



SOCIAL AGRICULTURE

case study

L'OLIVERA COOPERATIVA

L'Olivera was born in 1974 when a group of people decided to move to Vallbona de les Monges, in the south of the Lleida region of Catalonia, with a dual objective: supporting the integration of people with mental or psychiatric disabilities into society, with specific attention to those in disadvantaged social situations; and developing a productive economy based on local values. Since we began, we have always been a cooperative formed by people with multidisciplinary knowledge and skills, and focusing on both local social inclusion and economic development.

"Let's create a place to live and work together": L'Olivera is part of a societal movement inspired by humanistic values, and aimed at people who don't have family support. A group started living together under the common philosophy that everybody has a disability and that we have to look for abilities. It was designed as an organisation with a horizontal structure, with every person playing the part of the leader and protagonist of their lives and activities. They found that the cooperative was the best way."

Pau Moragas

MODEL IN A NUTSHELL

— **Website**

www.olivera.org

— **Social channels**

facebook.com/cooperativa.lolivera

twitter.com/olivera_coop

instagram.com/olivera_coop

— **Country**

Spain

— **Main sector**

Voluntary

— **Specific sector**

Healthcare, agriculture, labour integration, local development, research, supply chain

— **Stage of development**

Incorporated

— **Our work in SDGs**



FROM FEW TO MANY

L'Olivera was founded out of, and is part of, a movement of society, inspired by humanistic values, and creating a place to live and work together. The founders were part of this movement back in **1974**. The founders were not a single individual working alone, but it was a small group of people with ideas, including an alternative priest who adapted educational training to include people with disabilities into the farm.

In the 1980s, our project was restructured to ensure better organisation of farm activities including production, consumption and commercialisation activities, as well as creation of a financially, environmentally and socially sustainable high-quality production. Our team evolved and under the new **president Ahumada**, it grew further. The same president has been leading the cooperative **for 25 years** and led the development of a socially and economically resilient project that produces high quality local products. **L'Olivera** is organized as a **network with a collective leadership** rather than as a centralised organisation. Every five years we work on a strategic plan through an internal participatory process that allows us to identify key objectives for the future. Hierarchy is based on knowledge while strategy is defined together. There are about **65 people** who work at L'Olivera, in different capacities and according to different contracts based on personal need (full time and seasonal or voluntary). About 40 people work in Vallbona where we have 40 ha of land, and 25 in Barcelona, where 5 ha are cultivated and about 20 people with a disability work. We have local and regional partnerships with our sellers and distributors.

Our beneficiaries are **people with disabilities** included in the organizational structure of L'Olivera, customers who enjoy high quality, local products and society at large that benefits from activities that create multiple goods instead of negative externalities.



FROM IDEA TO ACTION

The L'Olivera idea emerged from a period of Europe-wide social mobilization, in which civil society became the promoter of including people with disabilities first into school and then securing their right to work. Initially, our business idea started with the aim of supporting the global social project, and was based on the **production of wine** from the recovery of traditional species of grapes, and the **production of olive oil**.

Now, **85%** of production is distributed within the **region of Catalonia**, with local distributors selling the products to restaurants and small wine and food shops. There are also direct sales in Barcelona and Vallbona, a tasting room in Barcelona (Wine bar) and an online sales directly accessible from the website. It is all based on the idea that high quality and great taste can go together. We want the customer to enjoy the wine first and only after to know about the social values that underpin L'Olivera. This is how we maintain economic sustainability.

At L'Olivera we also have the social support services which include **professionals** who help people with disabilities and the productive activity. Currently, the main activities of the cooperative in this area include **training** for people with a disability, **guaranteeing right to work**, producing high quality and tasty food (with the discovery of the social values that underpin it), contributing to the values of society, earning money without creating negative externalities, protecting agriculture where it is disappearing and creating cultural value. Occupational therapy workshop for members with special needs was initiated in 2000.

As a social enterprise, L'Olivera relies on a mixture of funding resources. **55%** of the income comes from the **economic activity**; a part of the budget for social activities comes directly from the **regional government**, while some funding comes from **EU investments** for underdeveloped rural area. Funding is also raised through small investors who receive their return on investment in the form of agricultural products or financial return. In addition, **knowledge, research** and **technology** are also needed to address the production and demographic challenges of the area and are developed through partnerships with research institutions, government ministries, and participation in projects with other social farming enterprises and organisations. Impacts are captured and presented through sustainability reports using the **GRI initiative methodology** and **social evaluation** of the organisation.

FROM OLD TO NEW

We don't use nature, we try to **live in nature**. We live in a dry Mediterranean ecosystem which does not produce much biomass. Farmers' economy is very difficult and as a result, farmers have been abandoning these areas. So in the dry lands, with little water at our disposal, the question that drove use was: "Are we capable of producing benefits?" We think nature is offering us the possibility to **produce very high-quality products**, but we need knowledge, research and experience, tradition, communication and technological application to do this that allow us to look at high end products.

We like to say that by doing what we do, we take what society leaves behind, to return it with a special value. By having new resident people in areas that are being abandoned, **restoring traditional landscapes** and **recovering traditional heritage species**, we grow very high-quality products and demonstrate this value. So when our wine or oil is sometimes recognised as very good in Catalonia, then we know that all of our work has value.

FROM NOW TO THEN

We believe that the economy is built on cooperation and not competition. Our rivals are the large industrialised food, not our neighbours who might produce similar products and can help us create a land brand association to producing high value products. The vision is to continue **producing quality products** while creating **multiple societal benefits** and **social inclusion** of people with disabilities. Currently efforts are being put on building the brand - L'Olivera - communication and creating the logo and the new website.

Current needs are financial support for branding, communication and marketing, creating a professional team that is stable over time, and ensuring public support and acknowledgement of the work that we do.

The external challenges are related to promoting societal values that **support a culture of humanism, collaboration** and **changing paradigm** towards welfare society. We need to find a balance in the context of managing natural resources, addressing unemployment, and shifting societies' perspectives and expectations on food production and social inclusion.

