

## SPAIN

# Local development

### Location

el Burgo de Osma,  
Soria

### Programming period

2014 – 2020

### Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local  
development

### Measure

M01 – Information &  
promotion activities;  
M02 – Advisory services

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 96 058  
RDP contr. 60 000  
Private 10 605  
Other 25 453

### Project duration

2018 – 2019

### Project promoter

ONGD Cives Mundi

### Contact

[civesmundi@civesmundi.es](mailto:civesmundi@civesmundi.es)

### Website

[www.elhueco.org/oxma/](http://www.elhueco.org/oxma/)

A social enterprise used RDP funding to foster social innovation and entrepreneurship in one of the most depopulated regions in Europe.

## Summary

El Hueco Oxma is a Social Enterprise (SE) established in a small village in Soria, Spain, which is one of the most depopulated regions in Europe. Its goal is to foster social innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas and act as an innovative enterprise incubator.



El Hueco Oxma focuses on creating an environment where rural entrepreneurial and innovative initiatives can flourish. It offers numerous services, such as a coworking area (working area and furniture), a meeting room, consulting (entrepreneurial, legal, financial and technological) and on-demand services (marketing, on-demand software, event planning etc.). Support from the Rural Development Programme of Castilla y Leon, helped the SE to organise a wide range of activities to stimulate interactions among co-workers and external guests, as well as thematic workshops on rural development.

## Results

Ten jobs were created in the two years of social entrepreneurship promotion.

Thirty workshops were organised regarding business projects that would build upon and enhance the resources and values of the area.

Ten organic farmers were supported in their transition to organic farming as a business opportunity.

## Lessons & Recommendations

Certain conditions are recommended to successfully replicate this kind of initiative:

- A team of people that combine business knowledge, social commitment and the right set of management and communication skills.
- If possible, an organisation leading the effort with a proven record of social, cultural or environmental impact.
- Interested and committed public and private actors. In their absence (as in Soria), a plan to create awareness, e.g. through successful pilots and examples in other countries, and foster commitment among these actors.
- Start-up financing to support a critical mass of initiatives that can lead by example.

## Context

Many rural areas in Europe are suffering from depopulation and the remaining population is ageing. Addressing this demographic trend requires fostering social innovation as a countermeasure. Creating innovative approaches to resolving societal challenges, mobilising civil society to foster inclusive socioeconomic development and promoting employment and competitiveness can make a real difference.

The capacity of social enterprises to stimulate local development and reduce socioeconomic imbalances for the benefit of local communities has been proven and they remain a crucial asset to retain residents in sparsely populated areas. This was the context in which El Hueco Oxma was set up as a SE.

## Objectives

The general objective of this initiative is to improve the living conditions of the local rural population and to curb the process of depopulation in the area. The aim is to achieve this by valuing the local resources through endogenous development and opportunities to undertake, through the promotion of innovation and social entrepreneurship, inclusive and sustainable development.

## Activities

The activities carried out within the El Hueco Oxma since its inauguration in January 2018 are presented below in chronological order. It should also be noted that El Hueco Oxma is open to suggestions from its members.

### El Hueco Oxma Open Space

An open space was set up for exchanges and communication between entrepreneurs, local authorities, public administration representatives and consultants.

The topics that were discussed in different groups included the importance of education in entrepreneurship; project financing; bureaucracy involved with starting small businesses; the importance of certain strategic sectors in the area; and lack of skilled labour.

### Impact Hub Madrid exchange

An exchange of experiences/practices was organised between entrepreneurs of El Hueco Oxma and entrepreneurs and managers from the community space of Impact Hub Madrid. The Impact Hub Madrid belongs to an international network of entrepreneurial communities

and impact innovation hubs. The network is present in more than 100 cities around the world and is made up of 17 000 entrepreneurs and professionals connected to various impact hubs.

### Envejez ANDO Arquitectura y Tercera Edad

El Hueco Oxma developed a proposal to depict the daily reality of the elderly and in this way, visitors could experience and understand how architecture can offer solutions to their needs. This activity was open to anyone interested from the local community and beyond.

### Caravana de oportunidades

The Caravan of Opportunities consisted of three itineraries covering the province of Soria. They were designed especially for entrepreneurs who wanted to travel around and see in situ what this territory had to offer to someone exploring the possibility of launching a new business idea.

### Workshops/trainings and conferences

Workshops and meeting days were open to people from the El Hueco Oxma community, as well as all others who were interested. These included a workshop on entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas, a workshop on "construction of the new rurality", a workshop on green entrepreneurship in sparsely populated areas, a meeting between winemakers and winegrowers in the region to enhance the value of the region's production, etc.

## Main results

The expected results were to:

1. identify and promote entrepreneurial talent from the region, as well as other geographical and socioeconomic contexts, who wish to develop their entrepreneurial project in the region;
2. develop existing social enterprises in the region on the basis of local demand and endogenous resources;
3. develop innovative social enterprises in the region that contribute to solving social problems, e.g. related to health, education, transport, agroecology, cultural heritage, etc.;
4. promote the development of entrepreneurial initiatives, mainly in the areas of agriculture, livestock, forestry, heritage, energy, tourism, gastronomy, education, new technologies, transport and communication.

## Quantified improvements:

- Ten jobs were created during the two years the project promoted social entrepreneurship.
- Thirty workshops were organised around business projects aimed at building upon and enhancing the endogenous resources and values of the area.
- Ten farmers were supported in their transition to organic farming as a business opportunity.

## Networking

El Hueco Oxma managed to establish an impressive network of partners and supporters, including universities (regional and national), investors (regional community banks, investment funds, philanthropists), public administrations (local, regional and national), traditional and social enterprises, non-governmental organisations, and consultants in various fields (legal, labour, financial, accounting etc.).

## Key lessons

El Hueco Oxma is actively working with public and private partners in other European sparsely populated areas to build a network of actors who can share knowledge and best practice. Likewise, its Erasmus+ project in the Dominican Republic and Haiti reflects its desire to connect with other local ecosystems to stimulate systemic transformation. Thus, El Hueco Oxma could be successfully replicated in other contexts, provided the initiatives can access a similar network of actors in their sparsely populated areas, including the right kind of financial support and ‘facilitators’ (i.e. highly skilled volunteers associated with a partner institution or citizens wishing to donate their time and expertise to advance the organisation’s mission). The following elements are replicable in other contexts:

- the core business model, based on a coworking space accompanied by facilitation, support and training activities to develop social entrepreneurship;
- the description and implementation plan for activities, including branding and materials;
- the software platform to manage the activities;
- the network of international contacts, including peers, academic contacts and public administration representatives who can be ‘activated’, if needed; and
- the tested financial tools and pilots.



The conditions for successful replication of this type of initiative include:

- having a team of people that combine business knowledge, social commitment and the right set of management and communication skills;
- if possible, an organisation leading the effort with a proven record of social, cultural or environmental impact;
- interested and committed public and private actors; in their absence (as in Soria), a plan to create awareness (through successful pilots and examples in other countries) and foster commitment among these actors; and
- start-up financing to support a critical mass of initiatives that can lead by example.

## Additional sources of information

<https://es-es.facebook.com/huecoxma/>