



Good Practice Report

ALMOCAFRE - ANDALUCÍA

Premises

0.1) Describe the Social and Economic situation in the Country.

The economy of the Spanish State, like that of most of the Southern European countries, is immersed in the economic cycle initiated with the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2008, which reached its peak in 2011 with the property bubble burst. These events had a decisive impact on the economy due to the strategic weight of the financial and housing sector in Spain.

However, the Spanish economy has been experiencing changes since 2014 regarding the main macroeconomic data, which has generated major discussions between the main economic analysts in the country, ranging from imminent catastrophe scenarios to encouraging sets of arguments. At present, these scenarios are still further polarized, if possible, due to the intense election year with four electoral processes (regional elections in Catalonia and Andalusia, regional and municipal elections in the entire Spanish State and general elections for the Presidency of the Government¹), marked by the emergence of new political forces that can undermine and reshape the political balance on which the party system was built since the establishment of the liberal parliamentary democracy in Spain.

Concerning the main macroeconomic data, the year 2014 was a turning point from the recessionary trend and stagnation that characterised the years preceding the economic crisis. For the first time in five years, the Gross Domestic Product grew by 1.4% as compared to the previous year, maintaining the trend during 2015 with an estimated annual growth rate of 3.1%². The contribution of domestic demand to GDP growth has equally improved, mainly due to the effect of private consumption, which registered an annual growth rate of 2.2%; while the contribution of domestic demand was negative in 2013 (-2.7%) , it reached positive numbers in 2014, contributing

¹ Within the framework of the Autonomy Statutes that underpin the territorial organization and the legal relations of the different Autonomous Communities with the central government, Andalusia and Catalonia have powers allowing them to call elections to their corresponding parliaments independently.

² The macroeconomic data were extracted from the Bank of Spain's Annual Report for 2014 and the Bank of Spain's reports for the first and second quarters of 2015.



to the GDP growth by 2.2%. Conversely, foreign demand maintains a negative balance of -0.8% in 2015, unlike previous years when it played an important role. This has led to a certain downturn in terms of growth expectations estimated by the country's Government and main economic institutions.

These data allowed the Bank of Spain and the government-related sectors to forecast a scenario of "economic consolidation and recovery" that is largely in contrast with the rates of unemployment and quality of the new jobs. Although the employment rate increased by 2.1% in 2014 and 2015, the unemployment rate is still extremely high compared to the period preceding the outset of the crisis (21.8%), with 4.8 million unemployed people - a figure establishing Spain as the country with the second highest unemployment rate in the European Union behind Greece. At the same time, employment remains immersed in a process of progressive precariousness reflected in the Social Security contributions, which for the first time in ten years registered higher levels of labour force having temporary or part time contracts (52%), as compared to 48% of permanent and full-time contracts.

As a result, the economy is growing at an approximate annual rate of 3%, while wage depreciation continues to deteriorate, ramping up all the inequality indicators. In 2013, Spain occupied the fifth position in the Gini index only behind Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Greece and Portugal³. During the period 2007-2011, Spain ranked first among the OECD countries in terms of growing inequality. The number of people having assets over EUR 1 million in Spain has increased by 24% during 2014, i.e. 13 percentage points above 2013⁴. At the same time, around 42% of the Spanish households reported not being able to bear unexpected expenses of more than 650€, while 17% of households reported difficulties in making ends meet.⁵

0.2) Describe the Social and Economic situation in the territory

Andalusia is located in the south of the Iberian Peninsula. With a **land area of 87,547 km²**, it occupies 17.8% of the country's total surface area. **In 2015, Andalusia had a population of 8,401,337 inhabitants, with a population density of 95.6 inhabitants/Km²**, above the national average, but far below the data registered for the EU-27. Concerning the population distribution,

³ FEC Foundation report (2014), Eurostat data.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Idem.



the areas around the Guadalquivir-Genil rivers and the Mediterranean coast are the most populated ones. Its population structure by age shows a younger population than in Spain and Europe, although with minor differences. People under 15 represent 16.6% of the total population, while the same figure in Spain and Europe is below 15%. At the same time, although Andalusia shows similar demographic evolution patterns as the most developed European regions, gradually ageing, its ageing rate (15.18%) is still below Spain's (17.38%). Due to the emigration of young people toward the regional centres or urban centres on the coastline, the ageing population is mostly concentrated in rural areas, where it is also much more dispersed. This situation is also a consequence of the migration dynamics in recent years: for the first time since 1996, Andalusia showed in 2013 a negative net migration, with a decline of 6% as compared to the previous year, mainly due to the decrease in foreign immigration.

In terms of economic development, the position of Andalusia's economy within the framework of the Spanish economic development has been "peripheral", due to a specialisation in production concentrated within the sectors related to exploitation of natural resources, i.e. agriculture, livestock farming or fishery. The structuring of Andalusia as a commodity-exporting economy was consolidated during the last years of the late-Franco period, when the economic policies of the regime supported the economic liberalisation processes, in an international context of increasing economic and financial globalisation. At the same time, urban growth and the real-estate sector start to play a strategic role in the '90s for the economic development of the country, with levels of land use above the parameters characterising the property bubble of the nineties and beginning of the 2000s.

This determined the main socio-economic features of the Autonomous Communities, just as their demographic, social and territorial development. One of the most significant aspects of the Andalusian economy is the structural persistence of very high unemployment rates, both in times of economic prosperity and after the advent of the recessionary cycle in 2008. Since the democratic transition up until now, the number of unemployed people has quadrupled, with an unemployment rate of 31.6% in 2015, after having reached 34.6% in 2012, making it one of the regions with the highest unemployment rates in the European Union. This shows both the structural nature of high unemployment in the Andalusian economy and an extreme vulnerability in times of economic downturn, due to the importance of a sector based on speculative growth strategies, as has proved to be the case with housing construction for tourism along the



Mediterranean coast. The difficulties in creating jobs in Andalusia are reflected in the long-term unemployed rate, which in 2013 was around three million and a half people, with an average wage for the entire working class far below the national average (1,900€ less in 2013). This has a direct impact on the Andalusian household income, which in 2012 stood at 11,403€, far behind the richest Autonomous Communities - the Basque Country and Madrid - where the household income reached 18,950€ and 17,980€ respectively. This also has an impact on the population at risk of poverty (29.1%), much higher than the national average (20.4%)⁶. Indicators are also above the national average in areas like severe material deprivation (+0.8% than the rest of Spain) or households with low levels of work continuity (+14.7% than the average for the rest of Autonomous Communities).

This situation is closely related to the regional production structure, characterised by the above-mentioned duality. On the one hand, an export-oriented primary sector well above the national average, and on the other hand, a services sector which employs around 78.6% of the working population. Both sectors are conditioned by seasonal variations, which impact the creation of stable jobs. Likewise, activity levels in the industrial sector and its labour absorption capacity are far below national indicators. Analysing Andalusia's contribution to the national GDP (€ 141,704 million regional GDP in 2015) - around 13.4% - one can see that it is very far from meeting its total population, which accounts for 18% of Spain's total population.

In terms of social services, indicators for Andalusia are slightly below the ones at EU level, but very close to Spain's indicators. Concerning education, while the population rates with primary and secondary education levels are almost the same, Andalusia shows a slight delay in university education levels. At the national level, 31.6% of the population held a university degree or an advanced vocational training diploma in 2013, as compared to 25.8% in Andalusia. School dropout rates are also higher in Andalusia. In 2013, the population aged 16 and 17 attending school stood at 85.3%, while the national rate was 91.1%. According to the last OECD report⁷, Andalusia has one of the highest school dropout rates. With regard to the quality of health services, according to the last report issued by the FDASP⁸ (Federation of Public Health Defence Associations), Andalusia occupies an intermediate position in spite of having one of the lowest budgets per capita among all the autonomous communities in 2015 (1,004.32 Euro).

⁶ 2013 Survey on Living Conditions, National Statistics Institute (INE).

⁷ Education indicators: Spain (2013), OECD

⁸ *Health Services in the Autonomous Communities (2015)*, FDASP.



As regards social metabolism in Andalusia and its impact on the ecological balance in the region, the focus will be on the main environmental costs stemming from the "emerging forms of agriculture" since the 70s and their crucial impact on strategic natural resources: water and land. As far as water is concerned, as a result of the "modernisation" processes and the subsequent structuring of an export-oriented agriculture, water consumption for irrigation has hugely increased⁹, in line with a gradual loss of the water quality¹⁰. While the irrigated area started to increase in the 60s, it was during the last decades of the 20th century when the boom in water use for irrigation occurred, with 65% increase mainly concentrated in the geographical areas with intensive farming (greenhouses in Almeria; citrus trees in Huelva; olive trees in Jaen)¹¹. **This gave rise to a situation of increasing "water stress".** Concerning land - the material place for farming activities, - **erosion has been the main concern.** According to the Ministry of the Environment's National Soil Inventory 2002-2012, there is an average annual soil loss of 20.3 mt/ha. This situation not only affects the most arid regions in Andalusia, but also other places such as the countryside in Cordoba¹².

0.3) Describe the Social and Solidarity Economy Organizations' role in this context

The weight and development of Social Economy in Andalusia has been historically linked to the cooperative movement, in particular to the development of agricultural cooperatives. During the sixties and seventies, both the international economic context and the economic policy adopted during the late-Franco period built a particularly unfavourable scenario for the countryside in Andalusia, forcing a significant part of the population who decided not to emigrate to search for new forms of organisation that would allow them to sustain their farming activities, relaunch obsolete facilities and create association networks that would enable small farmers to defend themselves better from speculators and dealers who took advantage of the extreme fragmentation and subsequent weakness of the sector. Large landowners also became interested in this and further benefited from tax concessions, cheaper supplies, and collectivisation of costs for fertilisation, insecticides, phytosanitary treatments, renovation of facilities and other means of production. The adaptation and expansion of the cooperative formula during the late-Franco

⁹ *Report on regional social metabolism: Andalusia*, (2014). Manuel Delgado.

¹⁰ Environmental Report (2010), Ministry of the Environment.

¹¹ *Report on regional social metabolism: Andalusia* (2014), Manuel Delgado.

¹² Idem.



regime is proven by the fact that by 1975, around 50% of the people who performed some type of farming activity belonged to a cooperative¹³. Therefore, it is worth noting that although the cooperative formula was key in the adaptation of the Andalusian countryside and farming sector to the political and economic changes of the sixties, the dynamics and processes resulting from it have advanced in different directions, from the co-optation and parasitism of the landlords, who found in the cooperative model an open door to tax and administrative concessions, to important workers' organisation processes and the maintenance of economic democracy fees.

Different ecological farming initiatives have emerged in Andalusia since the late 20th century, closely linked to Social and Solidarity Economy, characterised by the following aspects: strong awareness of the environmental problems affecting the region and of the strategic role of farming; trade and production practices oriented toward local consumption and revaluation of the region, in contrast to increasingly export-oriented models; a much more diverse social and cultural background of the subjects and stakeholders who develop these projects. In 2001, ecological agriculture occupied 107,309 hectares, had 3,983 producers, 190 production and processing industries, many of them managed by cooperatives. Cordoba is the province with the highest impact of these practices, with 1,227 operators who account for 29.4% of the total number of operators in Andalusia¹⁴.

The sector development has also been marked by the above-mentioned factors, which for one part of the sector meant forms of differentiation on the market, without taking into account goals like reaching higher food sovereignty quotas or trying to supply local markets. From this perspective, REAS-ANDALUCÍA (Social and Alternative Economy Network) was born in 2013 with the aim of bringing together and providing greater advocacy capacity to the organisations seeking to grow within a solidary economy approach. The economic activity generated in this way would be of a more cross-cutting nature, not only oriented toward ecological production, but also guaranteeing equal working conditions, local endogenous development, recovery of green areas, etc. This is even more significant now that ecological farming is part of the Regional Government's strategic development plan for rural areas, and the direction and social nature adopted in the coming years will depend largely on the influential capacity of the sector's stakeholders.

¹³30 years of Social Economy in Andalusia (2014), Carlos Arenas Posadas.

¹⁴ Ecological farming plan for Andalusia, 2002. Regional Government of Andalusia.



0.4) Describe eventual public/legislative initiatives to support/which affect those sectors

2011 is a particularly important year at the national and regional levels for the development of legislation and support for the Social and Solidarity Economy. At the national level, after several years of discussions and with CIRIEC-Spain's supervisory collaboration, the Law 5/2011 on Social Economy was adopted. The new regulation, although it does not alter the specific legislation of each of the "legal families" that integrate Social Economy, it does enable reaching certain important goals. First, it establishes an institutional acknowledgement in line with the economic and social role that the SSE organisations have been playing in the Spanish society. Second, it advances the definition of the group of SSE organisations. Finally, it defines lines of support and strategic development for the sector. **However, in spite of this law being ground-breaking in terms of definition of the SSE organisations, its framework is still very restrictive.**

At the regional level, Andalusia acknowledged in 2007, in the reform of its Autonomy Statute and through the organic law LO 2/2007 art.58.1 4 º and 172.2, that Social Economy companies will receive preferential treatment in the development of public policies. The 3rd Andalusian Agreement on Social Economy was signed in 2011, also involving the main trade unions (*Comisiones Obreras* and *Unión General de Trabajadores*) and the employer organisation of Social Economy companies (CEPES-ANDALUCÍA). The aim is to give a longer term and fully define the guidelines already established in the Autonomy Statute in 2007.

At the local level and in the context of the municipal elections in 2015, thanks to the political advocacy exerted by CEPES-Andalucía and REAS-Andalucía, all the left-wing parties (PSOE, IU, Ganemos Córdoba) have reached an **Agreement on Social and Solidarity Economy**, which after the elections and the access to government of a PSOE-IU coalition with the support of Ganemos Córdoba resulted in a commitment of the municipality toward the development and promotion of SSE, by placing emphasis on public procurement and on training and awareness-raising programmes.

Description of the SSE Good practice

1.1) Name, Organization and/or network responsible for the practice, Location, Sector.

NAME AND TYPE OF ORGANISATION: ALMOCAFRE is a non-profit consumer cooperative.

LOCATION: CÓRDOBA. Legal head office: Avenida de los custodios n º 5.



SECTOR: fair trade and production/sale of agro-ecological products.

1.2) Proposed activities

Main activity areas:

- Creating and organising a local production network based on ecological farming practices:
14 of ALMOCAFRE'S suppliers are members and partners of the cooperative. Being a member and a partner is not compulsory, but the cooperative encourages suppliers' partnership for two reasons: A) It creates a closer commitment and affinity network. B) Partner suppliers have access to the commercial data of the cooperative, which enables them to organise their own production in a more efficient way, while improving their offering to consumers.
- Developing short sales channels and promoting direct contact between producers and consumers:
Visits to producers' gardens or farms are organised with the aim of allowing consumers to know the production processes of their products. They participate in ecological markets and fairs organised in the municipality of Cordoba.
- Selling fair trade products and promoting solidarity:
At present, the store has around 2500 fair trade references. 80% of them are local or regional. It also has products from all around the country and from abroad. It is worth highlighting the campaign in support of Gaza by purchasing Palestine products within the "ARCA" programme.
- Raising awareness and educating on responsible consumption and care for the environment: Participation in local television and radio programmes, participation to conferences and seminars related to agro-ecology and SSE.

1.3) Management model and stakeholders involvement

In terms of internal management, ALMOCAFRE is strongly committed to keeping intact the genuine values of cooperative practices, which have been an important source of division within the cooperative movement in Andalusia. This is why an advisory and management body exists, integrated by four people in charge of analysing and focusing on the economic development of the project. However, during the regular meetings with all the partners and due to cultural and social disparities among the people who integrate the project (from farmers to university teachers),



pedagogical work and discussions are organized in order to allow all the partners to participate in similar conditions to the decision-making and to influence the future strategic lines. Partners' meetings are held quarterly at the cooperative store, with one vote per partner.

At present, the cooperative has 370 partners, 250 of which make daily or weekly purchases. Partners pay an annual fee of 30€, which can be replaced by volunteer work in the different areas of the cooperative. At the same time, cooperative partners and members receive a 2% and 3% discount on all the products. ALMOCAFRE operates on a multi-scale basis, as it is an integral part of the State Coordination for Ecological Products and Consumption (as a second-level associative element) which brings together many organisations that share a common ideological basis and establishes synergies and cooperation networks. The main goals of this platform are the political advocacy and the development of a critical discourse. Concerning the producers and the different organisations that supply the cooperative¹⁵, ALMOCAFRE has established an open model. Producers and suppliers can work as partners of the cooperative or simply maintain a standard commercial relationship. At present, 14 local producers take an active part in the cooperative as members and partners. They do not have any specific economic advantage, but they have access to the economic data and commercial development of the organisation. This allows providing guidance to producers in the assessment and selection of the products supplied to the cooperative in a more efficient and dynamic way, while also creating stronger collaboration networks all along the value chain (production/ distribution/ consumption). For the supply of fair trade products, ALMOCAFRE collaborates actively with IDEAS and *Córdoba Solidaria*, two platforms promoting cooperation and fair trade and having a wide range of products. Thanks to these organisations, ALMOCAFRE comes into contact with most of the supplier organisations and companies. They also conduct active research work, where the participation of partner consumers is very much taken into account.

ALMOCAFRE is currently developing a commercial expansion line through projects of collaboration and participation with local people who work in the restaurant industry in the city of Córdoba.

ALMOCAFRE does not have a commercial line for exports.

1.4) Turnover and job creation/quality

The direct employment created by the cooperative is very low in proportion to its turnover. Currently, ALMOCAFRE's turnover is close to 700,000 Euro, while only 2 people are directly hired

¹⁵ Please visit AMOCAFRE's website to see their Producers' Decalogue.



by the cooperative with permanent and full-time contracts, apart from 2 other members hired as part-time employees. This gap is not so much due to issues of economic viability or lack of job-creation potential, but rather to the structure and goals of the project. On one hand, the employment created by the cooperative is limited to the jobs related with the daily activity of the store. On the other hand, it is important to assess the indirect employment generated by creating a space where local producers can sell their products.

As concerns the project evolution, ALMOCAFRE adopted the cooperation model in the year 2000, after six years of being a consumers' group. The early-stage project implementation started as a triangulation of University sectors, social movements and organised civil society. In 1994, when the project was launched, a group of around 50 families converged around the need to create a space in the city of Cordoba with a permanent supply of ecological products. They had the support and active participation of, on the one hand, the University of Cordoba through the Department of Peasant Studies, who gave consistency and allowed a qualitative leap of the project in the more technical aspects for its implementation, and of *Ecologistas en Acción* on the other hand. In this sense, ALMOCAFRE has evolved from an activist profile to its own identity, which allowed opening the cooperative to greater partner diversity, healthy consumption being the common value for most of them.

1.5) Social and ecological externalities

The externalities derived from the activities of the cooperative can be grouped around three areas:

Social externalities:

- *Promotion and maintenance of a local network of producers* based on agro-ecological practices that bring significant benefits to the farming sector, both in terms of self-employment and quality of work and remuneration.
- *Ground-breaking project in Cordoba to create an economic space* for ecological and healthy consumption.
- *Awareness-raising and education* among the population. By organising visits to the producers, participating to conferences and events related to SSE, agro-ecology and food sovereignty, ALMOCAFRE contributes to raise awareness among citizens about the need for a change in consumption and production patterns.



- *Empowerment of producers.* Due to the modernisation processes, the work in the fields is undergoing a process of stigmatisation and social degradation. ALMOCAFRE, by acknowledging the social value of ecological practices, manages to empower producers and creates social recognition, which did not exist decades ago.
- *Land and biodiversity reassessment.* One of the most important aspects for consumers is the local nature of their products. ALMOCAFRE is committed to reinvigorate the endogenous resources and give value to the biodiversity of the region, contributing to rescue the bio-cultural memory of both producers and consumers.

Ecological externalities:

- *Clean and ecological production processes:* Although ALMOCAFRE does not require any eco-certification to their local producers, it does require them to work with an agro-ecological approach.
- *Marketing and sale processes:* They have a basic waste recycling system (plastics, cardboard and glass). The unsold excess of fresh products is reused on the fields or given to social organisations. Their commitment to short supply channels and the fact that they do not export reduces their environmental impact in terms of transport.

1.6) Communication and advocacy

The early-stage project had a highly activist profile, with many people linked to ecologist collectives and organisations (*Ecologistas en Acción, Centro de Estudios Campesinos*, etc.). This has had very positive effects on the cooperative, keeping a clear commitment to associationism and impact on their surrounding reality. Through its president, ALMOCAFRE has played an active role in the creation of REAS-ANDALUCÍA, an organisation that brings together many SSE organisations such as **IDEAS** (Initiatives of Alternative and Solidarity Economy), **FAMSI** (Andalusian Municipal Fund for International Solidarity), **ZOVECO S.L.E.I** (Cordovan Green Areas, Social Integration Company), **Fundación Innomades** (Foundation for knowledge exchange), **Xul** (Social communication company). As mentioned above, they are also part of a State Coordination for Ecological Consumption.

From REAS-Cordoba and within the framework of the municipal elections cycle, it was possible to reach an agreement with different left-wing parties for the integration of an explicit commitment



with SSE in their political programmes. The new local government integrated by the PSOE and IU parties and supported by Ganemos Córdoba signed a municipal commitment in 2015.

The website is the reference place for searching information on the activities organised by the cooperative and on the values governing the project. It also contains a list of producers and organisations that supply the cooperative, as well as links to other consumer cooperatives or eco-stores in Andalusia.

1.7) Networking, affiliations and openness of the Good practice to the existing networks

ALMOCAFRE works on an active basis at REAS-CORDOBA, as both organisations share the same president. They also collaborate actively with FACPE (Federation of Ecological Consumers and Producers of Andalusia).

As regards the development of inter-cooperation networks, ALMOCAFRE maintains a close relationship of commercial exchange and mutual support with similar organisations, such as IDEAS, with whom they collaborated for the supply of horticultural products. IDEAS is also an important supplier of fair trade products. ALMOCAFRE also maintains relationships with SSE organisations involved in other activities and with advocacy collectives focused on responsible consumption¹⁶.

In the international solidarity area, through *Córdoba Solidaria*, ALMOCAFRE has collaborated with the ARCA project aimed at denouncing the oppression of the Palestinian people. In this way, ALMOCAFRE is supplied with Palestinian products through *Córdoba Solidaria*.

It is important also to highlight their active involvement in the set-up of ECOCORDOBA, a market held from time to time in the city centre which brings together ecological producers and cooperatives. This is an important space for organisations to make themselves known among the local population outside their own affinity networks.

Evaluation of the Good practice

2.1) The Good practice's economic and social impact and potential

¹⁶ Please visit the website "links" section to see the complete decalogue of similar organisations.



Social cohesion and transformation:

- a) Empowerment of collectives and social groups participating in the project.** *"Before I used to walk with my hands in my pockets, if you know what I mean... Because I had a gardener's hands and that was like being poor, it was something bad. Now they come to visit me at my garden, even the television, now you interviewing me... I feel proud".¹⁷ "At the beginning I was not very aware of the ideology, I did it more for a healthy consumption and things like that, but then I started to learn a lot of things about the environment, about the workers... so yes, of course, I learnt a lot from spending time with committed activists¹⁸".* By being in contact with other partners of the cooperative, producers have not only seen their working conditions and the remuneration for their products improved, but they also got involved in an empowering process which resignifies a work that had been socially degraded by the "cultural modernisation" processes. Traditional producers who move towards ecological practices become aware of their social and environmental contribution through their own practices. At the same time, the interaction between people from very different social and cultural backgrounds enriches the learning processes and social awareness-raising. According to the informants, many customers of the cooperative got there for reasons related to healthy and local consumption and it was by interacting that they developed a more committed overview of their environment.
- b) Indirect employment creation through the promotion of local production networks and short sales channels.** *"We try to work with a zero-mile principle in mind. In other words, we focus on helping people who work in our environment, as long as they can guarantee the provision of quality products¹⁹".* From the choice available, ALMOCAFRE has a clear commitment to enhancing local development processes based on the endogenous diversity of the region. This does not mean that they will not work with producers from other places, it means that they have a clear intention to activate the economic fabric of the region. At the same time, they contribute to the localisation of food sovereignty-related processes, in a region where agriculture has been directed mostly toward export-oriented distribution channels.

¹⁷ Miguel, ecological farmer and partner of the ALMOCAFRE Cooperative.

¹⁸ María, partner and consumer of the ALMOCAFRE Cooperative.

¹⁹ Miguel, President of the ALMOCAFRE Cooperative.



c) **Entrepreneurship and social innovation for the implementation of collective spaces allowing responsible and ecological consumption practices.** *"Twenty years ago there was nothing here. Those who wanted ecological consumption didn't have where to go. In fact, we had many problems with the ecological concept when we started, it seemed very far away even for producers... at the beginning we called it traditional agriculture, all the ecological topic came later²⁰".* ALMOCAFRE was a pioneer project in the introduction and recovery of ecological production processes, in a region with strong influence of farming activities, which during the '60s and the '70s moved toward agro-industrial production processes as a result of the commercial pressure and market liberalisation. All this was achieved thanks to the triangulation and cooperation between areas of Academia (Department of Peasant Studies of the University of Cordoba), social movements (*Ecologistas en Acción*) and organised civil society, within consumer groups that were later transformed into cooperatives.

2.2) The transformative impact on the territory and beyond

Territorial cohesion and socio-ecological transition processes:

a) **Consolidating spaces throughout the territory that allow socio-ecological transition.** *"For instance, this municipality has a huge territorial extension, the first in Andalusia, the fourth in Spain, with a vast farmland area which is being cultivated and it is an agricultural issue... it is part of a private sector that exploits that land. Trying to convince those farmers to produce in an ecological manner and to put the production at the service of the solidarity economy is our challenge for this term, and in this sense, experiences like ALMOCAFRE act as a benchmark...²¹".* The ALMOCAFRE cooperative and all the SSE partner networks that already operate on the field allow institutions to acquire territorial intelligence for implementing public policies focused on enhancing sustainable practices not only within the Public Administrations, but also among the private business fabric. They put forward successful experiences also in the field of their specific economical activity, articulated with the socio-ecological changes required in a specific activity sector.

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ Amparo Pernichi, Environment and Infrastructure Delegate of the municipality of Cordoba.



b) Promoting integration and structuring of rural spaces with the urban environment. *"In Cordoba we have an associative network only comparable to that of the Basque Country... this allows us to tackle issues of territorial dispersion instead of understanding the urban space only as an absorbent of rural areas; it also needs balance, especially because of what I was telling you about the private sector exporting the products to places that don't have any relationship with the territory²²".* Examples like ALMOCAFRE, who carry out activities that bring together producers and consumers, also contribute to create synergies and connect rural populations with urban environments. The Ecological Market of Cordoba is a clear example of the capacity of SSE organisations to develop projects in the urban environment, integrating and bringing together populations from urban peripheries and rural environments.

2.3) Policy impact of the Good practice

Promotion of SSE within the Public Administration sphere

The early-stage project had a highly activist profile, with many people linked to ecologist collectives and organisations (*Ecologistas en Acción, Centro de Estudios Campesinos*, etc.). This has had very positive effects on the cooperative, keeping a clear commitment to associationism and impact on their surrounding reality. Through its president, ALMOCAFRE has played an active role in the creation of REAS-ANDALUCÍA, an organisation that brings together many SSE organisations such as **IDEAS** (Initiatives of Alternative and Solidarity Economy), **FAMSI** (Andalusian Municipal Fund for International Solidarity), **ZOVECO S.L.E.I** (Cordovan Green Areas, Social Integration Company), **Fundación Innomades** (Foundation for knowledge exchange), **Xul** (Social communication company). As highlighted above, they are part of the State Coordination for Ecological Consumption.

From REAS-Cordoba and within the framework of the municipal elections cycle, it was possible to reach an agreement with different left-wing parties for the integration of an explicit commitment with SSE in their political programmes. The new local government integrated by PSOE-IU and supported by Ganemos Córdoba signed a municipal commitment in 2015.

From REAS-Cordoba and within the framework of the municipal elections cycle, it was possible to reach an agreement with different left-wing parties for the integration of an explicit commitment

²² Idem



with SSE in their political programmes. The new local government formed by the PSOE and IU parties and supported by Ganemos Córdoba, signed a municipal commitment in 2015.

At the same time, the pressure and advocacy from REAS-CORDOBA and other organisations are enabling debates within the public administrations about the need of a more cross-cutting involvement. For instance, in terms of procurement by Public Administrations, it should not just be limited to social clauses on labour, but also include environmental or gender-related aspects. REAS is also organizing campaigns to promote public procurement by the City Council, an issue currently under discussion.

2.4) Sustainability of the practice

a) Economic sustainability. *"Volunteer service works up to a certain point, after that you realise the activity requires professionalism... but at some point there is fatigue and there are other priorities. As a consumer group we felt the need to free up some hours in the working day to be able to guarantee supply and, above all, have the capacity to negotiate with providers from a better position. We've always had the obsession of working at the best possible price, within a framework of decent work and fair trade, and we can only achieve it through economies of scale²³".* The cooperative has worked up a clear diagnosis on their economic viability. The only possible way of keeping the project alive is by trying to be competitive within the margins of SSE. This means implementing a pricing policy based on economies of scale and cost reduction. Cost reduction does not mean putting pressure on producers, but rather trying to reduce the costs derived from transportation and from supply units. Transitioning from a consumer group to a cooperative model allowed them to be capitalised and develop policies of scale. This also enabled an increase in their turnover, from a maximum of 500€ weekly in the past to around 20,000€ per week currently.

b) Good internal functioning and division of tasks. *"I believe this has a long future ahead, I see the management team very united and the partners very involved, and it's crucial that we all pull in one direction...²⁴".* The cooperative has an optimal level of vertical and horizontal integration of partners and members. On the one hand, the more passive partner-members are kept up to date on the economic evolution of the project. Partner producers interact with the management team

²³ Miguel, President of the ALMOCAFRE Cooperative.

²⁴ Maria, partner and customer of the cooperative.



regularly to be informed of the sales volume and best-selling products. At the same time, the management team includes a retired professor of economics and a professional accountant who collaborate as volunteers.

2.5) Participatory space open to the territory²⁵

a) Promotion of their products and awareness-raising. The cooperative organises regular tastings and samplings to promote their main products.

b) Collaboration with solidarity projects through fair trade.

- Purchase of Palestinian fair trade products through *Córdoba Solidaria*.
- Participation in the project "CULTIVATING SOLIDARITY" aimed at promoting women's literacy, through the purchase of bulbs.

c) Participation in spaces for the promotion of agro-ecology and SSE:

- Participation in the Ecological Agriculture Research and Advocacy Awards.
- Food Sovereignty Meetings.
- Environmental defence demonstrations.

d) Collaboration with education centres and institutions in the region:

- Visits to producers who have links with the cooperative for children with mental disabilities.
- Participation in workshops on responsible consumption organised by the City Council.

e) Impact on the local media.

- Some of the members participate actively in local newspapers, informing about SSE, Cooperation and Agro-ecology events, such as *Diario de Córdoba*.

What can we learn from the described Good practice?

3.1 Please identify and analyse the areas in which lessons can be learnt, the key factors of success/failure, role of specific actors.

ALMOCAFRE has established itself as a pioneer project in the city of Cordoba. The "ALMOCAFRE experience" has first contributed to prove that there are indeed people ready to be responsible and ecological consumers, and that this can also lead to the creation of a production network that could revitalise the region and improve the living conditions of the producers related to the

²⁵ Add strategic lines of development and some references.



project. **In short, spread local development models that generate economic activity beyond the activist sphere, and that also serve for moving toward more environmentally sustainable societies.**

On the other hand, **it highlights the need to rethink the relationship between institutions and civil society.** ALMOCAFRE allows creating greater territorial intelligence. Its openness to all the civil society organisations and its willingness to create social impact increase the associative density in the region, thus providing Public Administrations with greater support capacity in implementing transforming public policies. In parallel, it acts as a reference in the awareness-raising campaigns and promotion of the production and sectorial changes implemented by Public Administrations, influencing the conventional economic fabric.

Their organisational evolution and economic trajectory also allow for some important lessons to be learnt. First, their integration into the cooperative model occurred in a transversal and diversified manner. From the economic perspective, this allowed them to achieve a greater organisational structure, create quality jobs and provide themselves with capital to help the project grow. Likewise, it enabled competitiveness and the implementation of policies of scale, without having to put pressure on producers or to worsen their workers' working conditions. ALMOCAFRE has been successfully committed to diversify their activities through solidarity practices. Together with the creation of short sales channels at the local level, allowing them to consolidate food sovereignty-oriented dynamics in the region, they have developed an entire fair trade product range in cooperation with local organisations that operate at different scales, thus being able to have an impact on the different dimensions of the social reality beyond their own specific area of activity. They also consider developing collaboration projects with local cooks and entering the organic livestock sector.

Another important aspect lies in their internal policies for creating a sense of ownership of the project. They have become more flexible with regard to the inclusion of new partners. People with lower income rates could capitalise their initial contribution through voluntary work. This contributed to redefining the dimension of work beyond market practices, while it also allowed the cooperative to increase the number of partners and enhance integration. Likewise, the efforts toward the integration of many local producers in the cooperative has enabled to improve both product quality and consumer satisfaction, as well as the sense of ownership and co-responsibility throughout the entire value chain (production, distribution, consumption).



Besides, the active involvement in the creation of inter-cooperation networks (FACPE, IDEAS, REAS, etc.) has provided the organisation with greater capacity to impact the political and institutional fields, but also the population as a whole, thus reaching a greater number of individuals. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the leadership of members like Miguel, environmental and social economy activist for decades, with extensive experience in mobilising and creating mutual support, with regular presence in the local media.

Concerning the project limitations, the bureaucracy system in the public administration limits a more rapid development and growth of the SSE. It is crucial to convince the public administration and the bureaucratic structure in order to promote public procurement projects that allow these initiatives to reach a greater turnover.

Individual story

4.1 If possible, enclose an individual story/testimony which exemplifies the practice you describe.

María, partner and regular customer of Almocafre.

"I've been part of the project since the beginning, in 1994. To me, Almocafre was very intense since the beginning because it was the first organisation of which I took part. Back then, my participation in the project was about two things: On the one hand, it had an ideological side, but it also required to keep your feet on the ground. I was particularly interested in being a consumer. I had just had children and I was starting to learn about this field.

The truth is I remember it as a very intense moment of self-development. There were many assemblies. The first thing was to learn how to consume, of course. As I already told you, my main motivation was health, to know what I was eating and what I was feeding my children with. We, my partner and I, had learnt what it was all about back then in the "Integral" or "Body & Mind" magazines. It was the only way to learn about environmentalism and those kinds of things. So when we saw that we could put into practice what we had learnt, we started doing it.

Concerning ALMOCAFRE's evolution, at the beginning they had a more ideological profile; the meetings were more technical, with people from the University of Cordoba. They saw how all that was going on was affecting the countryside; their line of thinking was very similar to that of social movements. But I didn't think they had a clear idea about the consumption part. So yes,



they met with farmers, they discussed a lot, but then we couldn't buy potatoes, there was no lettuce here and all that stuff... It's like there were different paths: one more in line with the theory, and another one, which was us, who wanted to consume. Later, I did start to see more and more the importance that all this had in our environment. I mean for the farmers, for the countryside, for the environment... I realised that from the consumer perspective I could get to where these people intended to get... I mean social awareness and make things change. And well, that's where Almocafre started to define itself, in the sense that they knew that without varied products for consumption it was impossible to create social awareness.

Now, after some time, the cooperative has an identity of its own, in my opinion. The ideological values I was telling you about are already instilled in its spirit, and now we are mainly focused on the products, on having the widest variety possible of ecological and good quality products. I believe the new partners are very interested in health and are less aware, but they develop awareness over time. Well, not all, but many of them. It's like my children, they were immersed in this from a young age, but they don't attend the assemblies, they don't go to the store, it's me who does the shopping.

As for my vision of ALMOCAFRE's future, I am very positive, I think we are very united and those who built its history in their daily lives know what they are doing and they are doing a very good job. I trust them very much, and besides, they invite people to participate as much as possible. And I guess the best would be that ALMOCAFRE grows bigger, that every neighbourhood in Cordoba has a store”.

Additional information

Website references, contact details of the reference person if available, links to publications, press reviews, images, videos.

Reference website:

- <http://www.almocafre.com/>
- <http://www.economiasolidaria.org/reasandalucia>
- <http://ideas.coop/>
- www.facpe.org/
- www.cordobasolidaria.org/
- www.cepes-andalucia.es

Contact details:



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Related publications available on the web:

- <http://www.esinforma.es/index.php/cepes-andalucia/la-confederacion/6156-cepes-andalucia-traslada-a-la-alcaldesa-de-cordoba-una-propuesta-de-pacto-por-la-economia-social.html>
- [http://www.economiasolidaria.org/noticias/almocafre ejemplo de buena practica de e conomiasolidaria](http://www.economiasolidaria.org/noticias/almocafre_ejemplo_de_buena_practica_de_economiasolidaria)