

Title

Cooperativa Integral Minga – rural sustainable development initiative

Short description

The Cooperativa Integral Minga emerged following the Montemor Cooperatives Forum where several experiences of cooperatives were presented and it was discussed how the cooperative sector could respond to a variety of problems that affect the population of Montemor, namely: the lack of income/unemployment; inability to formalize productive activities; job insecurity; difficulty in access to housing and the effectiveness of this constitutional right; difficulty in accessing inputs for organic farming at affordable prices; difficulty in disposing of products; deterioration of the national health system; lack of alternatives in local commerce to access products with low ecological impact; among others. Based on good international practices, the cooperative seeks to include all the activities necessary to live (e.g., production, services, housing, health, education, etc.) in order to promote a circular economy in which exchanges and cooperation are fostered within the locality (preventing leaving income), as well as the reuse of resources, reducing the environmental impacts associated with production. The cooperative shares the costs of management (accounting, treasury and other administrative), a store to exhibit and sell products, a space for socio-cultural activities, distribution channels (e.g., participation in the municipal market of Montemor and fairs, distribution of baskets for consumption groups, among others), integration in solidarity economy networks, such as the Portuguese Solidarity Economy Network. Cooperators also talk about the difficulties faced by each one of them and seek ways of solving (collective purchase of products, sharing of work space, exchange of knowledge and services, etc.), which facilitate the progress of the business.

Topic

Consuming – food.

Characteristics (type, level)

Local/Regional Intervention.

Country/Countries of implementation

Portugal

Aims and Objectives

The cooperative aims to endorse local development in a social and economically sustainable way. It promotes the inclusion of micro-producers in the markets and consequently increases the flow of products, develops a circular economy that encourages exchanges within the locality, promoting proximity trade and capital attraction in the region. By fomenting local production and other initiatives the cooperative reduces the environmental impacts associated with production and distribution of products.

Target Group

The targeted groups are local/regional producers, consumers and the community.

Status

Implemented on a continuous basis.

Start and Completion dates

Since July 2015.

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

The practice encourages above all a change in consumer habits - consumers are favouring local products and respecting the seasonality of production.

Effects on:

Health and Wellbeing	The consumption of agricultural products of the season has an impact at nutritional level. Moreover, these products result from a more biological agricultural practice, which will have an impact on consumer health. Finally, the relationship of closeness and cooperation that is created in the community can have an impact well-being.
Vulnerable populations	By not charging such large amounts as intermediaries and by centralizing costs, the cooperative makes producer incomes more egalitarian. It also fights the market exclusion that small producers are experiencing and, by controlling costs, make organic products accessible to all.
Environment	The production of products of the season, along with the incentives to a more biological agriculture, implies the use of less chemicals; the store sells products that prevent soil and water contamination; there is a resource reuse policy; and production within the county requires less displacement (lower CO2 emissions).

Initiated and/or implemented by

The practice was started by a group of people after the Montemor Cooperatives Forum in 2014, where they surveyed the problems affecting Montemor producers, such as the difficulty in disposing of products and bearing the tax burdens associated with the business.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

The cooperative involves a network of local and regional producers, multiple local initiatives (such as Alma Verde, Biataki, Filmes da Praça, Harmony Seeds, Herdade das Gigantas, Kassa, NaturBosque, O Monti, Oficinas do Convento, Pico Pico), the cooperative partners, and the

local community. The cooperative shares the costs of management (accounting, treasury and other administrative), a store to exhibit and sell products, a space for socio-cultural activities, distribution channels (e.g., participation in the municipal market of Montemor and fairs, distribution of baskets for consumption groups, among others), integration in solidarity economy networks, such as the Portuguese Solidarity Economy Network.

Financial support

This practice has never received any kind of funding. It is sustained by the services provided and the connections established.

Evidence-base

The Cooperativa Integral Minga emerged following the Montemor Cooperatives Forum where several experiences of cooperatives were presented and it was discussed how the cooperative sector could respond to a variety of problems that affect the population of Montemor, namely: the lack of income/unemployment; inability to formalize productive activities (exclusion of micro-producers from markets); job insecurity; difficulty in access to housing and the effectiveness of this constitutional right; difficulty in accessing inputs for organic farming at affordable prices; difficulty in disposing of products; deterioration of the national health system; lack of alternatives in local commerce to access products with low ecological impact; among others. This practice is based on examples of good practice from other cooperatives. Indirectly it can incorporate scientific aspects underlying these practices. Based on good international practices, the cooperative seeks to include all the activities necessary to live (e.g., production, services, housing, health, education, etc.) in order to promote a circular economy in which exchanges and cooperation are fostered within the locality (preventing leaving income), as well as the reuse of resources, reducing the environmental impacts associated with production.

Main activities

The cooperative resulted in the opening of a physical store where the various products and services of the cooperative are made available. Other initiatives are part of the project, such as: the creation of an internal currency to buy other cooperative products/services; the dissemination of the various products and services; and the support for the organization, management and accounting of various local and regional businesses

Evaluation

The practice has been evaluated positively by several academic studies, mainly qualitative basis and case-studies.

Main results

The main outputs of this practice are:

- a physical store where multiple products and services from local providers are promoted and sell;
- a space for socio-cultural activities;
- an internal currency to buy cooperative products/services;
- decrease of the costs of commercialization and distribution of local products/services.

Key success factors and barriers

Key success factors include the relationship of empathy and trust created through proximity trade, the reduction of costs by the elimination of intermediaries (the producer receives more and the consumer pays less) and the existence of an internal economy that reinvests in itself. The main obstacles are the costs associated with maintaining the store and the rents paid by the producers, which makes their profit margin difficult.

INHERIT Perspective

This project has been chosen for inclusion because of its role in promoting more sustainable forms of food production and consumption. MINGA encourages above all a change in consumer habits to favouring local products and respecting the seasonality of production. The consumption of agricultural products of the season has an impact at nutritional level. Moreover, these products result from a more biological agricultural practice, which will have an impact on environmental costs of food production and on consumers' health. Finally, the relationship of closeness and cooperation that is created in the community may also have an impact well-being.

More information

<http://mingamontemor.pt/>

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