

# TESTIMONY OF A LIFE IN THE MOUNTAINS

“LIVING IN THE MOUNTAIN, A HERITAGE OF MORE THAN 4,000 YEARS”



**PROYECTO EUROPEO. LAS ESTRELLAS DEL BOSQUE**

EL PROYECTO 'STAR TREE' INCLUYE A TABUYO DEL MONTE COMO MODELO DE ÉXITO EN LA EXPLOTACIÓN DE RECURSOS NO MADEREROS

Marisa vive en un pueblo, pero a ella le gusta vivir en el monte, a ella le gusta vivir en el monte, a ella le gusta vivir en el monte...

## Why do we have in the Spanish Teleno mountains, our land and natural resources, a Heritage that allows us to live, work and enjoy a great quality of life?

### Monte Teleno

For thousands of years in the foothills of Monte Teleno, the highest peak of the Spanish Montes de León (2,188m), men and women have lived and coexisted in harmony with a natural environment that allowed them to eat, live and develop taking advantage of the nearest resources. Hunting, fishing, fertile land with wild edible species and even autochthonous pine forests have guaranteed the permanence of the human being in the Teleno Mountains area, although in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we talk about the fact that humans are almost in danger of extinction in many rural territories of our country.

In addition to all these benefits, this land has also always been rich in minerals which were exploited by the Asturians who inhabited these lands and began the extraction of gold, precious metal per excellence. Its extraction, smelting and exploitation attracted the eye of the Roman Empire who discovered a populated territory, organized (Castros y Coronas) and with several resources that gave the possibility of labour for the mines, wood not only for heating and eating, but also for the construction of houses and even canals. All these activities of these people interacting in this place have made us inherit a peculiar landscape with archaeological remains worth visiting and studying, and also allowing the use and enjoyment of the rest of Natural Resources that have not been depleted, but preserved thanks to extensive activity in both livestock, agriculture and forests.

For all this, it is our obligation to pass the legacy to future generations and for this, human activity and interactions are necessary, as they have modelled this landscape.

### The day I arrived in Tabuyo del Monte

The day I arrived in Tabuyo del Monte ... in the 70's as a Public Health Officer, a Rural Nurse, I was touched by the beauty of the environment, by the proximity of cows that neighbours took to the communal pastures. There were 3 bars in a village of a little more than three hundred inhabitants, a drugstore, a grocery store and tobacco, people were in the mountain picking berries, there was a school for boys and girls, pine cones and wood were brought down from the mountain by car for the winter ... and the whole village was paved (unusual in the area). The doctor's office was perfectly equipped for those times ... but where did the money come from for so much comfort, compared to other villages? I asked and a local told me “*From the mountain, which belongs to everyone*”. This gave me something to think about and it hooked me.

I was born in Astorga and used to live there, in León and Badajoz, but the natural attraction of this land and another way of Life, the feeling of being part of a community that takes care of and takes advantage of what Nature generously gives to bequeath to those who come after it, seemed to me to be a form of commitment to the land and to the people whom I could help by taking care of their health in the

consultation. Our children also wanted to "have a village" as they heard their schoolmates talk about in Astorga ... and so we stayed to live in Tabuyo del Monte.

As I went along, living and coexisting with others, I was progressively involved in the management of the community and during the years of my responsibility as Mayor of the Municipality of Luyego; LEADER, EQUAL, H2020, European funds for Development, Equality and Cooperation between territories were in full swing ... and thus my growing involvement gave me the opportunity to discover facets and aspects of society that I had not taken into account before.

**M** The **anonymous women of these villages**, and of others, do not appear in the History books and even if they worked like the men, they had no pension, their work had no social recognition, whereas they were also the ones who kept the villages ALIVE, took care of the mountains, the land and the cattle, as well as children and old people when the men emigrated or went to war. So, if the women remain in the village with a decent job and adequate services, the village is still alive.

The EQUAL project "Avant-Garde Rural Woman" helped us to sensitize these women, to train them so that they could go from there to the creation of Rural Tourism Companies, Services and Help for the Elderly, Transformation of Agro-alimentary products, Restoration businesses, ... and that is where I discovered my personal facets that I did not know: I am an ENTREPRENEUR. And together with my partners: Luci, Encarna, Carmen and Visi, we created "DEL MONTE DE TABUYO" in 2004, and since 2007 we have been transforming and selling leeks, Valduerna beans, organic raspberries, boletus and mushrooms both from our pine forests and cultivated by us in an organic, as well as serving our products in our restaurant "EL COMEDOR DEL MONTE" (the dining room in the mountain).



**M** The **Social Economy and Cooperation is the key to the Prosperity of a Territory and its people**. Tabuyo has been prosperous because it has some communal goods that for generations have been taken care of, taken advantage of and respected, without depleting them; they have given the possibility of covering the personal and communal needs with the benefits obtained, in addition to continuing to maintain the inherited patrimony. During our journey since 2004 and the creation of "Del Monte de Tabuyo", it has been essential for us to work with the Leonese Union

of Cooperatives and with [Cooperactiv@s](mailto:Cooperactiv@s). These networks have prevented us from falling into the void with any of the obstacles that we have been encountering along the way. This network of people active in the Social Economy are doing an enormous job to prevent depopulation by creating employment and social impact in rural and disadvantaged areas, mining and mountain municipalities in the province of Leon. The other alliance that we have also created is an Association of women cooks from Castilla y León, in which women cooks and producers make visible the role of women as entrepreneurs and work with products of the local environment, sharing their knowledge and recipes.

**M** The **lack of basic services can jeopardize the viability of human settlements and facilitate the much-feared depopulation**. The Residence for the Elderly and Day Centre of Tabuyo enables our elders not to have to emigrate in old age, in addition to guaranteeing a job to 18 women. However, the decrease in the number of inhabitants/voters makes public administrations cut the budget in services that depend of higher authorities ... if we are more, they will take us more into account.

**M** Our **sons and daughters, having gone to the University or with their training, studies or diplomas, are still in the village, there are resources and work** ... and we have demonstrated that IT IS POSSIBLE, we have passed the baton to the Next Generation, and that we would like more people to come and live with us.

Life is not a flat grid. We can have a job, an office, a place of residence and be incapable of thinking that we can do something that goes beyond the initial grid. But starting something new and creating something that will be part of the collective history of a territory is one of the greatest personal satisfactions, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to BE part of a VILLAGE. Thanks to all of you who preceded us and made it possible for us to enjoy this legacy.

*« The sustainable use of resources has made Life here in the Teleno possible ... the Mountain has been venerated by everyone for 4,000 years ... and as a person I commit myself to follow this path for at least another 4,000 ... »*

Marisa Rodríguez  
Tabuyo del Monte, September 2018