion emerged due to the poor policies for social integration. Furthermore, it has resulted into increase of domestic violence, insecurity in traffic and crimes. Emigration is seen as negative to the country in the sense that potential young people leave Uruguay looking for a better life and society loses young and qualified people who could be possible to help change and develop the country. (Clemente, 2008).

Paredes and Oberti (2015) analyzed the internal and external socio-historical events that Uruguayans considered have impacted their lives. Based in a survey performed in 2012 and the statistic's results derived from 1575 interviewees. The research aimed to investigate the construction of collective memory in Uruguay. According with the study, the Uruguayans responded as follow:

1. The dictatorship period in Uruguay.
1. The economic crisis of 2002 in Uruguay.
2. The attack of September 11th of 2001 in the US.
3. The first socialist government in 2005.
4. The events related to soccer.
5. The state coup in Uruguay 1973.
6. Citizen insecurity.
7. The democratic reopening in 1985.

It is important to look at the historical events that have molded the country for decades. The events have still affected on the mentality of the people living in Uruguay. Especially dictatorship period has still effects on the Uruguayan people and how they take actions in their everyday life.

3.2 Empowerment of women in Uruguay

Uruguay has better levels of social equality in comparison to most of the Latin American countries. Economically, culturally, and demographically Uruguay compares to developed countries. There have also been significant steps toward gender equality through legislation about sexual and re-productive rights and involving women in politics. According to UN Women Americas and Caribbean (2018) Uruguay has ratified all international gender equality and women's rights commitments. However, women's participation in politics and other decision-making roles is still low. (Espino 2017, 126).

Uruguay is highly ranked by United Nations Development Programs (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI). Human Development Index ranks countries annually according to development. It measures income, education and life expectancy in national level. Reproductive health and economic activity rank higher than the regional average in the UNDP's comparison but empowerment has lower value. In Latin America, average of parliamentary seats held by women is 27%, while in Uruguay it is only 11,5%. (Espino 2017, 127.)

There are also challenges on structural gender inequality, especially in areas strategic for development. Gaps in equality policies, employment, health, and participation in public and political decision-making effect especially women in rural areas. (UN Women Americas and Caribbean 2018.)

Domestic violence towards women is another key problem in Uruguay. Despite legislation and other effort to eradicate domestic violence, number of women who die because of domestic violence has not reduced. (Espino 2017, 132.)

According to Espino (2017, 127) there are also problems with income inequality in Uruguay, which is lower than the regional average of Latin America. In Uruguay women over 24 years old have higher education levels than men of the same age. Higher education levels have insured employment for highly qualified women, but still there is an income gap and women get payed less.

Typically, women find their professions in education, service sector, trade and cattle raising. Businesses owned by Uruguayan women are usually microenterprises and small-scale businesses that relate to trade of agricultural products, textile production and trade. Women also take care of the household which can easily make their working days long. However, it is common to have a nanny or domestic help to take care of the children while mothers work. Also extended family help with childcare. (World trade press 2010, 10-19.)

Bettering the opportunities for women in the labor market can give them more ways to generate income and make decision at house-hold level. Economic empowerment creates better income for families and improves local economy.

3.3 Economic situation of rural communities

It is imperative to look at the progress of poverty levels In Uruguay, to understand its significance on national level and why development projects in rural areas are essential. Even if the poverty levels have dropped in general in Uruguay, there is still much to improve in rural areas.

According to the last technical bulletin published on 29th of March 2019 by the INE (National Institute of Statistics in Uruguay) the total index of households and people under the indigence level in the country in 2018 was 0,1%. This means that one in thousand homes and people do not reach the minimum income to cover the basic food needs.

Number of households under the poverty level was 5.3% and people under poverty line was 8.1%. This implies that 53 homes in one thousand cannot cover their needs in food and non-food and same needs are not covered to 81 persons in one thousand because their incomes don't exceed the minimum expected to cover the basic needs. It should be noted that the poverty levels are higher in populations with less than 5000 persons.

It was identified in the same report, that the incidence of indigence presents equal value of 0,1 % in homes headed by women than in those headed by men. Facts in numbers show that poverty level is higher in female-headed homes than in the homes headed by men. (INE 2019.)

The pictures below show the behavior of the levels of poverty in households (Figure 2) and persons (Figure 3) from 2006. Even though the levels have decreased in the last 13 years, in 2018 with respect to the previous years, the estimate of indigence for the whole country remains unchanged, while the estimate of the incidence of poverty has increase compared to 2017. (INE 2019).

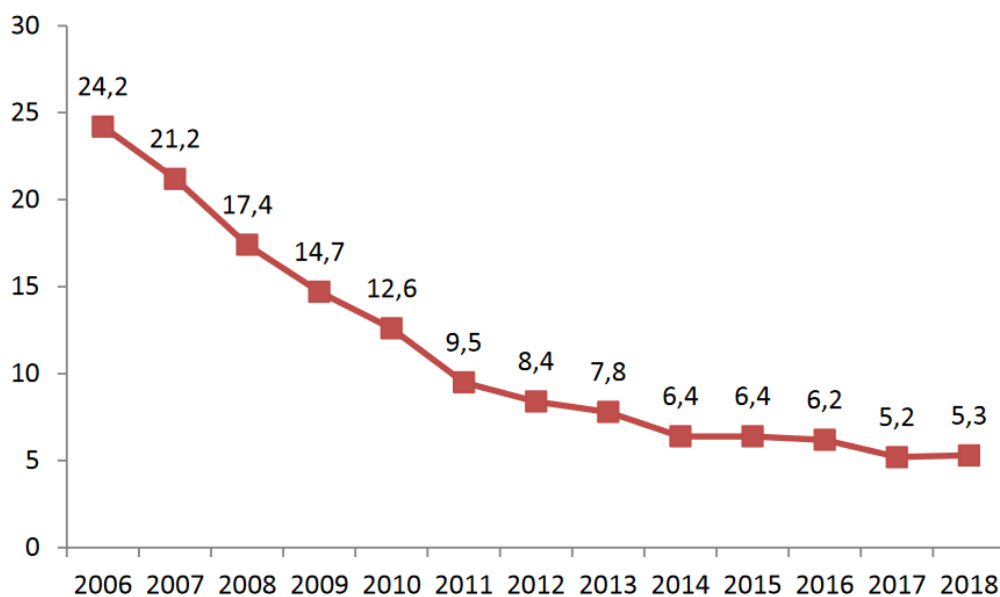


Figure 2. INE, Continuous homes' survey. Households poverty levels in %, 2006 – 2018.

Same phenomenon in 2018 can be identified in people's indigence level remaining the same percentage than in 2017, but the poverty in people have increased compared to 2017.

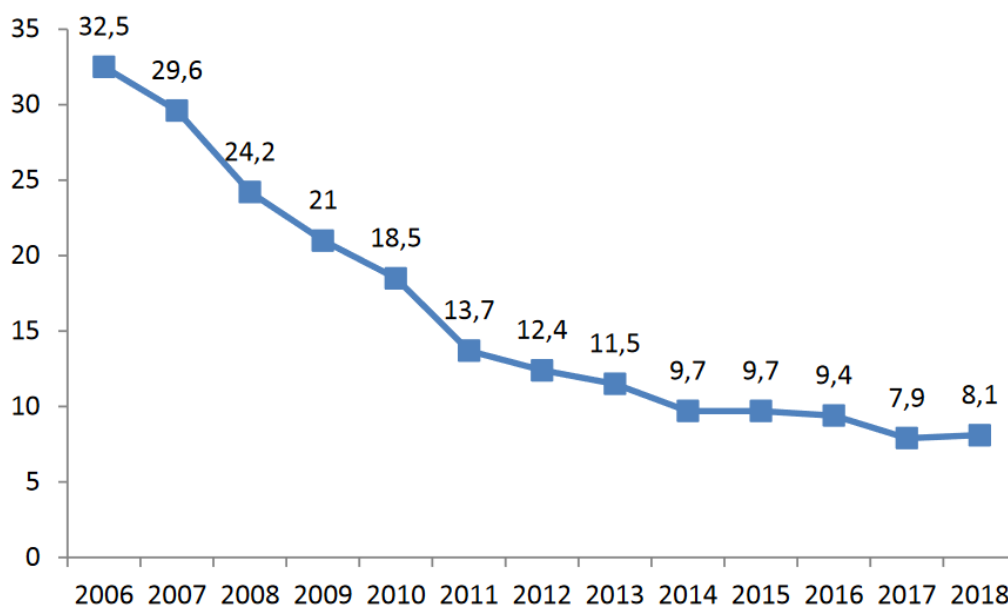


Figure 3. INE, Continuous homes' survey. People's poverty levels in %, 2006 – 2018.

As stated by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, despite the poverty has decreased in Uruguay, there are still poor people in rural areas that are isolated and vulnerable. One or more of the basic needs are not satisfied in the 47% of rural persons, affecting mainly women and young men that don't have the resources or education needed to set up sustainable and profitable entrepreneurships. (IFAD, Uruguay.)

Galjart (1995, 17) points out that when poor people are supported to become entrepreneurs, they might be trained and supported financially from the start. This causes problems if the person underestimates the challenges of starting of a new business and is not prepared and trained for the continuing of their business. This calls for a good leadership and support system.

According to UN reduction of poverty and eradication of extreme poverty is the central goals of development. Economic growth is the answer to poverty in the case that the income and growth goes directly to the poor. It should be noted, that this might not happen unless there is a governmental policy that enables poor people to take part. Mainstream economy is usually not favorable for the poor people. Poor people in many cases, just like in the rural communities, might do diverse jobs or operate small scale business. Especially women in many cases do the major part of housework with no income. (Wiman 2009, 70.)

Many of the issues around development of rural areas are tied to emigration of people from rural communities to bigger cities. Urbanization is a global trend and it can also be seen in Uruguay. Urbanization rate in Uruguay is 0,46% annually. (2015-2020 est.) (CIA World Factbook 2019.) Rural areas are mostly sparsely populated areas. There are a lot of small communities all around the country, but the population density is heavily focused on the capital area of Uruguay (Figure 4). Similar patterns are seen globally, but what makes it unique for Uruguay, is that population is extremely heavily concentrated on southern part of the country. 95% of the population live in urban areas. Half of the population live in the metropolitan area of the biggest city and capital, Montevideo.

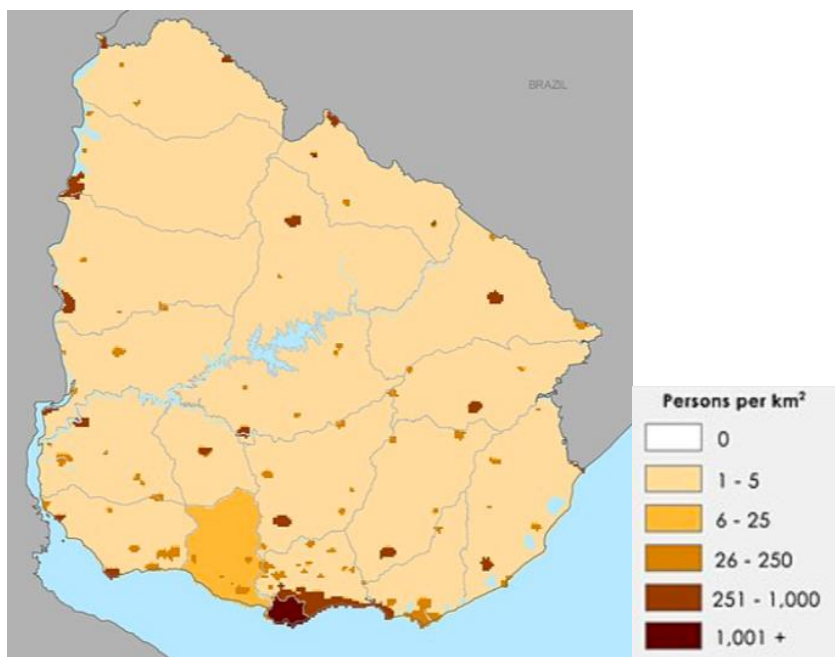


Figure 4. Population density in Uruguay in 2000. (Nasa 2019.)

According to World Bank (2019) there is a global trend of rural populations decreasing when people are moving to cities. This trend can also be seen in Uruguay (Figure 5). Even when the population has throughout Uruguayan history been concentrated in close proximity to capital area, looking at the population development in rural areas, there can be seen significant changes in recent decades. This creates challenges for development. When the population is scattered, the available resources should be used in the most beneficial ways to support communities.

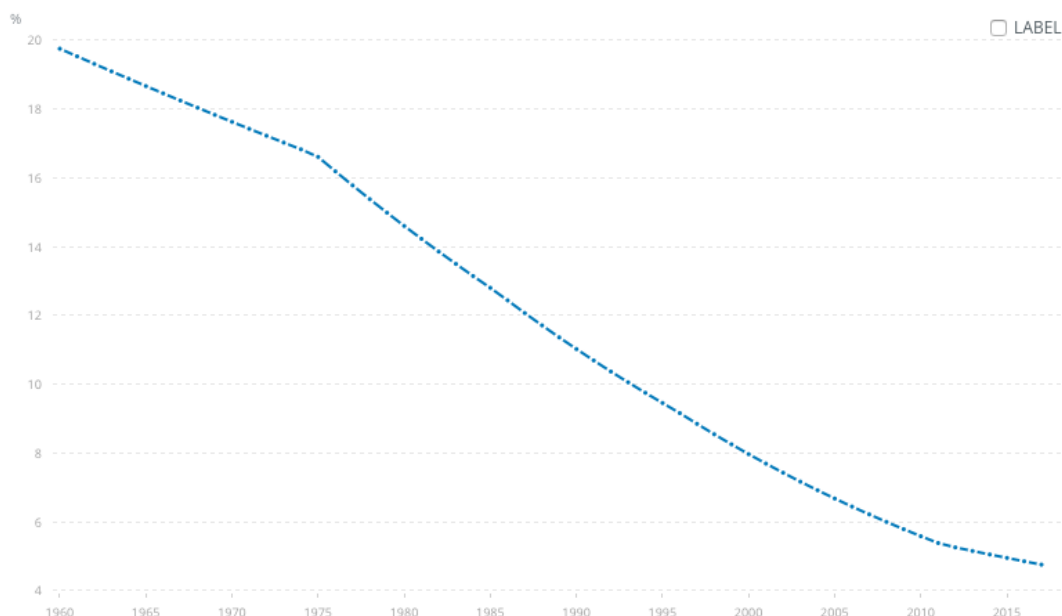


Figure 5. Rural population of Uruguay, percentage of total population. (World Bank 2019.)

3.4 Social sustainability in development projects

Social sustainability can be achieved by governmental policies that support functioning public institutions and by offering people equal services and security. The aspect of private sector following social and environmental policies is also part of this.

The view point of private sector following social responsibility regulations should be considered especially when looking at the development of rural communities. Investments from global companies are affecting many areas of rural Uruguay. These investments are also supported from the government. When evaluating impacts of the investments, social aspects should also be considered and tied to national strategies.

Sustainable development is part of the strategy of many of the large companies, but the affects cannot be seen at the current state of the planet. Sustainable business will continue to play a more important role in corporate strategies and operations of the companies. Leaderships of large companies agree that sustainability strategies are an essential competitive advantage now and especially in the future. (Dyllick T. & Muff K. 2016, 156-157.)

Ideally, sustainable business meets the challenges and needs of society that it is operating in. This should be considered on the planning stage of starting a business. Fully sustainable business not only seek to minimize the negative impact of its operations, but also

tries to create positive effects on the environment and people. Sustainability should be reflected in all aspects of the business through the organization. A sustainable company also sees ecological and social capital as an important resource for business. (Dyllick T. & Muff K. 2016, 160-165.)

Companies determine whether they work to minimize the impact of their actions or whether their actions have positive effects on the environment. Sustainability is difficult to achieve when the basic actions rely on exploiting natural resources. The companies can however have also positive effects on the community development and empowerment if they want to contribute on giving back to communities. This kind of activities can be seen around rural Uruguay, but they need better planning and strategizing for more sustainable results.

3.5 Development through empowerment and participation

According to Joaquín Lozano, director for Latin America of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), development of rural areas needs promotion. Development does not happen automatically. In the IFAD Report about Rural Development 2016, Lozano agreed with Berdegué that rural development is not synonymous only of agriculture. Rural producers are not only that, they are also users of the roads that they want to be repaired. They are mothers that want better schools and education for their children. They are citizens that want their rights to be respected. (RIMISP 2016.)

In the same report Lozano states that most of the solutions to the problems can be solved through empowerment.

The hyper centralization of the design and application of public policies is a formula that does not work [...] We must release many of the decisions from the bottom up.

He insists that more decision of the public policies should be taken from the bottom to the top, meaning, from the rural communities and the people living there. The rural communities and rural producers will know better how to integrate the infrastructure programs, productive development, social development and the management of the biodiversity.

(RIMISP 2016.)

Newton, Kemppainen, Kälviäinen and Turka (2011, 5) state that involving the participants or end users in the planning work and using co-creation and user-based development methods produce better results and can answer better to their needs. They should be considered as active, participative factors and their perspectives should be included in all

stages of the development. Achieving the best results in a development project requires an empathic and open-minded approach from the leaders and facilitators. It is important to try to understand the different situations, beliefs and feelings of the people involved.

When private organizations, NGO's or governments do community projects and use the term "empowerment", it needs to be studied how they define it and what are their actual goals for development projects. For example, there have been cases in the past where the objective of governmental development and empowerment projects has actually been lowering costs by cutting the welfare and privatizing social problems. (Mayo & Craig 1995, 1-3.)

Mayo & Craig (1995, 9-10) sum up that for community participation and empowerment would have long term transformation and effects, they should be tied to governmental strategies and goals. However, when doing participatory projects, they must be agreed with the communities. If the people don't agree with the project, they will stop participating. (Galjart 1995, 19.)

3.6 Community leadership, development and empowerment

Philip and Shutte (2004, 239-240) frame community leadership development into three components (Figure 6), which are connective leadership, collective empowerment and leading change through dialogue. Dialogue is important in change, because it minimizes chance of conflicts regarding assumptions. Even if the people are not agreeing on the outcomes, dialogues can lead to an agreement. Creating a safe environment for dialogue can create a better resilience for uncertainty and difficulties. Dialogue can shape and organize collective actions and in that way be an important duty for leaders.



Figure 6. Community Leadership Development (Philip & Shutte 2004, 239.)

Connective leadership helps individual and community members to explore possibilities and potentials of connecting to their common goals. It also helps to form and support a creative space for collective leadership to flourish. It promotes collaboration and enables people to raise their voices. (Philip & Shutte 2004, 241.)

Collective empowerment leads to individuals finding their place, role, identity and voice in the collective system. When individuals have a clear knowledge of their roles, they can connect and have clarity of their purpose, meaning and value on the development.

Empowerment leads to communities taking action. Involving community members for development is important as discussed before. Al-Haj and Mielke (2007, 2) describe empowerment as an ongoing process. It is not a one-time event. Empowerment needs constant motivation for people to take responsibility for their fate and be active participants for making a change and taking responsibility for their actions. As this is even more difficult for people who suffer from economic and social distress, it demands a lot of motivational skills from the leaders. One way of seeing the role of community leaders is to define them as the catalysts for positive change in the communities. (Flowers & Waddell 2004, 6.)

Adedayo (1980, 31) found in his research that if the development projects are implemented through government agencies do not necessarily meet their goals. However, if the project is led by community approved leader, projects have better chances of success. Community leaders who mobilize their community members have also better results for their development projects.

There is a need for motivated and skilled leaders with good knowledge of the complex issues affecting the surroundings for developing and empowering rural communities into vital places to live and thrive (Rural Development Initiatives, 2019). On top of nominated official leaders, community members participation is needed. Emerging leaders from the communities should be given more responsibilities as they are the key agents for successful operations. This calls for empowering people to take part. The human element is as important, or even more important than the material resources for development. (Adedayo 1980, 27.)

Challenges that the rural communities are facing are complex and they can't be solved with simple solutions. There are several ecological, economic and social aspects that must be considered when developing the areas and improving opportunities. Sustainability is important for the people, but also for the environment and development might have even effects on a global scale.

Metcalf and Benn (2013, 369-371) have researched what kind of qualities a modern leader needs in order to operate in a complex environment and for understanding the impacts of the decisions for the surroundings. Leaders need to be able to understand the complexity of the problems and to act on solving them. They need to be able to handle large amounts of information to understand the changes that are happening around and to be able to adapt to the changes.

As complexity increases, it is unlikely that one leader has enough information to make reasonable and timely decisions. Shared leadership can be one option when the demands for social and ecological sustainability are increasing locally and nationally. (Metcalf & Benn 2013, 375.)

Defining community leadership becomes important at this stage. Recognizing who are the community leaders is also relevant. Community leaders are not necessary just the ones with the title referring to leader. They might be the active initiators and enablers and coordinators. The ones that could be determined as the emergent leaders of the communities. (Flowers & Waddell 2004, 6.)

4 RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter describes the methods of gathering research data and how the data gathering, and sampling unfolded as the project proceeded. Methods used for collecting data from community members were participatory methods such as virtual workshops with the Lorenzo Geyres community, survey for school children in the same community and observation. For gathering data from leaders, methods used were interviews and questionnaires.

Qualitative approach was chosen for this project since the research focuses on people's interpretation and experience of their lives and how they see their future and opportunities for change and empowerment and the leaders and influencers own interpretations on the community issues.

Kananen (2008, 25) describes qualitative research a new way to understand different phenomena. It concentrates on understanding how people see and experience the world. In practice, this often means giving space to the perspectives and experiences of the research subjects and familiarizing their thoughts, feelings and motives associated with the phenomenon being studied.

Researcher gathers and analyzes the data and filters out the research outcomes as their own interpretation of the data. The logic of reasoning is induction, which means practices and interpretations are turned into theories. The goal is to examine the material in a complex and detailed manner, highlighting relevant themes. (Kananen 2008, 25.)

4.1 Participatory methods with the community

This research started as a participatory action research, focusing on the people living in the communities. Wimpenny (2010, 89) describes participatory action research as combination of action and research. It is a collaborative research where a group of people attempt to solve a common challenge or situation. It can create sustainable actions for change.

Participatory methods are especially suitable for empowerment projects since they aim to be democratic, equitable and liberating for the people involved. They increase participant awareness of the things affecting their lives and enables self-confidence and capacity to make decisions. Starting point was to collaborate with the community members and

facilitate them to realize their own capabilities as active participants in the community and support empowerment in the process. (Wimpenny 2010, 89.)

Goal of the thesis at first was to raise voices from the community members and define the problems as well as solutions from the grassroots level. Virtual workshops were used as a tool for communicating and trying to understand the communities better. In addition to gathering data, workshops involve and engage the community members and are a part of empowerment process.

Researcher's part in this was to act as facilitators, raising community members' voices and keeping up the conversation and also helping the community members reach a conclusion in defining the problems and challenges, they want to solve. According to Summa and Tuominen (2009, 9) facilitators act as a neutral party in a group. They help the group to think, make decisions and solve problems and to commit to the decisions. At the same time facilitators ensure that all ideas are heard and handled fairly.

4.2 Observation

According to Kananen (2008, 69) observation can be used in qualitative research as a data collection method. Observation gives versatile information on actions and behavior of an individual. Its advantage is the authenticity of the situation and the phenomenon as it occurs in a natural environment and context.

Observing the community members in the workshops was important part of gathering data for creating the big picture. There is a lot of things said in the background and can be seen in between the lines and also on the unspoken communication. Things that might not be in context of the actual questions asked, but things that reflect the attitudes and mind-set of the people.

4.3 Interviews and questionnaires

To understand better of the complexity of the problems, research team interviewed leaders, experts and influencers in the area. These people were chosen for interviewing as they are faced with development challenges in the area. Interviews were chosen as a method to gather data. The goal was to get perspectives for the research area from experts from different fields to have diverse viewpoints to the challenges rural areas are facing. Collecting views from diverse group of people can give also new perspectives for the

same issues when data is analyzed. Contacting leaders started in 2017. Interviews were performed from August 2018 and data collection continued until February 2019.

Focus interview was chosen as a type of interview method. Merton et al. (1956) devises a focused interview as a type of interview where the interviewees are given open questions about a specific situation related to the research area. (Bryman 2012, 210.) Open questions were chosen, because researchers wanted to give the interviewees a chance to get their own views of the challenges heard. Two interviews were done via Skype, recorded, and later transcribed. One interview was done face to face when the vice minister of tourism in Uruguay happened to be visiting Helsinki.

Interview and questionnaire questions were divided into two parts. First part focused on asking what the leaders' views on current situation in the rural communities were and how the people felt about the situation. There were also questions on the strengths, challenges of the communities and what were the obstacles on development. Interviewees were also asked to describe how they saw the people's willingness to commit to development and what were the challenges on leaders' point of view for engaging and involving them for change.

As some of the leaders had experiences with development projects with the foreign companies there were also questions on how they have created benefits for the communities regarding opportunities, development and empowerment and how these experiences could be useful for future projects.

Other part of the interview focused on the interviewees experiences as leaders and how they see the future opportunities in the communities and how they see their role from the empowerment point of view.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed and translated from Spanish to English before analyzing. Interview process was taking a lot of time. The goal was to include as many of the expert point of views in the research data as possible, so it was decided to transform the focus interview into a google form questionnaire with open ended questions to gather more data. It helped with the time management and translating the answers since they were already in written form.

Questionnaires were sent to leaders and experts with the same questions as the interview questions (Appendix 3). Some of the questions had to be re-written, since when using the self-completion questionnaire, interviewer is not available for explaining the questions. This is also one of the challenges Bryman (2012, 233) states as a notable difference in comparing questionnaires and interviews.

Questionnaires proved to be an efficient way to contact the right people. Questionnaires were sent to 28 local leaders and influencers. Answer rate was 57% and 16 of the contacted people answered the questionnaire. People who answered the questionnaire are all experts (Appendix 3) on different fields and work closely on the issues that have effect on rural areas.

The interest of the local leaders and influencers about the topic of this thesis was growing as the process moved on. They started to recommend or request permit to send themselves the interview form to other experts who may add value to this research project. It also would have made it possible to expand gathering the data even further. Due to time limitations answers had to be limited to get the conclusions from the existing answers.

4.4 Sampling Methods

Sampling methods used in the research were theoretical sampling and snowball sampling. According to Mason (1996, 94) theoretical sampling is selecting the study units based on relevance to research questions or theoretical position (Kananen 2008, 34). This sampling method was used as selecting the right people for answering as their expertise supports the discussion lines for this research.

Snowball sampling is a technique where researchers initially pick a small group of people, who are significant to the research. These people then propose other relevant participants to take part in the research. (Bryman 2012, 424.)

This sampling technique was ideal for this project because of the distances and connections. In this case the interviews started with couple leaders and influencers from Lorenzo Geyes and one referent from Tacuarembó. They immediately started to recommend other leaders whom were suitable and relevant to the topic of this research. The professional and personal profiles of the interviewees are diverse, which allowed enriching this research with different contributions and points of views.

5 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS FROM CO-OPERATING WITH THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS

This chapter analyzes the gathered data and observations from each part of the research. Research was done completely by using virtual tools, apart from one interview that took place in person in Helsinki. All the other interviews and workshops with community were done virtually by using Skype. Virtuality was the only practical method for this research since it was not possible for the research team to go to Uruguay.

Even though there were some challenges due to distances and time differences, virtual tools worked quite well. Since Uruguay is very well equipped when it comes to internet access and laptops, interviewing via Skype, facilitating workshops or using Google Forms as a tool worked out perfectly even if distances were long. It is possible to connect to the remote small towns in rural Uruguay and have workshops, interviews and conversations effortlessly.

5.1 I Workshop

There were two virtual workshops with community members of Lorenzo Geyres. Lorenzo Geyres is a small town, also known as Estación Queguay. It's located in west-northern part of Uruguay in the Paysandú department. Population is approximately 1100. (Giardello Maianti 2014, 1.)

First workshop was initially part of another project but is also used as a reference for this research. This was the first contact with the community and research team and is a starting point for this project.

The objective of the first workshop was to innovate new business ideas for Lorenzo Geyres and to know more about the community in general. As part of the group, researchers were capable not only to detect community's challenges to develop own projects, but also other needs from the community.

Workshop focused on recognizing skills of the local people and finding out what kind of tools and resources they needed for utilizing their skills for creating business, especially around rural tourism. Present in the workshop were community members from all age groups and genders. It seemed like everyone in the community wanted to be involved.

In early stage of the communication with Lorenzo Geyres, it started to be clear how the mindset of the people was affecting their lives and situation. They thought very little of themselves and could not see opportunities for changing their situation and seemed to be settling for their lives as they were. However, talking to the community members resulted in practical needs for developing tourism, innovating new business ideas and developing their skills.

What thesis writers found out was, that the community members wanted to have more ideas about tourist information, courses and workshops and reorganizing the ideas, as well as help for understanding what things are most viable and faster applicable to the environment. What the community members were asking for, were courses in marketing and tools for unifying ideas for achieving better services for tourists. They also needed encouragement for people on how to create a market and create capacities for a local market.

Workshop was already a step towards empowerment, but it seemed that the people needed a lot of encouragement towards taking action for development. Talking with the contact people of the community also resulted on the understanding that the community was lacking skilled leaders, and this was affecting the development of the community as well as empowerment of the community members in a negative way. Lack of leadership and political will was seen as a challenge since the opportunities for further education, recreational opportunities or career options were non-existing in the community.

One of the challenges in Lorenzo Geyres was that they had gotten money for development projects from the Uruguayan government, but it was difficult for them to create new innovative ideas or to figure out how to carry them out. It was figured out that the government supports development of small communities, but the resources were not utilized in the most beneficial way.

5.2 II Workshop

Second workshop involved teachers, local women and leader of Lorenzo Geyres. Goal of this workshop was to find key people interested to be involved in project and also introduce them the outcome of a previous project they had been involved with.

The locals taking part in the workshop were excited when they saw thesis team and themselves in the big screen during the Skype communication. They had not used Skype before and were asking if thesis team could see and hear them also. They were also excited

to hear about the outcomes of the innovation project and were surprised to hear that it was their own contribution and ideas that had sparked the innovations.

What was found surprising, was the attitudes that rose from the teachers present. One of them even thought that it was a negative thing if the locals learned how to use the available it-technology. It was clear for the research team, that the teachers were underestimating the people. Researchers observed that the people could really benefit from positive reinforcement, encouragement and use of new skills and tools. These could lead to new ideas and empowering communities.

There were plans about a third workshop which included a preliminary questionnaire for the participants. The goal was to conceptualize the problems that the people living in the rural parts of Uruguay face in their everyday life. Defining the problem together with the community was important for them to engage for the project and was also part of the empowerment goal.

Getting answers to the questions and engaging the people proved to be problematic. Answering rate was low and even when there was talk about getting the school children to help with gathering the answers by going door to door, project seemed to be stuck. The challenge of the teachers underestimating the community members rose again when they asked if questionnaire could be simplified. Since the purpose was to ask people how they experience and feel about their everyday lives and challenges, a simplified yes and no answer sheet was not going to give the data that was needed.

5.3 Findings from WhatsApp

Shortly after the second workshop, Lorenzo Geyres community created a WhatsApp group for sharing information and general discussion to carry on with dialogue around the topics that were shared on the second workshop. The WhatsApp group is called “Mujeres Empoderandose” which is translated to Women Empowerment. Group was created on 27th May 2018, and on May 2019 it was still active discussion group with 20 local women and few men, and with thousands of messages and over 400 pictures and links shared.

According to Nancy L. Pfahl (2011) social media such as Facebook and Twitter, or this case WhatsApp, can be platforms that create personalized and evolving narrative language. They have become narrative tools which connect generations and intertwine social exchange also globally. (Patton 2015, 130.) Connecting people, sharing stories and experiences can be empowering. In this case setting up the group and naming it “Women

Empowerment” already tells a story that the people want to connect around empowerment issue and can also take actions towards it.

The activity of this virtual group is weekly, and the topics vary. It started with the purpose of empowerment and continued with general information of the activities in the town, jobs offered, natural accidents that prevented the commuting to other cities, and request of help or collaboration. The women utilized the group as a marketing channel downloading pictures and offering their handcrafts, homemade foods and other activities with which they earn some incomes. Furthermore, the WhatsApp group was utilized by a teacher as communication channel for the activities of the local educational center.

In this case the WhatsApp group works as a place for sharing ideas, experiences and stories as well as public information. It works also as a market place for selling and promoting products and services that the local people, especially women can offer to each other. It can be as itself seen as a step towards empowerment.

5.4 Analysis of the survey for children

As part of the initial discussion lines, there was also a survey for the school children in Lorenzo Geyres. Combining primary and secondary classes, there are total of 84 students in the school. The questionnaire was sent to the secondary school students. Two teachers proposed to complete the questionnaire at the educational center and 35 students participated answering it. The collected answers were from 33 students with ages between 12 and 17 years old, one student under 12 years old and one over 18 years old.

Gender proportion of the students who have answered the questionnaire were 45,7 % male and 54,3% female. In the results came to light the future desired professions, knowledge how to achieve the profession and what they have done to accomplish it.

The results for the question about their knowledge or awareness how to achieve the professions was: 51,4% of the children were not sure how to achieve it, 14,7% didn't know how to accomplish and 37,1% of the children knew how to do it.

The teachers explained that it was surprising to realize that the children wanted to stay in the community and build their career there. They were expecting to find careers in the community with stable workplace and well-paid jobs. Also, the teachers commented that the questionnaire was an excellent tool for themselves to discover the shortcomings or gaps they are facing in the education system as well. What they observed and explained was that the children don't seem to be aware of the different existing opportunities and

there are also children who don't know what to do in the future They expressed that the future possibilities are not discussed in the homes either.

6 INTERVIEW AND QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

Some of the interviewees wanted to stay anonymous with their answers. Ethical decision was to anonymize all the answers to protect the anonymity of the few. As the interviewees work in public positions, it can be concluded that the topic for discussion is also sensitive matter when anonymity is requested. Instead of names, thesis writers refer to the interviewees as interviewee A, B, C and so on.

For the data analysis researchers used combination of discourse analysis and content analysis for dissecting the interview data. Analysis has also features of narrative approach as an explanation building tool. These methods were chosen for understanding the big picture and on the other hand note the different perspectives and experiences of the same dilemma. According to Yin (2009, 141) narrative form is a common way of explaining a phenomenon in case studies. However, narratives are not precise and should be reflected on for example public policies or theoretical propositions. This has been done later on the discussion part.

Narrative approach for the thesis was chosen on data gathering. People started to tell their stories, so narrative approach for analyzing and making sense of the data unfolded naturally. Narrative approach was chosen for this project as a way of structuring different individual perspectives of the same problem. Goal of the narrative is to give local leaders a way of seeing the challenges and solutions from different perspective. It can also be used to inspire, not just the leaders but also community members.

According to Löytönen (2019) narrative does not look for objective or generalized information, but local, personal, and subjective knowledge. The analysis seeks to find the key factors and themes that the interviewees told in their answers and compare them with each other.

Interview analysis is divided into three discussion lines that create a narrative of each topic on the answers. To answer the question what and why for the discourse, it is important to look at the current situation of each discussion lines before finding ways for solving them.

6.1 Empowering communities

Dissatisfaction to living conditions, employment or other aspects of people's lives combined with willingness to change them, creates opportunities for cultivating empowerment. Researchers focus on why the community empowerment is important and how the

communities can benefit from empowerment. Analysis seeks answers to understanding the challenges around empowerment issues, but it also discusses the strengths and opportunities that the communities have. This part of the analysis focuses on the root reason for community empowerment and who can benefit from the actions around it.

In general, the inequality between people living in urban areas and rural parts of Uruguay causes dissatisfaction compared to urban people. Because the rural parts of Uruguay are very sparsely populated, it creates a lot of structural challenges. People living in rural areas don't have the same choices with for example education, employment and other resources than people living in cities. It is important to state out that the dissatisfaction is not related to their location but the social and employment circumstances that they are in. (Interviewee B.)

Most of the interviewees stated that big part of the people living in the communities are not satisfied on their situation. There were however differences between age groups and social status. Young people were seen more dissatisfied than the elderly and depending on the answers, men or women were singled out.

Significant factor are the younger dissatisfied people who are moving to cities or even different countries in pursuit of better opportunities. When younger people get dissatisfied it leads to emigration to cities and decreasing population. According to the answers one of the biggest challenges seems to be the lack of education opportunities in small towns. (Interviewees A, I, L.)

Women were singled out as more dissatisfied than men, because lack of employment opportunities (Interviewee D). They were however described as active people who try different ways of improving their employment situation. It can be seen from these answers than young men that are dissatisfied would be a bit more eager to emigrate to cities, and women might be also dissatisfied but are more eager to improve their situation.

There are also people, especially women (because in rural areas there is a large proportion of women, children and elderly people, retired people and pensioners), who are not only very restless and develop a very versatile tasks in order to achieve occupation and, as far as possible, some sustenance, and search employment or self-employment in a sustainable and intense manner. (Interviewee D.)

The most satisfied community members by age would be the elderly, over 60 years old people. They consider themselves satisfied and do not imagine living anywhere else other than the place where they have spent their entire lives. They however express needs with regards to having better health coverage, infrastructure and transportation, access to better and wider coverage of education and work for their children. (Interviewee A.) Although, there were also thoughts that they might not be satisfied with the situation and might just be passive and settling for their situation. (Interviewee L.)

Landowners with large properties were seen more satisfied than small and medium sized farmers. Dissatisfaction of the farmers also reflects to their children, who might also have effect to emigration to cities. This shuts down the traditional farms and there are also fewer jobs available in the farming sector. (Interviewee B.)

In general, there is a pronounced disconformity among the actors of the agrarian sector in Uruguay. Which means that the children of the producers see the situation their parents are going through, and once they finish the high school, they decide to move to the city without return, generating a poor generational change in the farms. (Interviewee F.)

Dissatisfaction of farmers is a major issue currently and it is causing massive demonstrations throughout rural Uruguay. This movement is caused by the dissatisfaction for government actions. (Interviewee C.) It can be seen from this example that the dissatisfaction of people can lead to movements and willingness to seek change. Mobilization of the people was achieved by using social networks that can work fast and reach people even in the remote locations.

The "autoconvocados" (self-summoned) met on January 23 in the city of Durazno. [...] They mobilized all over the country and everything was through social networks like WhatsApp. They did not advertise it or use any media such as the radio or the newspaper, nor were there politicians bringing them together. [...] This movement was historically relevant and also showed that the rural people are willing to stand up and act. [...] What was achieved by this group? They were able to put on the table at the level of the whole country, the problematic sensed by a sector of the society that is the rural one. Until that moment and historically the rural sector has been

very meek, is very passive, that mobilizes very little and is very little rebellious. (Interviewee D.)

Interviewees seemed to have a consensus of the strengths of the communities. The answers create a picture of hard-working people who are described as capable, responsible people who are not afraid of any kind of work. They have a culture of responsibility and they are convinced that work dignifies, they strive to overcome and generate progress for their families. (Interviewee C).

They are committed, responsible, hard workers. We know that there are potentialities in each of the rural inhabitants. (Interviewee G.)

Willingness to change their circumstances combined with the working hard was also a one point of seeing the strengths. Tight communities and close relationships combined with the willingness to improve and take actions is also the first step for empowerment.

The desire/wish to change their reality, very hard-working people, they still maintain a great commitment, solidarity and they are very reliable. There is reciprocity as to the/be helpful (helpful attitude), they trust in the other, they do not have badness and they are very collaborative, even more with the people who come from outside. Strong attachment to the place, experiences of cooperative work, identity that has a history of searching for constant improvement [...]. (Interviewee L.)

Toughness and adaptability to live in the rough environment was seen as a strength. However, leaders describe that the people in the communities are a big part of the reason why development is not going anywhere. They are described passive and unmotivated. (Interviewee F & D.) This is important and interesting when researchers think about how the communities can change their own lives through empowerment. This is however the leaders' point of view of the people. It would be important to ask the people how they see their part in this.

In these descriptions the communities are seen also as closed and conservative. One reason for this is that they lack contacts, networking and knowledge. They also are reluctant

to change and reject things that are external to the community. (Interviewee A & C.) This kind of mentality would also prove to be challenging for implementing change, especially if the change comes from outside of the community.

Conservative thinking and inequality create also obstacles for change. These ideologies are especially deeply rooted in the communities and especially in the associations and institutions that decide the community issues. (Interviewee H.) This is very difficult thing to change and take time. It is also important to recognize the decision-making authorities in communities.

If the people are skeptic to improvement and projects, would be also relevant to find out why. Is it because they are afraid of change or because they have been disappointed for the actions or that they can't see results for these projects? It is also essential to know who the passive or active people in communities are. As one of the interviewees mentions, elderly people are the most passive ones. However, they were also described as the most satisfied for their lives, so this might be the reason that they are also not seeking change.

The main factor that is holding back development in the rural communities is the people themselves, because of what I was saying earlier, there is a little generational change, which makes very difficult to motivate people over 60 years old to change. They don't want to hold meetings and they see with the skepticism any new proposal for improvement [...]. (Interviewee F.)

People in the communities are also described as thinking they are less, they are poorer, and they cannot achieve their goals because they lack motivation and have very low self-esteem. People in rural areas have low education and they are in many cases poorer than the people that live in the cities. (Interviewee G.) It is true that they can't choose where they are born, but this should not have effect on how they see themselves, or how they make decisions about their lives.

They are not proactive. They have no aspirations. They settle for little. (Interviewee G.)

There can be also seen positivity by changing the mindset, empowering people and giving them the possibility to change their lives. Important step is to recognize those who are willing to change and be the agents for change. Motivation, inspiration and helping the people to believe in themselves and believe that it is possible to change is the key for empowerment. Empowerment combined with the right education or training and financing could open doors for people to improve their lives and achieve their dreams. (Interviewees G & D.)

The motivation of this people needs to be worked, encourage them, open their expectations a little more and start empowering those with capabilities. Make them have dreams and fight for them. (Interviewee G.)

To work the factors related to the promotion of self-esteem, to accompany them in the process of change, to empower them with the projects, to encourage them to make their own decisions, to train them, to strengthen them, to finance them and then to let them fly! (Interviewee D.)

6.2 Community development and opportunities in rural communities

Huge structural challenge for the communities is the emigration from rural areas to cities. When people don't stay in the communities, it can create a cycle of opportunities decreasing. When thinking about why people want to stay in the small communities, we must think about opportunities for education, jobs, entrepreneurship, but also things that have effect on other parts of peoples' lives. Things that support their wellbeing as whole, such as social wellbeing, raising their families and recreational opportunities. People should be able to choose where they want to live, and not to emigrate because they don't have any other choice. (Interviewee I.)

At a general level, there is still a great inequality gap in Uruguay between the communities that live in urbanized territory and rural areas. In fact, statistics show that only 5% of the Uruguayan population live in the countryside, and this number has been declining in recent decades. (Interviewee J.)

The biggest challenge is to generate opportunities of income generation that allow people to stay, return or even choose to come to live in these communities. (Interviewee D.) On top of lacking job opportunities, there is also critique towards the educational system as part of the problem.

A youth eager to emigrate due to the almost total and structural lack of opportunities. Great sloth/neglect/negligence from the part of the education authorities to meet the needs of infrastructure and professional skills of teachers, especially in the high school. (Interviewee D.)

Lack of Education and training is also a big challenge for people over 45. Younger people have a good basic education, but the isolation of the communities mean that they might have real difficulties if they want to continue their studies after primary school. This creates lack of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities and they have less income opportunities. (Interviewee C.)

6.2.1 Jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities in rural communities

There are not that many job opportunities available now in rural communities. Having a job or a career, making a living and supporting one's family is one of the important issues for rooting people in to the community. Even if the job situation is not that good at the moment, the interviews state that there is room for improvement and jobs could be created.

If the question is whether there are job opportunities, there definitely are not, but there is work to be done and could be generated much more. (Interviewee D.)

I think there are opportunities, but you must know how to work the opportunities and be constant, the workforce will always be needed in rural areas. (Interviewee G.)

Existing jobs in the rural areas focus largely on agriculture. New employment opportunities could be created around agriculture and technology and services. This means there is also a need for more education on this field. It is also important to see the structural change in farming as a part of this problems. When small and medium sized farms disappear from the area it also effects jobs. (Interviewee I.)

In areas of small producers, the current economic situation is very difficult. I think that there would be opportunities to generate more jobs, increase production and expectations of growth and development as long as the support policies were well focused, I believe that there is a great ignorance in the government and in the political leaders in general of the agricultural sector that prevents serving adequately the rural communities of family farmers. The youth of this sector do not see opportunities in the field and as possible as they can, get trained in other aspects and emigrate from rural areas. (Interviewee F.)

In addition to traditional farming and training new job opportunities could also be created around agriculture while changing their way of farming to new ways.

I am absolutely convinced that there is room for development, we must open our minds to generate in Fray Bentos and especially in the rural community Tomás Berreta, a food center for the export of citrus fruits and change the traditional agriculture model with soy plantations and low rotation in the soil. This would create business opportunities, employment and family rooting in the rural areas. (Interviewee F.)

Entrepreneurship is also one option for creating new job opportunities especially around rural tourism. There are job opportunities in the tourism sector, development of rural tourism and nature. (Interviewee A.) Tourism as an opportunity causes a lot of excitement but also questions. Entrepreneurship could create more jobs and choices, but it seems that people need more training on this and especially help with starting their businesses. (Interviewee I.)

What happens to small town entrepreneur who wants to develop rural tourism. How they can start? They need to meet with a larger tourism service provider from Montevideo or someone who can tell them what they need so this person can prepare. Two pillars are, training and linking and supporting the new entrepreneurs for the first two years, for example. (Interviewee I.)

Other entrepreneurial opportunities are not seen. Distances to cities are one problem, (Interviewee I) but also the lack of entrepreneurial spirit. One of the reasons for this is the historical events and dictatorship in the past still have effect on people and how they think (Interviewee I & J.)

“In the rural communities, in general lines, a strong traditional and conservative culture persists as well as lack of entrepreneurial spirit. Although it would be unfair to maintain the same concept that defines all communities, the truth is that we speak of a rural environment that for centuries was relegated to the priorities of national governments, communities that in many cases were isolated from development processes and the own globalization in all its aspects. (Interviewee J.)

The locations and road infrastructure keep the communities isolated geographically from other towns and cities. Distances from cities can create challenges on meeting people in person and distributing products. One of the interviewees mentioned on the community strengths that, *“They live with much less “contamination” of the media.”* (Interviewee A.) This suggests that the rural communities are also seen isolated from information that is available for more urban areas. This also means that they might not be connected to people and not know what is happening in the rest of the world.

The isolation of the rest of the society [is holding back development], they are not aware what is happening elsewhere. (Interviewee A.)

[...] In a small town you are relatively isolated. Farmers have associations throughout the country, even in small villages. Other sorts of entrepreneurs do not have that kind of organizations to back them up. I don't see it's easy for young entrepreneur to start to contact national organizations. The other thing is, if you are in a small town it might be difficult to include in your cost the transportation of products to the consumers etc. More than that, I think the main constraint is the lack of contacts. If you live in the capital city you can have the meetings and the workshops, in small towns you don't have the opportunities. (Interviewee I.)

The leaders see education as a way to improve job situation through vocational exams but also by bringing the entrepreneurial education and promoting and economic independence to primary schools. Opportunities should be created on the potential of each territory. Involving stakeholders on local level and defining a strategy. (Interviewee A.)

Creating new jobs needs also a new way of thinking. Besides the traditional careers, As mentioned before, Uruguay has good internet connections throughout the country. Software development can be done from anywhere in the world when the tools and skills are available. There are already entrepreneurs that are moving to rural cities because they find young people that are educated but unwilling to migrate. For example, In Salto there are 14 firms that give full IT services to clients that are located in Europe. It is also said that the government should be promoting these opportunities more. (Interviewee H.)

6.2.2 Other opportunities and developing services

Rural towns are considered as good places to raise kids and start a family. Children can get the basic education and have a safe place to grow up. (Interviewee I) Challenges start when young people don't have opportunities for further education and the same kind of life style choices as in bigger cities.

People living in rural communities should be offered the same services that are available in bigger cities for example regarding education, health and social services. There is also inequality between urban and rural areas. One major issue is that the households are generally poorer than in cities. (Interviewee G.)

Emigration to cities is natural, but it should be optional. Now it is happening because there are no other opportunities. Even small towns should have good services. Especially younger people are missing also recreational opportunities. These include places to spend free time, play sports and also cultural activities. Also, women, unemployed and not educated people should be cared for. Government should play a role in improving services for everyone. (Interviewee I.)

[...] if you want the people to stay in the communities you must give them the same life quality that they will get if they go to larger cities. They are looking for places to go and have a pizza and meet with friends, places to go and play sports, places to

have cultural activities. [...] Small towns in Uruguay are good places to raise your family. But then the children want other activities and social life. (Interviewee I.)

Children are seen as the future key agents. They are also the ones who suffer the most from development challenges.

[...] Children, according to where they live are the opportunities. The further away from the population centers the greater are the difficulties they face for their better development. (Interviewee B.)

6.2.3 Development opportunities from foreign investments

There is also a lot of co-operation with foreign and national companies that are involved in developing rural areas. This development can be beneficial to the community in question and it is important also to discuss here, even if the developments are affecting only certain parts of rural Uruguay. They can create a lot of positive things for the communities such as jobs, education and other community development and can at best be empowering for the communities in many ways. There have been examples where companies operating in the areas have brought social development and improved poor communities in different ways. But these co-operations can also have down sides and they should be looked at critically. UPM, UPM foundation and Montes del Plata are mentioned frequently in the answers.

These companies have promoted the generation of local integration, motivational workshops, development of entrepreneurship spirit in young people, and in some specific cases have granted scholarships for studies and training. They have created Bioparks and an accentuated protection of the environment. There is a lot to learn from them. Such as the benefits of companies returning a part of their profitability to society. And also, to have trust on young people, motivating them and give them educational opportunities. (Interviewee C.)

Generally, people seemed to be satisfied with the co-operation with foreign companies. They create direct jobs in the production lines, but can create also new services on the side, such as transport, services and hotels. In addition to this, they do also projects that aim for improving lives in the communities. (Interviewee B.) For example, foreign

companies operating in the territory of Tacuarembó have been generating sources of work. Employment has increased in farming, forestry, generating wind energy and using biomass.

In addition to creating jobs, the companies also offer training for their employees. Multinational companies have also created a need for small local suppliers to adapt to their demands on quality standards. This improves also services on local level. (Interviewee A.) These bring also other development in the area by bringing knowledge to the people of their rights as citizens.

I only know the contributions and support of UPM Foundation and Montes del Plata. Their contributions are significant since they have facilitated access to many people to their rights along with government policies. You can see that there is still a lot to do. (Interviewee B.)

It is important that the communities are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities given by these companies. There is a lot of possibilities seen on the co-operations and some of the interviewees can't see any negative aspects. It is notable that the collaboration with the companies is identified by the communities and the actions respond to ideas that arise and are identified in the communities. (Interviewee G.)

[...] They are always willing to help and provide what the rural area needs (Interviewee G.)

At the moment there is discussion for a large investment that would take place in the central part of Uruguay. It could have massive changes to the lives of people who live in that area.

However, there are offers in mechatronics, construction, forestry, etc. which will be very interesting in the case that UPM is installs its pulp mill in the region. (Interviewee D.)

Even if the cooperation has brought many positive things to the rural communities, it is not all unproblematic. It should be considered that the companies are working in the area for a reason and their goal is to make profit. There is critique about the social impacts of the development projects as well as critique for the environmental actions of the companies.

People coming from outside the communities, might have the wrong idea about the challenges in the area. They also might leave in the middle of the project, if there is a change in the investment plans. There have been cases where this has caused new problems for the community and people involved. Also, they don't necessary meet the actual needs of the communities and especially the social impacts of these projects are criticized.

[...] the logic of the foreign companies is far away from the local way of thinking. Managers are usually from elsewhere and they do not reside permanently in the territory, which makes difficult the real awareness of the problems of the place and the locals. In some occasions in Tacuarembó, the foreign companies have unexpectedly left from the territory creating not only the loss of direct sources of work but also significant economic difficulties due to the non-payment to local supplier. (Interviewee A.)

There are also problems with out-sourcing activities to smaller companies. Big companies have regulations that guarantee working in an ethical way. They have improved working conditions and guarantee a sufficient income for workers. However, there have been cases when the out-sourced activities have done by companies which are not controlled by authorities and this has led to poor working conditions.

Large companies work at a different scale than small communities. Effective companies in logics zonal or departmental, which imply improvements in personal incomes and working conditions. But there is also out-sourcing of activities, and those are not so controlled by public authorities, such as afforestation, and they lead to abuses in working conditions. (Interviewee E.)

[...] I can mention specific examples of contributions made by some forestry companies to the community, although they specifically point to RSE (Corporates' Social Responsibility) policy and in many cases these companies are attacking natural

resources of people who are concerned about these issues. Ex: Guichón. (Interviewee J.)

There is also critique that the development projects of these co-operations have really small-scale effects and they don't benefit the communities long term. There is room for improvement and communities can also learn a lot of what has been done already and how to improve the actions going forward.

[...] Although the schools receive support for the development of educational projects that have been well valued, the support and projects are very specific. There is no development of integral projects that generate labor sources/ new employment, that today is one of the issues that concern the communities. The benefits are punctual, in the long term they are not perceived even at a social level [...] (Interviewee L.)

The vision of those who execute the projects and the proposals they make that have little/small social impact. ... Can be learn a lot, but above all have to get better vision, improve the ideas that these companies are financing, to generate a greater link with the countries of origin for their presence in local development and cultural exchanges among students for example. Moreover, much has been learned in terms of projects, teamwork, and the possibilities that can be generated with the funding organizations. (Interviewee L.)

In conclusion, the companies invest a lot in the communities and there can be seen major improvements for the people. However, it should be considered that everything that they are doing starts from the companies' own interest. They are not altruistic on their actions.

[...] They do not participate in the Round Tables of Rural Development that already today is a lot to say. Do not waste time working with organizations of the Table of Rural development that may propose to them problems or requirements. They do not like to "waste time", and it is not productive to the interests of their companies. (Interviewee N.)

6.3 Leadership challenges in the communities

On top of structural issues that are mainly caused by the isolation and location of the communities there are two important issues raised from the interviews that are holding back development in rural areas. One, is lack of leadership and the other is the mental state of the people. This causes challenges on involving community members to participate. Passive mental state of the people is also seen as part of the unsuccessful development projects. Development projects also often fail because the outcomes are not concrete and practical.

[...] The challenge to involve them, at least from the public sector (which is and has been my role) is to encourage participation and above all, to promote concrete actions so that they see the tangible product of the processes. (Interviewee J.)

Lack of leadership is discussed throughout many of the interviewees. The challenge is lack of clear leadership and people who may be able to carry out processes of endogenous development in each locality according to their potential without this being influenced by a political factor. (Interviewee A) Lack of organization in communities is also recognized. They have the resources for development available but lack of organizing. (Interviewee L.)

[...] because the communities are not organized, the government support them giving the money/help/support by drops to each institution and there are no projects that encompass. There is also a certain lack of leadership. (Interviewee L.)

Looking at the issues from the leaders' point of view, many structural issues and need for political will for improving the rural communities more efficiently are needed. What mainly stops the development of rural communities is not having the political will to plan and execute projects that boost the economic growth of the regions. (Interviewee D.)

There is no clear vision of both the government and the producers in what is needed to change and when the time comes to do it, the policies of the state are general and very rarely can be downloaded to land on time (achieve on time). (Interviewee F.)

It seems there is a problem on the governmental side for discovering the right actions and on the other hand problems with engaging communities to projects. A solution for engaging people in to projects would be to start working with the communities from the early on and making them understand that they have a way of influencing their situation.

In these moments I think so, we must work more for the change, sensitize them and look for solutions as a team. Not to work alone, fight and pull all together for the good of the society. - Conducting workshops, trainings, with teamwork, working the cooperation and collaboration. (Interviewee G.)

There is a need for investigating the needs and interests of the community and then sharing this information on the issues raised, bring answers that explain and respond to those interests, and propose work processes. At the moment, development projects are quite specific, and process is illogical. (Interviewee H.)

There is also a will to engage people and look for deeper commitment. Often there is a distrust from the people that the projects really aim to improve the community and also on the project objective's sustainability. Developments are promoted and after a short period that are not enough to consolidate the changes, they are abandoned to the fate of a population that often doesn't have the local capacities to sustain them. (Interviewee D.)

The phrase "small town, big hell" was mentioned in the interviews twice. (Interviewees D & I.) This means that there is jealousy between people, and this prevents change. This refrain refers about how difficult can be for people to live in a small town, as this will cause that any event will automatically become a gossip or rumors. All the town people know everybody's activities, and there is no privacy. They are afraid of other peoples' opinions about their actions and do not dare to discuss, to argue or to act. They avoid being involved in trouble.

Well utilized this can be seen also as an advantage, as can allow the people to be rapidly informed about important events, activities and news. There is a need for facilitators who can lead dialogue between all the parties involved. People need to visualize common objectives that are beneficial for communities, avoiding falling into personal issues that hinder the processes. (Interviewee J.)

I believe that a conservative hegemonic culture persists that prevents to a great extent to advance in the possibility of promoting changes. On the other hand, it also applies (from experience I can speak) the said "small town, big hell". Uruguay is a very small country in territory and inhabitants, and this element as well as positive, also leads to small towns or villages (where everyone is known) to generate resentment or jealousy often related to political differences but also between the philosophy of people's lives. This is a real weakness that often prevents collective work processes, where collective challenges and dreams are the main objective. (Interviewee J.)

7 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter thesis writers discuss about their observations findings from the analysis and examine the recommendations when looking at the research frame. Recommendations are divided to the discussion lines of empowerment, leadership and community development. In this part the discussion lines and recommendations also overlap since the topics also support each other.

Facts are that the rural communities are quite sparsely populated, they struggle with distances to bigger cities, services and for example education possibilities. People living in rural areas are generally poorer than people living in cities. People are not happy about their current situation. Young people are emigrating to cities in search of better lives. Changes in farming and the way agricultural producers are supported by government cause a lot of anger in especially the small and medium sized producers.

There is a need for change for better. For the communities to stay vital there needs to be more and better education, job opportunities and services available. Developing the rural communities for better is critical. Quality of life has to be on the same level as with people who live in urban areas.

Communities need better leadership and development strategies that focus in the necessary issues for development and create sustainable and beneficial solutions. And finally, the people of the communities need to be empowered to take charge of their own lives and have effect on the decisions and development of the community.

Parts of the rural Uruguay have already been greatly affected by foreign investments and soon there will be more of these investments affecting central parts of Uruguay. Companies operating in Uruguay are already doing developing projects in local communities. For example, UPM (UPM Uruguay 2018) has a foundation which is already working in 130 small communities around Uruguay.

There are plans for a large forestry project that will have a significant effect on some of the rural areas if the plan goes through. UPM has signed an investment agreement with Uruguay to define requirements for a pulp mill project. (UPM Uruguay 2018a.) This project addresses also the cooperation projects that have been done with for example UPM.

This kind of investments create massive changes for the communities that are situated in the development area. With these changes come good opportunities but they should also be looked at critically. Communities should be prepared for taking advantage of the

opportunities. Change should support development in the communities and be sustainable for the people as well as for the environment.

The sub chapters give answers to the research question:

How can local leaders empower and develop their communities?

7.1 Community Empowerment

One of the biggest challenges for improving the situation in rural communities seems to be that many of the people don't believe in themselves or believe in the change. Also, a general negativity and communal low self-esteem of the communities was described as a problem in the interviews.

If you combine this answer to the observations and experiences from the workshops, teachers minimizing the people's capabilities to take part in the surveys and seeing the opportunity to learn new technology even harmful for the community members. There is a need for positive reimbursement, empowerment and inspiring the people.

On the other hand, the growing dissatisfaction has caused massive demonstrations among farmers throughout the country. This is a considerable movement which proves that the people are ready to stand up to barricades to raise their voices. It should be also noticed that Uruguay has already invested a lot to improve the situation for agricultural producers, but it seems that the actions are not enough or not focused on the right things because of the demonstrations.

Empowering the communities is needed to show that community members can be their own masters and have an effect for their future. For this the communities need to recognize who are the key agents that are willing to change and engage in development projects. Since empowerment is not something that can be created from outside, but it has to start from the people themselves, it is important to find the people who are willing to commit to this process.

According to these interviews the key agents for these empowerment projects would be young people and especially women. These groups are described to be more willing to change their situation. Empowering women is especially beneficial as giving women more power economically and as decision makers can benefit families and whole communities by bringing more money to the families and improving their economy.

In addition to economic empowerment it is important to support women empowerment and encourage women to make decision and take leadership roles in the communities. It is also studied that women as leaders make better decisions for the communities and aim for more socially sustainable results. (UN Women 2018)

Empowering young people to take control of their own lives should start already in schools by positive reimbursement and a way of making them believe themselves more. Involving young people to community development projects from the start would be a way of giving them a power to decide on things that are important for them. It was said also in the interviews that the leaders should have more trust on the young people to find new ways of improving opportunities.

When asking from the children how they see their future, it was observed that possibilities especially in homes with low educational level are not necessarily recognized. On the other hand, it was interesting to find out that the children don't necessary think about emigrating to cities as their first choice for future plans. They are thinking about finding decent, well paid jobs in the community and building their career there. It should be further investigated if it is because they don't know the opportunities that are available in urban areas. Educational centers could operate as facilitators of promoting, encouraging and giving tools to the children to see and be open to the wide range of opportunities for their future.

In other words, educational centers should be children's empowering centers. As recommendation, educational system may think about improving their programs in boosting the children's future, helping the to recognize opportunities and to see prospectively.

7.2 Leadership

There is lack of political will and lack of leadership in the rural communities. These statements are clearly reflected in the opinion of many of the interviewed leaders for this thesis project. Some of them have expressed that decisions, programs and rural policies are taken behind a desk and by people who have rarely been in contact with rural areas.

In this sense, Uruguayan rural programs and policies are not inclusive, they do not listen to the voice or the needs of rural communities, they cannot commit them to change, because they do not solve real problems or needs of these communities.

Recently there has been activity around this kind of thinking considering development of agriculture in Uruguay. The Rural Development Round Tables were created for this purpose to bring local producers to discuss on the development issues.

The Rural Development Round Tables (Mesas de Desarrollo Rural) are an instrument of public policy for family agriculture and rural employees, strengthened by the Law of Decentralization and Coordination of Agricultural Policies with a Departmental Basis. N° 18.126 promulgated on May 12th, 2007. Some of them are fixed Rural Development Round Tables, and others are itinerant. In some municipalities there is only one and in others more than one, following the territorial needs of the different populations and the Territorial Teams of Rural Development (Equipos Territoriales de Desarrollo Rural). (Villalba Clavijo 2015.)

This issue was also discussed when starting the first project with the Lorenzo Geyres community members. They see the lack of leadership as lack of organization, poor use of resources and lack of development. The same kind of issues are raised from discussions with the leaders.

According to the interviews there is a big challenge to identify people with leadership skills. It is suggested that leadership skills should be installed through training programs, that would help to generate social cohesion, bring together community members and associations and have a consensual strategy: *“where we want to go as a society”*.

Communities don't have to wait for the government to create one vision and strategy for developing rural areas. Communities can be empowered to take action and create their own local strategies. This could also help to find better use for governmental resources and funding for more practical and sustainable development projects locally.

It is important to note that for decades the government did not pay attention to the needs of the rural communities, the corrupt national administrations and the crisis have affected negatively the developments of the rural areas. In addition, effects of the dictatorship are still present in the memories of the Uruguayans. (Foreign Policy 2014.)

What is defined as lack of leadership in the communities should be further studied. Emergent leaders and active community members should be given more power. When talking about leadership, researchers observed that people were also referring to lack of organization and strategies from government. Communities have resources and tools available for development, but it seems that they are not tied to strategies and there is no one organizing or seeing through that the development projects have real impacts or sustainable actions on the communities.

There is a clash in what community members are saying that they need, how government supports these needs how these things are seen in the community influencers or leaders' eyes. Good example are the public learning centers called MEC centers. Government has supported building of the centers all around the country. MEC centers can be found even in the smallest communities.

At the moment, many of these learning centers offer however only few activities and the courses offered are not always the things that are needed. For example, according to Giardello Maianti (2014, 8) many unemployed young women are taking a hairdressing course in Lorenzo Geyres MEC center. They are taking the classes because it is the only thing available for studying and it gives them something to do and because there are no other alternatives available. However, the problem is that hairdressing will not employ all these women in the future.

Giardello Maianti has studied the use of the Lorenzo Geyres MEC center and found out that the course offering is not what the community members want and what could benefit them the most. The course offering, and activity of the centers seems to be highly depending on the leadership of the center and how active the leader is for developing the activities of the center. There is a huge potential in these centers, but they also need good leadership, planning and organizing the courses.

Another example is learning and digitalization. Government supports digital literacy by giving every child laptop and for elderly people tablet computers. As from researchers' own observations people are eager to learn and be involved. This attitude towards learning is also supported on the research of Giardello Maianti. Problematic seems to be the attitudes and the approach from the leaders' side.

Leaders see people as passive, unmotivated and with low self-esteem. Is this because of the leadership, or is this how people also see themselves? Leadership is tied also to empowerment, inspiring and motivating the people. They seem to think that the people don't have the motivation, or they have negative prejudices against trying new things.

During this research the thesis authors came across these issues several times. Mentality of the people was talked several times in the interviews. However, thesis team observed the community members as enthusiast, curious people. These observations are however generalizations on researchers' part from their findings. Since each community is unique, this should be considered by each case, but not automatically generalized to each community.

Community leaders can have a big part on effecting the way people are seen as members in the community and how they are given the power. Giving them opportunities to learn and be curious is important. Changing the mindset and ways of thinking is not easy and it takes time. Leaders need also ways of broadening their minds and giving people ways of testing their skills.

There is also a need for participatory planning and action for involving community members in this case. Participatory methods can also create an empowering cycle for communities. According to Metsämuuronen (2006, 356) it is important to define the current situation and the issues affecting it. Once they are clear, it is easier to the people involved to see what they want for the future. This already empowers people when they begin to break away from their restraints. When future goal is created and defined together it can activate creativity and communality.

According to Robinson (2016) involving the communities from the first stages of the development is a way to engage the members for the project as well as for the changes. When communities are given the chance to influence results of the project, the outcome will be sustainable and beneficial for the community. Resident centered approach gives direct benefit to communities and brings forward social change. According to Heikkonen and Österberg (2012, 10) involving end users or in this case the community members as early as possible ensures the best result for the project.

In order to be agents of change, the communities must be educated in social participation so that they can see the benefit of pursuing a purpose together. Communities' members must diagnose together the strengths and weaknesses of the community and learn to detect and manage the needs, bringing together solutions.

Rural policies, projects and programs must be created taking in account the rural communities' voice, challenges need to be identified together with the community and solutions generated with the participation of the communities, co-creating rural development policies.

It should be considered that even if the rural communities have similar challenges throughout the country, every community is unique and solutions to the problems might not be always the same. Involving people to defining and solving the problems together helps to focus on the actual problems of every community and it also engages people to be part of the change.

7.3 Community development

Developing of the rural areas means creating opportunities for the people. They have to have same kind of job and educational opportunities as people living in urban areas. Also, public services have to be available for people. In addition to that, for the communities to develop they have to offer people recreational opportunities.

Even though the statistics shows that the poverty and extreme poverty have decreased during the last years in Uruguay, in the rural areas and populations with less than 5000 persons, the poverty rates are higher than in the urban areas with more than 5000 persons. (Presidencia, Políticas sociales, Vivienda y Medio Ambiente 2016).

Fast aging of the rural communities is caused by the emigration of the young people due to the lack of educational and other opportunities. Young people don't have resources or capacitation to generate profitable and sustainable businesses. National policies don't cover the rural sector and the support is not enough to help the small farmers facing challenges to grow. The farmers feel that they cannot be competitive to access in the national or regional markets due to the high production costs.

As discussed before, there are however resources available from the government as well as development projects that are already happening. Challenge is that the projects don't always meet the actual needs of the communities. Resources and money are spent, but not in an effective way. For the development projects to have impact and sustainability for long term, they should be tied to the governmental development plans and strategies. Involving community members in early stages of the development actions, is also empowering.

People need better prospects for education, jobs and also recreational opportunities equal to people living in urban areas. Keeping the rural communities vital and changing the situation of the people for better demands also a lot of structural and political changes. Structural changes don't happen overnight and might take years to build.

When studying the use of MEC centers, Giardello Maianti (2014, 9) asked people what kind of courses the people would like to participate. People seem to want two different kind of courses. First, educational courses that would help them to find jobs, such as learning English and computer sciences. On the other hand, there is also need for recreational activities, such as dance workshops, gymnastics, cultural courses, theater and cinema.

According to Giardello Maianti (2014, 13) MEC center should focus more on the needs of the young people to get them more active. This is important especially in small communities such as Lorenzo Geyres. Involving young people could help them understand the value of education and aspire them to get decent jobs in the future. It could also be a way to innovate and get new ideas.

Researchers also found out that young people are more willing to engage into change. When thinking ahead in the future, the focus point of development projects should be children and young people. These are the people that will also be the change in the communities later, if they have not emigrated to cities because of lack of opportunities. As found out from the survey for school children, the children have future dreams of staying in the local areas, and not emigrating. Because of lack of opportunities, they might not have any other choices.

It should be noted, that since Uruguay has very good internet connections available for everyone, the biggest challenge is not necessary the actual availability to connections because of distance and isolation. They have the tools available; they just need to learn how to use them more efficiently and find the right people to connect. As this thesis project proves, it is possible to connect to people living in remote places in Uruguay, network, develop and have workshops in virtual places.

Teaching digital literacy and use of digital tools for adults has positive effects and shortens the digital gap between generations. It also gives the rural people more equal opportunities to the rest of the citizens. However, researchers encountered prejudices from the teachers for teaching the people new digital skills. This was even seen as harmful for the people. During the research thesis authors also found out that there is a digital learning network that covers most parts of Uruguay available. This could also be utilized to MEC centers by providing virtual courses around the country.

Creating jobs is a major challenge. In addition to jobs involving agriculture, the leaders see that there are not that many possibilities at the moment. They see that there are possibilities on entrepreneurship and especially rural tourism. However, people need more education on starting new businesses and creating new innovation and ideas for business.

One way of thinking about new ideas is to think about the needs for services the communities need themselves and create jobs by offering services locally. There are also examples where communities have created successful business from the intentions of improving the quality of life of the rural women in Uruguay. Manos del Uruguay was created in 1968 and now it's a successful craft company that delivers its products globally. (Manos

del Uruguay 2019.) Sharing these kind of business stories and successes could be useful to help inspire people.

IT sector and software development offer also jobs and educational opportunities in rural communities. It came up in the interviews that there is already activity on this in some small towns. According to Serron (2018) Uruguay is the leading software exporter in South America per capita. The IT industry focuses mostly on Montevideo, but this could offer more opportunities on the rural areas also.

Plan Ceibal was initiated in 2007. It offers every school child a laptop computer with internet connection. Starting from 2009, 100% of the Uruguayan children have received their own computers. With the purpose of digital inclusion, Uruguayan government started the Plan Ibirapitá. It provides a tablet computer for retired people with low income. This means that the Uruguayan over 23 years don't necessarily have the IT literacy as the young people have at this moment when starting their upper or university level. (Plan Ceibal.)

Uruguay has developed a unique and excellent network infrastructure for education through Plan Ceibal. In 2016 there were 797,000 devices in use by beneficiaries and ex-beneficiaries. 100% of the educational centers are equipped with Wi-Fi connections and Internet access. 92.9% of urban public schools had access to the Internet via fiber optics and 99, 8% of urban public educational centers had videoconferencing equipment. Connectivity achieved through Plan Ceibal was 99% in primary and secondary education, 99% of the lyceums with basic cycle and 100% of the UTU (technological schools). Plan Ceibal arranged the generation of electricity through solar panels for 71 schools without electricity. (Plan Ceibal.)

Government already supports digital development, but there is still need for more work from the teachers to support the career choices and opportunities. As it was seen from the answers from the children, none of the answer on future career dreams mentioned related to IT services. There is a huge potential on the educational centers and digital learning platforms and as IT sector is growing and more workforce is needed also globally.

One of the challenges for starting new business was that the new entrepreneurs don't have the connections or knowledge how to get started. From the interviews came the idea of connecting the starting entrepreneurs to already existing ones. (Interviewee H) One idea was to create similar organizations for entrepreneurs that they have for farmers in Uruguay. Another way would be to support a mentorship program. There was also a suggestion of bringing entrepreneurial education to schools starting from primary schools.

One big opportunity for creating development and job opportunities in rural communities are foreign companies that are making large investments on the rural areas. These create massive changes for the areas they are operating and can transform the lives of the people completely. Companies can provide training, jobs and also other development projects for the communities. For example, UPM has a foundation that has improved schools in the areas and has projects that better the lives of the poor people.

There has also been critique about the actions of these companies and this should be taken into consideration. Is sustainability tied into the company strategies and are they working in a way that supports sustainable development and empowerment in the communities. Or is it a way of greenwashing the company reputation and distraction from the actual effects they have on the environment. It should be considered also what are long time consequences for the community and are the companies sincerely committed to developing communities and not just taking advantage of the people for better public image.

There is little that the communities can do to affect which parts of Uruguay the investments are situated. Co-operation with the companies needs a readiness for change from the community. They should be prepared for the projects to take the advantages that the companies might bring for development. To do this in a more sustainable way the communities need to create a vision and strategies for development and then they can be more prepared for the co-operation and gain the best outcomes for the community. Some of the communities situated in the development areas are poor and there are a lot of benefits that these investments can offer for bettering lives of people.

8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH

According to Bryman (2012, 390-393) qualitative research has to be evaluated through its credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity when looking at the trustworthiness of the research. Topic of the research has significance and relevance for the people living in the communities, but it also aims to understand difficulties and challenges around community development projects in rural areas in general. This research follows ethical practices and protects the anonymity on the answers as requested from few of the interviewees.

Credibility means that the research is conducted with good practices and it has gone through validation or triangulation. In order to establish credibility of the findings in this research project, the thesis writers have utilized the triangulation technique. For the triangulation of research methods and data collection were utilized: workshops, surveys, interviews, questionnaires, sampling and data analysis methods. Theoretical triangulation was used throughout the research process in order to analyze the data.

To the triangulation of sources, the researchers have interviewed different people such as children, women, men and leaders within different rural communities and from several parts of the country. Leaders as sources, were chosen through theoretical sampling methods and focusing on their differing in social and political perspectives. The amount of data is abundant, and it covers different perspectives of the people involved. The data also offers possibilities for further studies.

As a second credibility technique, the thesis writers utilized the member-checking technique to verify with the interviewees and analysts the collected data, interpretations of the translations, possible mistakes, misunderstandings, clarifications and supplementary information. The gathered data was constantly reflected and discussed among the thesis writers.

According to Patton (2015, 480) interviews are complex interactions as a method. Cross-cultural aspect creates even more complexity and increase possibility of misunderstandings significantly. Especially vulnerable for misunderstandings are short term cross-cultural thesis projects such as ours. Some words, terms or ideas might be impossible to translate directly, and things get lost in the translation.

Interviews proved to be challenging also for time management reasons. A one-hour interview turned into a three-hour session and it was impossible to stay in schedule.

Recording, transcribing and translations took a long time and it quickly turned out that if researchers would do all the interviews in person or Skype, it would take too long time to complete the project.

Turning the interviews into Google Form questionnaires made it possible to involve more sources for information. It also affects the details and quality of the data since the questionnaires lack interactions with interviewers. This can be seen also in the amount of data. Interviews done by Skype or in person gave significantly more material than the open-ended questionnaires even if the questions were the same. The length of the answer depended also on the interviewed person. Some of the interviewees gave detailed answers while other answered only with few words.

As Wimpenny (2010, 90-93) states, in participatory action research there is room for creativity, but it also creates uncertainty and messiness for the researchers. A part of the participatory action research is to engage into self-reflective cycle which reflects the actions as the process proceeds. For the process to work it also needs to move forward. When thesis writers started doing the research, it was clear that the outcome would clarify at the end process. Unfortunate setback was getting stuck in the participatory methods with community members. On the other hand, talking to leaders and influencers in the communities produced vast amount of research data. It was then clear that the data was taking the research to a different direction.

As a part of creating the understanding and knowledge of the problem, participatory research methods served their purpose. Complexity of the issues and then deciding on how to utilize the existing data continued changing the research type more into case study about development and empowerment of rural communities in Uruguay.

According to Yin (2009, 4) case study is a method of choice, when you want to research how or why some social phenomenon is important. In this research thesis writers want to explore how community leaders can empower their communities and why empowerment is important for development. Case study is also a good method when research questions require a wide and thorough description of the social occurrence.

For transferability it should be noted that rural Uruguay has its own unique features, cultural details and demography. Many of the findings can be useful for other kind of settings but the features and challenges of these communities should be considered before applying.

During the research process there has been kept records of discussions, shared knowledge and interviews. The data can be found as audio files, transcriptions, notes and

for the translated parts, the original Spanish versions. This ensures the dependability of the research.

According to Brymann (2012, 393) complete objectivity is practically impossible in social research. Objectivity is the basis for confirmability. As the research topic came up with the interests of the thesis writers, the objectivity was at times difficult. However, analysis and findings go through all the point of views equally.

According to Lincoln and Cuba (Brymann 2012, 393) authenticity rises from the facts that there are different viewpoints of members in social settings represented. Research works as a tool for the members to have a better understanding of their social surroundings and it can also engage for change and empowers members to take action. During the research it was clear that gathering data already gave the community members new ways of thinking.

9 CONCLUSIONS

Uruguay is considered as one of the most developed countries in the Latin Americas and Caribbean region. Population is focused mostly on the capital area and few bigger cities. Rural parts have a lot of small communities which have population of 5000 people or less. These communities suffer from poverty, isolation and lack of opportunities. They have fewer job opportunities available and the distances make it more difficult for the young people to carry on studies after primary school. This concludes to high emigration from rural areas to cities.

This development project started from the grassroot level with the community of Lorenzo Geyres. At first, the objective of the thesis was to create an innovation and testing network for creating new business ideas for the rural areas. During the process the research excavated deeper into root problems and challenges of the communities.

As the complexity of the issues was realized, the project focus changed into identifying the challenges and trying to solve them in collaboration with the leaders and reflecting the interview data with other research data. Focus shifted to working with the community leaders and helping them to find ways to empower and develop the communities. The research question is examined from three discussion lines empowerment of the communities, community development and leadership. Purpose of the research from the start was empowerment of the people and the communities. This stayed the same during the process.

9.1 Empowerment

Since the people in general are not satisfied with their living situation, taking action and being able to have effect on their lives and making the decisions is important. Empowerment can benefit development of communities and societies.

As the Uruguayan society has changed in the last decades and women have taken the role as the family head in many homes; empowering the Uruguayan women would add value to the sustainable development of the country and would contribute to decrease the poverty level that is affecting this specific area of the population: home head women.

Poverty in the rural communities means that some of the basic needs of the members are not covered and this causes general dissatisfaction. The effort from the government creating participatory round tables with rural population has been a positive initiative but not enough for solving the community's problems. Authorities and community's members

don't have a clear vision. They cannot organize their ideas and the policies and solutions created are general and implemented too late that they don't solve specific community problems.

The lack of skills, resources and knowledge is seen as a problem, but the main challenges are the low self-esteem of the community members and their self-limiting beliefs. This state of mind is reinforced by leaders undermining community members. As a result, people have become passive because they don't believe in themselves and they cannot generate change or be drivers of change.

The workshops held with Lorenzo Geyres, showed that people are keen to listen and engage for the change when they are listened, and their needs and ideas are taken in consideration. They have skills and knowledge that can change their lives, but in some cases, they are not aware of them, or they don't want to believe in their own talents. As was found out from workshops with the communities, they can benefit from facilitating new ideas.

There is a high level of unemployed women in rural areas of Uruguay. They are affected by the inequality as they are seen as the producers' woman. They do majority of the household work and help with farm work but are not recognized as workers. In many cases they don't get salary or don't have working rights.

Involving community members in decision making and development project is recommended as many of the studies show. The Rural Development Round Tables in rural areas are seen as positive step to generate an environment of reflection and together be able to create initiatives with a communitarian purpose. The communities have enough knowledge and skills to solve their challenges and the connection to public and private stakeholders may help to create a broader vision of the challenges and together design better and creative solutions.

During development projects is important to emphasize to all community members how important are their collaboration and their contributions. Recognizing the key persons in the community, who are willing to engage for development projects is essential. Sometimes people are enthusiastic to engage in projects and need to have the sense of belonging as a part of the project, group or community. Recognizing these people and seeing the benefits of the collective power can give positive reinforcement for all community members to work for a common goal.

One of the main themes from the start for this project was empowerment, and how communities could benefit from empowering their members and especially on engaging them

for positive change as well as taking actions. Even if the focus for this project quickly grew from empowering women to empowering whole communities, it is important to take notice the importance of women empowerment and how this can have positive effect not just for the women themselves but for the communities also.

Uruguay needs to create programs for empowerment of rural women. Empowerment programs should focus on emphasizing women's talents and boosting their inner motivation and finding ways of training them to pursue their dreams, to generate ideas and look for new opportunities. Generating a pool of talents and sharing the knowledge between the community members is important. Rural areas have lot of resources to be explored and taken advantage of like wool, leather, meat, vegetables, fruits, wines, rural tourism, and all the sub products that can be innovated from these resources. Women need the tools to generate business ideas, startups and sustainable business models.

It is important to involve especially the young people in community development projects and giving them tools for innovating new opportunities. This is not only going to empower the young people, but it will also improve the economy of the rural areas and decrease the migration of young people to bigger cities. Young people need opportunities where to be involved and engaged with. Opportunities that generate income and job opportunities help to keep them motivated to stay in their home areas.

There can be found discrepancies in most of rural communities. Local news reach everyone faster than in the bigger cities. Everybody knows each other, and they don't always agree with everything. Positive reinforcement for all community members is necessary and a transparent communication is a key factor in community empowerment. Keeping community members informed about the progress of development projects and their results, is very important. The members must learn to listen to each other actively and understand that the criticism is a necessary part of the process to grow.

Educating children on future opportunities and ways of achieving their dreams in early educational stages can help to change the mindset of the children regarding their future lives. Creating teaching programs in the Uruguayan educational system and preparing the students to create plans for their future is important.

They should be educated how to create their goals and what are the steps to achieving them. Also teaching about time management, strategies, risk evaluation, marketing, sales, negotiation skills, entrepreneurship, e.g. will teach them new skills and empower them already during the scholar age. The programs should be adapted to each age and integrated in the education.

9.2 Leadership

Many interviewees expressed about the lack of political will in Uruguay and that it is more evident with the rural populations. As per their answers, the politicians show their faces in the rural areas only during political campaigns for the national elections because they need to accumulate votes, so rural communities' members, in some cases are only a number or another vote to be elected.

Lack of governmental development strategies for rural areas is one of the weaknesses in Uruguayan development programs. Politicians don't necessarily have any idea about the real challenges that the communities are facing. Development strategies must be created with community leaders and local actors. This creates a deeper understanding of the communities' problems.

Creating a vision and strategy for developing the communities can be done on governmental level or in the community level. In all cases they should be created with the participation of all the stakeholders, including community leaders.

At the moment resources from the government are not spent in the most beneficial way or there are overlapping from different governmental and non-governmental organizations. This is holding back development. The different organizations are not able to communicate with each other. This means they are not able to coordinate and administrate the destination of the budget for rural development.

The most important things that can be shared for the community leaders from the results is to utilize participatory methods for planning, creating strategies and engaging community members for development projects. This research shows that the key agents for these projects in rural communities are children, young people and women. It should be noted that each community is different, and these might vary depending on the situation of each community.

Challenges, limitations, resources, available tools should be looked at from different stakeholder perspectives. Offered solutions to the problems should be taken in account from up to the bottom and vice versa, involving community members in the strategy process and deciding on development projects. Government development projects should be tied to the commonly created strategy. This can lead to more effective utilizing of government resources. Following up on the projects, measuring the results and learning from them is also important for development and empowerment process.

Lack of leadership skills was one of the issues expressed in the interviews. This can also influence the mentality of the people. Their passivity and low self-esteem are affecting leaders as well. They are also community members and don't have the necessary skills or tools for change these situations.

Changing the mindset of people can positively affect their lives and their situation. People need to be aware about it want to change. One option could be to create programs to the small populations where the goal is to activate the people and help them to learn how to change their habits, their passivity and self-limiting believes. Helping the community members to learn about planning and achieving their goals and helping them to get out of their comfort zone, will contribute to boost the change.

Training the leaders in development of personal and collective skills in rural communities could affect positively in the improvement of the communities. Working together with the community to shape the way of thinking with clear vision and goals while finding the community voice is important for the future developments. Discovering together what are the strengths of the communities and encouraging them in believing in themselves finding a meaningful purpose in their lives can create positive change. Creating training programs for children, youth and women to be skilled leaders can create generational change. They are the future leaders who can empower their own communities one day.

9.3 Community development

The lack of opportunities is predetermined by the low educational level, deficient jobs and recreational opportunities. It is a major challenge in rural Uruguay. Many of the communities have only primary education level available. The children discontinue their studies due to the lack of financial resources to go to bigger cities to continue their studies. Many communities have implemented secondary level education, but there is a generational gap with middle age community members that didn't have almost any access to the secondary education level. In addition, there is also a digital gap, and this can be detected with people between 23 and 65 years old. These are the people who have not benefited from Plan Ceibal.

Uruguay has improved a lot in offering training and education, but it is really focusing all the resources in solving the right problems and needs of the communities? Have they been able to utilize the resources effectively? Have they measured the results of educational development projects in the rural communities? There is still a need for further

studies around this issue. Rural people who didn't have the opportunities for proper education or with low educational level need also extra attention around this.

In addition to lack of opportunities, isolation of the communities is one of the main challenges that arose from the interviews and is holding back development of the rural communities. Isolation creates challenges for education and the effects can be seen with emigration levels. Isolation is due to the location of local communities and the poor conditions of rural roads. The road infrastructure is affecting the connections and transport to access even to the local market. It is challenging for local producers and development of their business.

Leaders state that isolation is not only geographical, but it also creates isolation from information. The people are not aware of what is happening in the rest of the country or in the world. Isolation from information creates lack of tools, ideas, networking with people and this makes it difficult to create new and sustainable businesses.

It is highly recommended to implicate innovation and co-creation tools for the generation of new and innovative business ideas. Detecting the resources, strengths and abilities of each local community and its members, generating spaces for innovation and co-creation of new entrepreneurship ideas is important. Training the community members in idea generation and creating programs to build start-ups with real benefits to the members can create positive change. Eliminating the bureaucracy and stress of unnecessary modalities can help the future entrepreneur start their entrepreneurial activity. New entrepreneurs could also be supported through mentorship and entrepreneur networks locally and on national level.

Generating entrepreneurial opportunities for young people should start early with creating business and innovation incubators already in the primary school level. Games and projects could be beneficial for generating the entrepreneurship. Idea generation through co-creation could be included at national level in learning process programs of primary and secondary education system.

Bringing entrepreneur education to schools will help to boost the entrepreneurial spirit and knowledge of rural children and youth and this could be transferred to their homes also. People could be inspired also by sharing entrepreneurial success stories. Stories that people will empathize with, motivate and empower at the same time.

Uruguay must highlight research on the development of new jobs in agricultural and rural activities in general. Great efforts are being made to develop forestry professionals due to the construction of pulp mills and the need for trained people in this area. But the

Uruguayan farmers are not only dedicated to afforestation. Efforts should be initiated towards training in the more traditional areas of agriculture, such as livestock, dairy, fruit farming, viticulture and apiculture. Focus should be in the range of activities to which the rural environment offers jobs and income to the rural and urban homes.

More research is needed for generating new business around rural and nature tourism and by providing services locally. A lot of job and business opportunities could be generated also around IT sector. This could generate services around rural activities to develop and facilitate farmers work. But there are also more opportunities around software development. Growth in this sector can be seen in urban areas and some parts of rural communities also.

Investment decisions affecting future development of the country should include further investigations on the direct impacts to the rural areas which are affected by these investments. Communities should take advantage of foreign and national investment projects preparing for change in advance and not be shocked and overruled by the change.

Before signing any investment or project agreement, the government should require investors to develop a plan for the future impact of their business in the communities. The development plan must be carried out together in collaboration with the members of the affected communities, the companies and the government, creating a set of goals, development opportunities, evaluation of risks and measurement plan of the development goals.

Another good tool of the Uruguayan government, that should be better exploited and optimized, are the MEC centers. By assessing the needs and resources of each community, a selection of courses should be developed, planned and implemented to address those needs. The MEC centers could be utilized as social, cultural, recreational and training centers, where the community members propose and discuss development ideas for their community. Involving and engaging the community members on developing also recreational opportunities for the communities could create also more attractive communities for young people. Effectively utilizing this tool can help to connect, include and increase citizen participation in rural areas.

Plan Ceibal has developed and extended internet communications and virtual learning to almost the entire country. This is smart and powerful tool to be used for the empowerment and opportunity development in rural communities. Utilizing the available IT structure, internet communications and available physical learning spaces for virtual learning could also create new ways of extending training and education opportunities to even in the most remote places.

10 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Research process was complex, and the outcome of the project was not what thesis writers started to do in the first place. In the early stages it was known that the results would be generated as the conversations went forward. However, when researchers started with this project, they did not anticipate that the process would take them through this kind of journey.

Process as a whole was a learning experience for the researchers but also for the community members involved. In the process the community members learned ways of utilizing new tools for them, such as internet surveys, Skype and innovation tools. Using these tools also open their mind of thinking what kind of possibilities they could have and opened their mind of seeing things from another perspective.

As defining the current situation can already be seen as an empowerment action, there was already small steps taken towards empowerment during the research project. Discussion continues on the Lorenzo Geyres community WhatsApp almost daily.

This research gives an overview of the challenges and recommendations on the chosen discussion lines, but the research material would offer possibilities for deeper discussions on each topic and would need more research, for example on effects of foreign investments on rural communities.

Since empowerment should be looked at an ongoing process, for the communities the next steps are important. There has been interest from the Uruguayan embassy in Helsinki and the community leaders involved towards the results of the project.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Uruguay in general

Uruguay is located between Brazil and Argentine with coastline on the Atlantic Ocean (Figure1). The largest cities are Montevideo, Salto and Paysandú. (PwC Uruguay 2016, 8.) Population of Uruguay is 3,369,299 (July 2018 est.).



Figure 1. Uruguay Map (CIA World Factbook 2019)

According to PwC Uruguay (2016, 10) Uruguay's economy relies traditionally on production of raw materials such as agricultural products, meat, wool, wood etc. However significant growth can be seen in other sectors such as for example tourism, information technology, logistics, finance and shared service centers. Companies are usually small family businesses. In rural areas agriculture is the biggest provider for jobs.

According to the CIA's World Factbook (2019) and PwC Uruguay (2016, 4, 9) Uruguay rates high for most development indicators. Culture, living and health standards are the highest in Latin America. Uruguay has well-developed social security and educational system. Entire population has access to clean water which is not common in Latin America

and the Caribbean area. Environment is safe and healthy. Pollution is low since the cities do not have polluting industries and they have large green spaces.

Demography of Uruguay is similar to developing countries. Birthrate is decreasing, and population is aging. Emigration of young adults is also affecting population growth in a negative way. (CIA World Factbook 2019.)

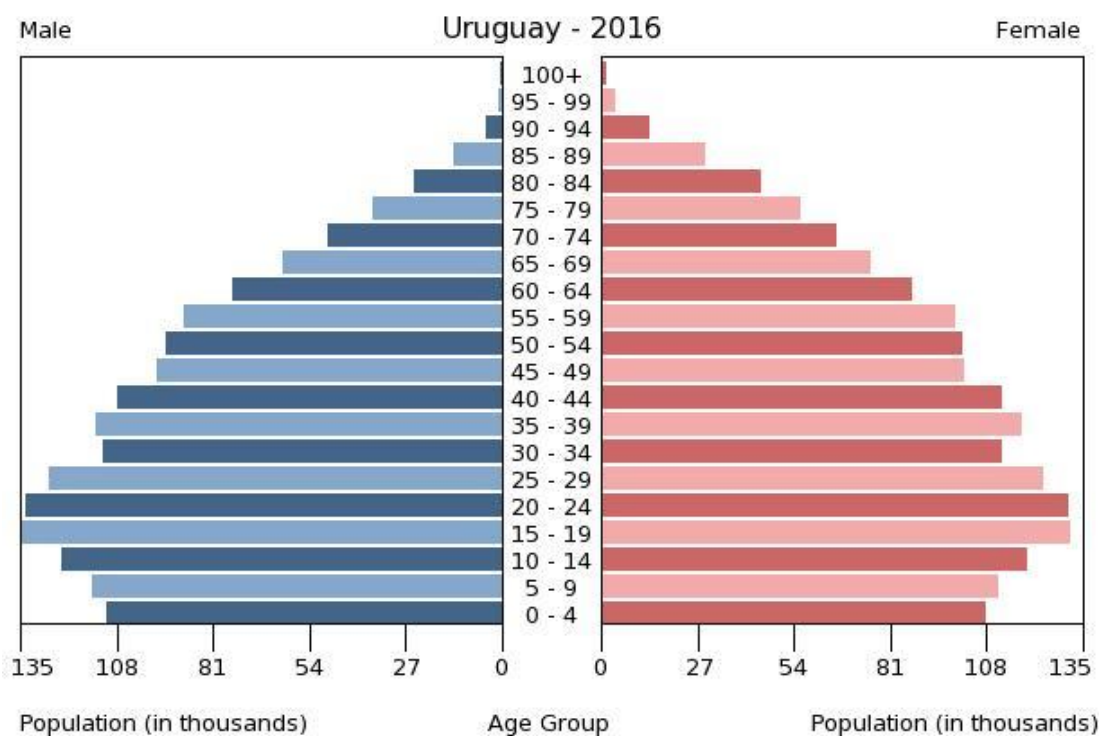


Figure 2. Demography of Uruguay (CIA World Factbook 2019).

Education and child labor

In Uruguay primary education is free and it is compulsory for children ages 6 to 15. In remote areas children have sometimes trouble of attending school. Average literacy is however the highest of Latin American countries. According to CIA World Factbook (2019) literacy for population over 15 years is 98,5% (2015 est.). Primary school graduation percentage is 98 percent for girls and 95 percent for boys. Attendance for secondary school is higher for girls than boys and about 60 percent of university students are female. (World trade press 2010, 20.)

Legal age for working in Uruguay is 15 and there are strict laws for preventing child labor. Despite of this there are children under 14 years working instead of going to school or

combining work and school (Table 1). Number of children working is bigger in rural areas than cities. (World trade press 2010, 8; United States Department of Labour, 2019.)

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education in 2016 (United States Department of Labour, 2019).

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	6,1 (31,955)
Attending School (%)	5-14	97,8
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	6,5

Choice of profession is figured out by economic and social background as well as education and other skills. Especially in the rural areas it is common to stay at the same occupation for lengthy periods. (World trade press 2010, 8.) According to CIA World Factbook (2019) Unemployment rate was 7.6 percent in 2017.

APPENDIX 2

Questionnaire for the school children**Estudiantes**

Ésta entrevista es parte de un trabajo de investigación de la Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas Lamk, Finlandia.

Gracias por su aporte y cooperación !

***Required**

1. Cuál es tu edad? *

menor de 12 años

12 años

13 años

14 años

15 años

16 años

17 años

18 años

mayor de 18 años

2. Género *

Femenino Masculino Prefiero no decirlo Otro

3. ¿Qué tipo de trabajo o profesión quieres tener cuando seas grande? ***4. ¿Sabes cómo lograrlo? ***

Sí

No

Tal vez

5. Cómo?**6. Qué has hecho o estás haciendo para lograrlo?**

APPENDIX 3

Interview questionnaire for leaders and influencers**Empoderamiento de comunidades rurales en Uruguay**

Entrevista a referentes y líderes en Uruguay. Respondiendo a esta entrevista Usted está participando de un proyecto de innovación social llevado a cabo por 2 estudiantes de la Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas LAMK de Finlandia. Las respuestas no serán publicadas textualmente, pero pueden ser usadas como referencias en la tesis de grado de la maestría.

Gracias por su aporte!

Comunidades y su gente:

Esta sección está enfocada en la situación actual de las pequeñas comunidades rurales y también en las fortalezas y desafíos para promover/facilitar/crear el cambio. Desde su punto de vista como líder o referente, ¿cuál es la situación en este momento de la gente en los pequeños pueblos y comunidades rurales?

Nombre:

Título:

Compañía, organización, Institución y cargo que desempeña en la misma:

- 1. ¿Está la gente de las comunidades satisfecha con su situación actual? Desde su punto de vista, ¿cuál es la mentalidad de las personas de esas comunidades?**
- 2. ¿Cuáles son las fortalezas de la gente en las comunidades rurales?**
- 3. ¿Qué es lo que frena el desarrollo en esas comunidades y cuáles son los mayores desafíos para revertirlo?**
- 4. ¿Están los miembros de las comunidades dispuestos a comprometerse para el cambio?**
- 5. ¿Cuáles son los desafíos para involucrarlos?**

6. **¿Está el gobierno y/o el sistema apoyando el desarrollo en las comunidades? ¿Cómo?**
7. **Si ha habido cooperación con empresas extranjeras (como UPM, Cargill, Basf, Syngenta), ¿cuáles han sido los beneficios y las ganancias a corto o largo plazo? ¿Qué se puede aprender de ellos?**
8. **¿Cuáles han sido las dificultades y aspectos negativos en la cooperación con empresas extranjeras? ¿Qué se puede aprender de ellos?**

Líderes y referentes

9. **¿Cuál es su vinculación con las comunidades rurales?**
10. **¿Cómo ve usted las oportunidades para las personas en áreas rurales? ¿Hay suficientes empleos? ¿Hay oportunidades para crear negocios y puestos de trabajo en áreas rurales? ¿Hay opciones para los niños cuando crezcan?**
11. **¿Cómo puede usted como líder o influenciador/referente, ayudar a empoderar a las comunidades rurales?**
12. **En cuanto a proyectos que beneficien comunidades: ¿Hay algo en lo que esté usted trabajando en la actualidad? ¿O haya estado trabajando anteriormente?**

APPENDIX 4

Interviewees' profiles

Laura Lacuague: She holds an Agricultural Engineering in Agricultural-Livestock orientation, degree granted by the University of the Republic UDELAR, a Postgraduate Diploma of Specialization in Sustainable Rural Development obtained in Faculty of Agriculture of UDELAR and currently in the preparation of the final thesis for the Master's Degree in Education and Rural Extension at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of UDELAR. She is the current General Director of Development and Environment Programs (PRODEMA) in the Municipality of Tacuarembó and she is holding this position from 2010 uninterrupted. He has been working on different positions in this institution from 1993 carrying out the work of conducting the environmental policies of the Tacuarembó region, the most extensive in the territory (15 thousand km²) of the country. Principal lecturer at UDELAR (University of the Republic of Uruguay) and Professor at UTU Technological Pole. Laura was a rural producer from 1987 to 1993 and she has participated during 25 years in several development projects with national organisms like CND – Fundación Logros – DINAMA, Uruguay Integra, OPP and international organisms such as FAO - PNUD - OPS-OMS, Fondo Canadá.

Vicente Plata: He is the Officer in Charge of the FAO organization in Uruguay (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). He is an Agricultural Engineer, a degree obtained in the University of the Republic of Uruguay. He also has a Master in Commerce (Agriculture) at the University of Lincoln, New Zealand, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Rural Development (Centro di Studi Agricoli "Borgo a Mozzano"), Italy.

Araseli Acosta: She is an Architect and working as a Project Manager at MIPESTAC - Development and strengthening of micro and small enterprises of Tacuarembó. She currently works as well as a principal lecturer for the Global Governance course and Cooperation for the Development course at UDELAR (University of the Republic of Uruguay). Coordinator of the Suppliers' Development Program (2013-2017) for BID Fomin-Development Agency of Tacuarembó. She has experience in coordination and management of international projects financed through IFIs (International Financial Institutions) and funds of the European Union for Public Administrations, NGOs and private companies. As a proposal manager she has done the analysis of business opportunities and development of international projects for companies in the private sector. Has experience in international cooperation and in local and territorial development. She has earned her working experience in Uruguay, Argentine, Spain and Italy.

Benjamin Liberoff: He is the actual Sub secretary of Tourism of the Tourism Ministry of Uruguay. He has held the former positions as Director of the Technical Direction of Tourism of the Ministry of Tourism, National Director of Tourism and Director of Tourism of the Municipality of Montevideo. He studied at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of the Republic of Uruguay and he holds a Postgraduate Degree in Economics and Management of Sustainable Tourism. He was Director of the Institute of Training in Tourism - ICT and General Secretary of the Confederation of Congress Organizers of Latin America (COCAL).

He also served as Tourism Advisor for the World Trade Center of Montevideo and Angola in 2002 and 2004. He has been a leader of organizations linked to the organization of fairs and congresses in Uruguay and Latin America. He was also counterpart for consultancies of the United Nations, Bid and other international organizations, and a reference for the UN-UN for issues related to the Country Brand, of which he was in charge by appointment of the Inter-ministerial Council, CIACEX

Carlos Rafael Damico Menta: Professor. He is the Departmental Director of the Ministry of Social Development (Mides) in Paysandú Municipality.

Francisco Faig: D.E.A in Political Studies (diplôme études approfondies, France). In 1992 he went to France to study for a degree and finished his first year of a PhD in Political Science at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris. In 1997 he returned to Uruguay. He is a professor at the ORT University, the largest private university in Uruguay and writes in the newspapers as an Editorialist and Journalist in El País and La Democracia. Participate in radio gatherings of En Perspectiva radio and El Espectador radio.

Iván Pini: is a BBA in International Business. Partner and rural producer at Altos de la Colonia. Lecturer responsible for the course Multimodal Logistics at UTEC (Technological University of Uruguay) in Fray Bentos city. Have worked at the Finnish companies Botnia and UPM in Uruguay and in Uruguayan ones like Forestal Uruguay and Estancias del Lago SRL (all related to rural or forestry activities).

Patricia Berocay: Physical education teacher. Sexuality educator. Soccer coach. Post-graduate in educational management. Teacher for the Secondary Education Council- ANEP- CODICEN, Inspector of Educational Institutes and High schools Zona Litoral-Uruguay. At the moment pursuing a master's degree in education, society and politics.

Juan Andres Pardo: Master in Tourism Consulting. Bachelor's Degree in International Business and Economic Integration graduated from the Catholic University of Uruguay. Also, in that university he studied the master's degree in business administration. Working in the Municipality of Paysandú as Coordinator of the Directorate of Tourism.

Professionally, he has worked in commercial companies as head of the business area and commercial management.

Luis Giménez: He possess a PhD in Agricultural Sciences and a Degree in Agricultural Engineer at the Faculty of Agronomy (UDELAR). A master's degree achieved in Spain and several capacitation courses in Israel, Spain, Argentina, Brazil. He is Principal Lecturer and Associate Professor of Crops at UDELAR (University of the Republic of Uruguay). Private Technical Advisor in crop. He has written several books and produced articles for scientific journals, magazines and newspapers. He has done 48 evaluations all related to Agricultural Sciences including projects, publications and thesis. Several projects performed at national level and he has been keynote speaker at many seminars and conferences in Argentina, Brazil, among other Latin American countries.

Oldemar Chacon: He is a History Teacher and a Business Technician. Teacher at the University of Labor of Uruguay (UTU) and Communicator in Quebracho Digital weblog. Student of Social Sciences Teaching at the Regional Center for Teachers (CERP) in Salto and Social Sciences at UDELAR, Salto

He worked for CODICEN as Departmental Referent in Paysandú of the Student Participation Program. He participated in projects of the Interamerican Foundation IAF, of the IDB. Has given seminars, presentations, trainings, technical assistance in the rural area of Quebracho and surroundings. In addition, Oldemar has worked in a center for children with different abilities.

Rodolfo Sabjan: Agricultural Engineer, diploma from UDELAR. He is the Regional manager in National Institute of Colonization, Regional Soriano.

Pablo Javier Manuel García Rampa: Agricultural Engineer, degree obtained in the University of the Republic of Uruguay. He is the Director for Paysandú Municipality of the MGAP (Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries).

José Luis Giardello Gabo: He is part of an association called TOGETHER FOR QUEGUAY [Lorenzo Geyres]

Magdalena Recoba: Doctor in Veterinary, degree obtained at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of UDELAR. Magdalena is the actual Social Development Director of Durazno Municipality for MIDES (Ministry of Social Development). He has been adviser of groups of small producers in the dairy area and the Veterinary Doctor responsible for the Agricultural School of Durazno where she acted as Teacher of Animal Production as well

Rosemarie Vergnes: Teacher for the Secondary Education Council- ANEP- CODICEN. She has worked a teacher foe over 20 years in kindergartens, primary schools, secondary

schools and high-schools. In 2017 she worked as a director of the CEI Lorenzo Geyres (Integral Educational Center) where started the connection and co-creation process with this research thesis. For 15 years she has been beekeeper and living in rural areas.

Julio Russi: He holds a Master Degree in Marketing and Communication Management (Spain). He is Specialist in Quality Management System (QMS) (UNIT-ISO). Director at CEO & Associates (Operations Strategy Center), company with the purpose of training, advising, guiding projects in the different levels of production and services for rural or urban communities. Non-formal educations programs for governmental institutions like INEFOP and DINAPYME in the Ministry of Industries. He worked as a teacher of the Uruguayan public school from 1972 to 1979. Has participated as a panelist in radio programs and has written several newspaper articles.

Author of the five books related to entrepreneurship, encouragement and boosting of the entrepreneurial spirit in primary school, secondary school and high school.