



## Zoom-in I

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# Local Development as a Prism

How the Mares de Madrid Initiative goes beyond entrenched understandings and divisions of labour among workforce training, employment, local development and innovation policies



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# 1. Beyond sectorialization and segmentation: supporting emerging social economies through a complex and iterative environment of people and tools

How to train the workforce? How to know the skills and abilities that are embedded in certain communities and localities? How to support viable, innovative economic projects? And, finally, how to make sure that such projects can both build successful and productive interactions and synergies with the wider economic environment? These are quite pressing, although fairly established, policy issues and questions that are on top of the agenda of any local development department of regional and urban administration across the EU. Discourses on the key role of human capital, on the need to embed economic innovation in the realities and paths of single localities and on the urgency of building ecosystems of development and innovation where interactions among actors are as important as the actors themselves have been common-place in Europe in the last years. A savvy understanding of the fact that there is no economic development and innovation recipe fitting the needs and possibilities of all territories has finally become central in conversations around development.

Still, to answer those questions in both an innovative and integrated way is close to utopia. The sectorialization of public administrations and the scalar complexities of multi-level governance limit the possibilities of truly coordinated and circular policy initiatives while the heavy role of incumbent, entrenched ways to manage – say – training and workforce development may strongly limit the possibility of deep innovations in that realm. The Mares de Madrid initiative is doing exactly that, trying to answer simultaneously to those questions putting in place a complex set of operations that end up in being a continuous, iterative process. The three essential elements – so, the operations – of this process are:

- the mapping of local skills that has been implemented through the setting up of "laboratorio de competencias" ("skills laboratories") participated by inhabitants and interested parties;
- the mapping of so-called local "cadenas de valor" ("value chains"), meaning the web of existing economic activities, their existing and potential links that are present in the four neighbourhoods;
- the set-up of "comunidades de aprendizaje orientadas a la practica" ("practice-oriented learning communities") that are aimed at leveraging the skills that have been mapped to enhance their overall quality and distribution.

These three operations can be understood as sources of knowledge and information that continuously inspire the setting-up of new economic projects. These projects are incubated in the real space of the five Mar – Energy, Food, Recycling, Mobility and Social Care (that are present in all four spaces) – and are supported by a wide range of forms of mentoring that are offered by the so-called "Servicios Especificos" ("Specific Services") and by the activities continuously planned by every single Mar by the so-called "dynamization" team. While the first operation – the "skills laboratories" – has been extensively addressed in the first issue of the journal ([here](#)), we will discuss in the next section the "value chains" and "learning communities". And then, by presenting three concrete cases of economic projects being currently incubated, we will see in a snapshot how single projects have leveraged their participation to Mares de Madrid, also in reference to the role of the Servicios Especificos ("Specific Services").

## 2. Mapping existing productive and distribution processes to imagine new-ones: the “Cadenas de valor”

By “cadena de valor” (“value chain”) it is understood the system that articulates the economic actors who participate to the same productive processes as defined by a specific market, from the provision of the raw materials, the production, the conservation, the transformation and commercialization throughout the final consumption of a specific product. If this is the basic understanding, the emergence of do-it-yourself (DIY) and collaborative economies has implied a reframing of it with the possibility of conflating and/or “jumping” different rings of the chain by, as an example, repairing you own bike or growing your own tomatoes or buying them through a self-managed buying group. In this reframing, and in reference more in particular to the concept of the “circular economy”, the so-called “cascades” – the ways in which a product, once it has been consumed, can make its return to the origin of the entire chain (food waste being turned into compost represents the quintessential example of such a process) have acquired increasing relevance. Of course, the recycling intervenes, in this case, only when the possibilities of repairing and reusing are no longer possible.

So, if this is the general concept, let’s see now how it has been operationalized in the context of the Mares de Madrid initiative with the aim of better informing starting-up social economy projects that are currently being incubated. A first function is that of mapping the wider context in which a specific project can find its niche in its own sector, across different sectors and in the different territories – the four neighbourhoods, and beyond - where the initiative is currently operating. More in particular, in order to both represent the existing economy and the potential for transformation, the design of each “value chain” has been organised around a matrix of relevant “badges” – products and services already present in the territory, that can be accessed or acquired in a digital way, role of the social economy, services promoted by the public administration, products and services that are produced in a non-monetized way.

The “value chains” have been produced in a collaborative way through the organisation of workshops involving both the promoters of new social economy projects and established actors active in each productive phase in order to share information about their own processes, suppliers, costumers. The final product therefore shows both how the established economy usually operates (orange area, in the diagram) but also how “new” economies could join the chain – DIY practices (yellow), “collaborative” (purple), and circular (greenish). Therefore, the process allows the groups involved in the start-up of new economic projects to visualize how the value chain is shaped, what kind of processes and which do not, and what alternatives – local, digital, social – operate alongside traditional ones. This makes it easier to influence business models with greater self-awareness, reflection and knowledge of the process, and even involve other agents of the chain to co-design, co-produce and co-manage new alternatives that fill in gaps and areas of opportunity. The detection of the vacuum is the first step to identify a business opportunity that – coupled with many other factors such as economic viability, logistics, regulations, labour legislation, scale, productivity, the cost of raw materials, labour, etc. – will finally give us the viability to “fill” that gap with our business idea.

Once this is done, another key activity is to assess the interdependencies between the value chain of a specific product – say, bikes – with those relative to the other sectors involved by Mares’ operations (food, energy, care, waste). Therefore, the value chains are to be understood as analytical tools that can be used – in the context of laboratories with perspective entrepreneurs, members of the “Specific Services” and of the “Economic Organising” teams that have been focusing on the mapping and mobilization of local, also neighbourhood-based actors (see second journal [here](#)) – in order to better position the economic projects that are currently being supported.



### 3. Communities of learning oriented towards practice

By “comunidades de aprendizaje orientadas a la practica” (“practice-oriented communities of learning”, CAP) the Mares initiative understands “groups of people who share a concern or passion about something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact” (Mares de Madrid, 2018). They have therefore spaces for research, generation, acquisition and deepening of knowledge oriented towards the practice of communities and of collective self-employment initiatives that are part of these communities. The knowledge is produced from the interaction and participation oriented towards the learning of the members of the community, starting from the experience and knowledge of the group and relying on knowledge and external experiences that are considered relevant.

In this sense, what “learning communities” try to do is what – in traditional, entrenched approaches – formal education and training institutions and programs have been doing for decades in the wide field of local and workforce development policies. But they do it in an alternative way, both for the social character of the economies that Mares is supporting – that implies the rooting of new economic projects in a social demand that has been detected at the local level – and for the transformative character of the productions that are supported – that implies an open-ended and exploratory process of knowledge creation and sharing. The pedagogic aspect – proper to learning – and the functional and experiential aspect – proper to practice – are therefore equally important elements in the design and life of the communities.

But how are they organised and what are the topics that they are treating. First, their domain that can be related to a topic (childhood, for example), to a know-how (how to manage teams, for example) and that, more in general, can be very basic or very specialized. Second, their participants that can range from individuals currently engaged in starting-up a project incubated in one of the Mar – and that therefore use the knowledge and information for their economic project – to established actors specialized in the area involved by Mares’s staff to individuals who are interested in building knowledge even if not in a perspective of immediate use. Third, their organisational form – that integrates both an on-line and real dimensions and that entails facilitators that are responsible for setting the agenda, the schedule and the final goals of the activity of the groups.

As of now, roughly twenty communities are active in all five sectors of the project – and with some naturally covering more than one sector – ranging from “working in teams” – responding to the question “how can we deal with the distinct alterations and challenges that are met by a group in way that make it more human and effective?” – to “Materials reuse” – responding to the question of “how to design protocols for the distribution of materials that can have a second life in the context of reuse projects?”, from “cyclo-logistics” – responding to the question of “how can we develop a more sustainable urban logistics? – to “eco-friendly canteens in schools” responding to the question of “how can we introduce new food models in primary schools?”.

### 4. Economic projects in their making

All these operations have variably supported both Mares and the individual projects in the last months. And the so-called “Servicios Especificos” – specific services – have been strategic in channelling all these resources while supporting individual projects with a wide range of essential services: from supporting them in the design of their business plans and communication plans to provide advice on fiscal and legal issues related to the incoming statute of cooperatives of most economic projects. These rapid snapshots of economic projects – three out of a total of 243 – give account of this complexity.

## La Pajara

The La Pajara project starts from the experience of a small group of young individuals that have all been employed in different delivery platforms. The participation to the activities of the Mar de Movilidad have ignited the interest and the imagination of a possible economic project that drawing from this working experience would put into discussion the business and labour relations model embodied by large, mainstream platforms. “Today workers have a fake autonomy and fake flexibility. To respond to this issue, we want to build a cooperative in order to give a dignified alternative to today’s reality”, says one of the members of the group. In order to achieve this goal it’s the rationale itself of the delivery service that needs to change. The new cooperative will be operating at a neighbourhood scale based on a partnership with a web of local restaurants and other establishments – mostly vegan, vegetarian, organic and ecological – with which the workers will have a direct relationship. There will be of course an app – one was already acquired by a French collective engaged in anti-delivery platform mobilizations – but the direct relationship with the restaurants and the clients will both erase the costs linked to intermediation (and of course the profit) and advance a day-to-day and personal knowledge-based direct management of problems and issues arising day by day. Prices will be competitive but equitable and linked to a wider discourse of sustainability embedded in the characteristics of the local network of establishments involved. Mares’ operations have supported this ambitious project in many ways. First, by providing a context – with the development of the Mobility Mar (Movilidad) activities – for its first concept. Second, by offering support in the design of a business plan and communication strategy and by providing the initial legal framework – a temporary regime and form of support defined “Impulsacoop” (<http://impulsa.coop>) that facilitates the consolidation of start-up projects in proper cooperatives – that has allowed the start-up of the project. Third, by facilitating the establishment of relationships with other social economy actors and more in particular by identifying all the services that the cooperative will need in order to develop – from bike-repairing to refrigeration – through the design of its own “cadena de valor” (“value chain”). Fourth, by establishing relationships with possible clients also through the mapping of local actors that has been implemented during the “skills” and “citizens” laboratories in the four districts in the first part of the project.

## Mymo

Mymo develops out of the individual initiative of an urban planner that in the context of the 2008 economic crisis experienced a form of age-based discrimination that, in her perspective, prevented her to overcome unemployment induced by the crisis. An NGO was created with the goal of establishing spaces and opportunities to leverage on the skills and knowledge accumulated by older generations throughout their professional lives. Such skills and knowledge are extremely large pools of resources that, in the current social system, that are untapped and wasted because no organisational settings exist for their inter-generational transmission. In the Spanish context this is clearly visible with on one side volunteering opportunities involving senior generations seldom involving activities implying the mobilization of such cultural capital and on the other side the existence of a web of specialized spaces and services – such as senior centres managed by the city of Madrid – that while offering some recreational opportunities do not really engage individual in further and more engaging activities. In this perspective, Mymo has involved itself in Mar de Cuidado (Social Care Mar) with the goal to develop a proper economic project aimed at making this intergenerational transmission possible through a series of pilot tools that could be later escalated. In particular, the neighbourhood of Villaverde –



where the Mar de alimentación y cuidado (food and social care) is now active – has been used as test-bed for such pilots with the organisation of in-depth sessions of training and mentoring putting together senior and young adults. Also in this case, Mares has been key in offering a varied range of forms of support. First, by providing background information about the community of Villaverde – and in particular in relation to the skills, available or not available, in the neighbourhood - based on the mapping and more in general diagnostic activities promoted in the first phase of the project. Second, by supporting it in the involvement of higher scale partners – such as the Agencia par el Empleo (the employment agency) and the Universidad Complutense – and of local actors – thanks also to the work of mapping and identification of so-called key agents (see Journal n.2) in the organisation of the initiatives and in the outreach to their potential participants. This phase of experimentation will be functional to the setting up of a series of pilots that may be then promoted to a wide range of possible interested parties such as companies, public administrations, NGOs. This may eventually imply the evolution of the association into a new legal form that will make it more consistent and effective in the perspective of creating an effective actor in the field of the social economy of the “cuidados” (social care”).

## La Corriente

La Corriente developed out of the initiative of a young engineer who has been involved in energy issues both as an activist and as a professional. The project that, currently involves five individuals, intends to contribute to the decentralization of the energy production and distribution system through the establishment of an energy cooperative. The goal is to distribute renewable energy to urban consumers while empowering them through the wide participation rights that come with the membership of a cooperative, a model that is seen as a growing alternative to established and mainstream highly centralized systems built around the large, capitalistic energy companies. The set-up of such a cooperative has posed and is still posing a variety of issues, from its scale – at least 500 members are needed in order to make it viable – to the complexity of its set-up and governance – the goal is of a cooperative to which members participate also through capital. The involvement of the group with the Energy Mar (Energia) has been functional to the overcoming of some of these challenges. First, the Mar itself has been key in providing actual working spaces for the group and also in allowing them to establish relationships with other actors and prospective economic projects as in the case of NGOs specialized in energy audits. Second, the “servicios específicos” (“specific services”) have been again very important in supporting the group with the design of a business plan and a social communication and marketing strategy. Third, both the high accessibility of the Energy Mar – located in the Centro neighbourhood – and the mapping and diagnostic initiatives are being functional to the reaching out to the potential public of the cooperative.



## The MARES project

Since 2008, the economic crisis' impact in Madrid has produced several mutations. Social polarisation and spatial segregation dynamics have escalated, strengthening even more the income barrier between the north (exclusive urban services) and the south/ southeast (negative externalities concentration). The MARES project will initiate an urban and economic resilience strategy on employment through the social and solidarity economy in key industries to move forward a new model of productive matrix of the city.

Therefore, a comprehensive approach of actions will be deployed, based on four pillars:

- 1) Activating recovery processes, prototyping and co-designing disused public spaces.
- 2) Launching a competencies lab capable of promoting economic resilience strategies of civil society.
- 3) Fostering territorial economic innovation processes which generate a new economic fabric through social economy formulas and improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the existing productive schemes in the city.
- 4) Encouraging mechanisms for awareness raising, territorial economic revitalisation and cooperation among agents in order to articulate ecosystems allowing production diversification and more collective possibilities on employment and employability at local level.

The MARES project will launch in four city districts, Centro, Villaverde, Vallecas and Vicálvaro, four spaces called M.A.R.E.S. Every MAR will be specialised: M (mobility), A (food), R (recycling), E (energy) and S (social and care economy, common to the four MAR). These MARES will become a prototype of urban resilience on employment by encouraging social and solidarity economy on these strategic sectors. The project will generate economic activity and create stable jobs by deploying business models, principles and values of the social and solidarity economy. It will recover abandoned or disused common areas and make them available for the creation of new productive initiatives.

The project partnership:

- Ayuntamiento de Madrid
- Agencia para el Empleo de Madrid (AE) - Public Agency
- DINAMIA S. COOP. MAD (DN) - Private Company
- Grupo Cooperativo Tangente (TNG) - Private Company
- SIC ARQUITECTURA Y URBANISMO SLP (SIC) - Private Company
- Vivero de Iniciativas Ciudadanas (VIC) - NGO
- Todo por la Praxis (TxP) - NGO
- Fundación Acción contra el Hambre (ACH) - NGO
- NUEVO ESPACIO INDUSTRIAL MADRID, S.L. - ECOOO - Private Company



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Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This Zoom-in, written by a UIA Expert, captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. It is part of the capitalisation and dissemination activities of the UIA – Urban Innovative Actions Initiative.