

Social innovation to counter depopulation

RuralCar is here, the app for shared journeys designed for rural Spain

- This platform for collaboration allows the residents of isolated communities to get in touch with their neighbours and enables them to organize themselves and solve the problem of inadequate transport in rural areas
- The application is available on [Google Play](#) and [App Store](#), and was created through the collaboration between the Red Eléctrica Group, the El Hueco association and the La Caixa foundation

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Rural Spain now has a new mobile app, [RuralCar](#), to enable mobility in areas where the public transport system is neither readily available nor frequent, and where there are no alternatives such as car sharing or VFH (vehicles for hire). The app was created thanks to the collaboration between the Red Eléctrica Group, the El Hueco association and the La Caixa Foundation.

RuralCar is a collaborative platform in which the residents of isolated communities in sparsely populated regions of Spain can get in touch with others in their area to organize and cover their transport needs, such as asking someone to take them to a doctor's appointment, hand in paperwork or visit their family. The application is also useful for those who need to travel to another town on a regular basis for work, such as plumbers, or people caring for dependent relatives, as well as those who need to send bulky or urgent items, due to the lack of logistics services available.

Conceived as a large virtual notice board for the rural communities, anyone can use the platform to offer to take someone in their car on a specified route, or ask for help to deliver a message, to sell things or even ask for or offer a service (gather firewood, cleaning, building...). The app classifies valuable information for residents by region or county, sending alerts and notifications to their devices.

"Most of Spain, around 90%, is rural and there is an obvious economic and social gap when compared with urban life. If we want to curb depopulation, increase social cohesion and revive the economy in Spain's empty areas, the people who live there or who want to move there must be able to live their personal and working lives as fully as possible, and to do this they must have basic services such as transport. If you can also boost the shared use of private vehicles, you are adding an extra benefit: reducing the emission of greenhouse gases and global warming", says Antonio Calvo Roy, Sustainability manager at the Red Eléctrica Group.

RuralCar is one of the proposals derived from G-100, a working group created by El Hueco in which a hundred people with close ties to rural life, 50 men and 50 women from all over the country, have dedicated time to thinking of ideas to improve the situation in the depopulated regions of Spain. "RuralCar is the result of a process of co-creation founded in our villages, to respond to their needs through innovation. Hundreds of people have already taken part from conception to the implementation and testing phase", adds Joaquín Alcalde, director of El

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Hueco, who explains that the app design is the result of a fieldwork survey carried out among 650 people who live in areas where public transport is severely limited.

Simple interface for people with limited vision or unaccustomed to technology

The application has a straightforward interface that can be used by people of all ages, with limited vision or who are unfamiliar with modern technology, improving their quality of life and autonomy. It uses jargon-free language and is pitched at basic reading skills, with a design that is adapted to poor vision, using larger icons and letters to make it easier to read.

RuralCar is available on the App Store and at Google Play and can be used anywhere in Spain, although there are additional services for the province of Soria thanks to the collaboration of La Exclusiva, a social company that has set up a free system for distributing essential items and services to homes –such as the weekly shop or medicine– for a population that finds it hard to do it themselves, such as the elderly or people with limited mobility. The Red Eléctrica Group and El Hueco are looking for similar entities in other provinces to collaborate in copying the model of Soria and multiplying the number of people who can benefit fully from the advantages that the app offers.

RuralCar is contributing to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 7, 9, 11, 13 and 17 and is one of the social innovation projects that the Red Eléctrica Group is implementing in rural Spain to create a positive social impact in the communities where it operates, offering solutions for regional, digital, gender and generational inequalities that non-urban areas suffer. It relies on the collaboration of local groups with a reputation for social action –like El Hueco– with the necessary knowledge and experience to develop and carry them out.

