

TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local

e-ISSN: 2386-9968

Number 8 (2021), 506-530

DOI 10.7203/terra.8.20837

IIDL – Instituto Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Local

# **The development of Aras de los Olmos: a case analysis in the framework of the knowledge economy and social innovation**

**Ana Sales Ten**

Instituto Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Local (Universitat de València).

Ana.Sales@uv.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8218-1375>

**Joaquín Martín Cubas**

Instituto Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Local (Universitat de València).

Joaquin.Martin@uv.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8467-6993>



This work is distributed under the license Creative Commons  
Reconocimiento-No Comercial-Sin Obra Derivada 4.0 Internacional

## ARTICLE SECTION

### **The development of Aras de los Olmos: a case analysis in the framework of the knowledge economy and social innovation**

*Abstract:* This article contains an analysis of the *Big History* Project, an action focused on sustainable development and promoted from the village of Aras de los Olmos, Valencia (Spain), from a theoretical perspective based on the *knowledge economy* and *social innovation*. The synthetic evaluation of the results and performance achieved by the implementation of the project allows us to know and value the key elements that have favored the growth and development of the territory. The methodology applied in this research is a *Public Policy Analysis* resulting from the implementation of the *Participatory Action Research* and the *Ecology of Knowledge* in the theoretical framework of the *neoinstitutionalism of democratic governance*. The main results allow us to confirm that creativity, co-creation of knowledge, participation and the governance pact have been key elements for the success of the project and its impact on the development of the whole Serranía region in the Valencian Community and its neighboring regions.

*Key words:* social innovation, rural community development, governance, co-creation, knowledge economy.

Reception: April 29, 2021.

Review: June 08, 2021.

Acceptance: June 21, 2021.

*Citation:*

Sales, A., y Martín, J. (2021). El desarrollo de Aras de los Olmos: un análisis de caso en el marco de la economía del conocimiento y la innovación social. *TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local*, (8), 506-530. DOI 10.7203/terra.8.20837

## IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. La economía creativa y del conocimiento contribuyen a generar un modelo innovador de desarrollo.</li><li>2. Las estrategias de desarrollo local basadas en la co-creación son claves en el desarrollo de la comarca.</li><li>3. La participación de todos los sectores implicados favorece el impulso del proyecto y la dinamización territorial.</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The creative and knowledge economy contributes to generate an innovative model of the development.</li><li>2. Local development strategies based on co-creation are the key on the development of the region.</li><li>3. The participation of all the sectors involved favors the promotion of the project and territorial dynamization.</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. La economia creativa y del coneixement contribueix a generar un model innovador de desenvolupament.</li><li>2. Les estratègies de desenvolupament local basades en la co-creació són clau en el desenvolupament de la comarca</li><li>3. La participació de tots els sectors implicats afavoreix l'impuls del projecte i la dinamització territorial.</li></ol> |
|--|---|--|

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This article contains an analysis of the *Big History* Project, an action focused on sustainable development and promoted from the village of Aras de los Olmos, Valencia (Spain), from a theoretical perspective based on the knowledge economy and social innovation. The synthetic evaluation of the results and performance achieved by the implementation of the project allows us to know and value the key elements that have favored the growth and development of the territory.

### Justification

The *knowledge economy* and *social innovation* are interpreted as key variables to explain the economic dynamism and development of the territories. It is understood that they enable societies to value and rationally use resources, especially those of an intangible nature, and allow attention to be focused on the potential of the territory to promote sustainable development and create knowledge. The frame of reference for development and proliferation of both terms is to be found in the Europe 2020 strategy that the European Commission has promoted to overcome the ravages of the economic crisis and to reconvert the European Union into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy, enjoying high levels of employment, productivity and cohesion.

The concretion of both terms has generated a theoretical discourse that has given rise to the emergence of new metaphors to try to classify the models studied: “smart cities”, “creative cities” or “cities of knowledge”. These terms give us specific points of view and, often, complementary nuances of a phenomenon that is undoubtedly complex in its analysis, but which has generated some agreement as to the bases or foundations of these new forms of urban development: from the formation of innovative clusters, the concentration of human capital, the innovative effort of companies or the connection to networks of all kinds.

In our work we share the reflection of Soulary and his collaborators on two key points that allow us to better understand the success of the case that we will present: (1) the local economic revitalization must be understood as the sustained growth in the economic activities of the territory, previously defined and prioritized by the instances of government of the territory, which have a significant impact on the main variables of local economic activity and on the rise of the standard of living of the population; (2) a line of university research has a dynamic orientation when it is oriented, in the fundamentals, to solve problems of the locality that prevent the process of economic dynamization, or to enhance factors that drive this process, also providing scientific relevance and international visibility (Soulary et al., 2017). And we added one more challenge for local development, (3) the challenge experienced by many municipalities in the interior of our country in the face of the depopulation of a good part of their territory and that, despite its seriousness, only in recent times has become part of the public agenda (Martín, 2019).

### Objectives

- Show how the *knowledge economy* and the *creative economy* positively influence the economic and social growth of a rural region, generating an innovative model of local development.

---

<sup>1</sup> Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

- Development strategies based on the *co-creation of knowledge* are key to local development, contribute to the growth of the region, and intensify the capacity to organize through networks.
- The integration of the different professional sectors, in the same project, favors the implementation of more creative and innovative development actions, favoring the growth of the region.
- Attention and respect for the natural environment, landscape, tradition, history and idiosyncrasies of the area, have a positive effect on the development of the same.

### **Methodology**

The methodology applied in this research is a *Public Policy Analysis* that applies *Participatory Action Researcher* and the *Ecology of Knowledge* in the theoretical framework of the *neo-institutionalism of democratic governance*.

To this end, the techniques used have been the following: the review of documentary sources, both bibliographic and statistical; semi-structured interviews with key actors of the municipality and focus group whose members have been selected from among the neighbors of the municipality in which they have worked with the OASIS methodology.

### **Sources**

Direct information of the agents under study and the bibliographical references cited.

### **Results**

The main results allow us to observe creativity, knowledge, co-creation, participation and the governance pact, as key elements for the success of the and its repercussion on the development of the whole *Serranía Region* in the *Comunitat Valenciana* and the neighboring regions.

### **Discussion**

The main contributions of the discussion focus on two crucial aspects: (1) to observe how in the elaboration of public policies there is an adjustment in political forces and citizenship, which breaks with the linear structure of their generation. And (2) the achievements of the project can be attributed to three aspects that have been crucial: the elaboration of a strategic planning participated and open to the collaboration of the residents of the municipality; promoting a networked government that has maintained its commitment to continuous communication and transparency; and the enhancement of the impact results that have allowed the citizens of the locality to see the results of the participatory planning.

### **Conclusions**

The Big History project has managed to value the natural heritage of the region and the history of the municipality, avoiding the increase of its depopulation and favoring the generational recovery of its inhabitants; which positions us before an intervention that can be highlighted as a pioneering example of innovation and enhancement of the cultural heritage of the rural environment in general, and of the Valencian Serranía in particular. The value of it and its results must be attributed to the demonstrated capacity to promote the necessary synergies between local government, citizens and the university environment, who have worked with the aim of taking advantage of resources, both endogenous and exogenous, to achieve a development at the same time, socioeconomic and sustainable of the municipality.

### Directions for the future

- The open and participatory mode of government must be maintained with the necessary adaptations and improvements required to update the democratic governance process.
- It is necessary to promote the tasks of maintenance and enhancement of the less developed aspects, especially everything that relates to the ordinary operation of the Big History Center.
- The work of the municipality must be strengthened to ensure the future sustainability of the project, especially with regard to: (1) adaptation of regional planning to the new needs identified, (2) promotion of entrepreneurship around the productive sectors of the area, (3) promotion of the digital immersion of companies and population, and (4) a housing policy that allows the arrival of people to the locality, accompanied by the development of companies and services in the locality.
- Maintain a continuous evaluation that allows feedback of the project, the correction of its failures and weaknesses and the adaptation to the new realities of the territory.