



## Initiatives for Rural Galicia



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## The experience

Granxa Arqueixal is an economic initiative that integrates: an ecological dairy farm of 30 hectares in which cheese, yoghurt, and milk are produced following traditional methods, an agrotourism activity, and initiatives to recover the cultural rural heritage.

Its main feature is its commitment to ecological agriculture, which is adapted to the territory, to the traditional landscape, and to the smallholding structure of the field.



Arqueixal supports itself in four main pillars:

- Milk production, with 35 cows in 30 hectares of land, some hectares in property and others rented.
- Transformation of milk products based in the production of different types of cheese, yoghurt and other dairy products.
- Active agrotourism, in which using the group of houses belonging to the initiative is fundamental.
- Culture of awareness based in tradition, by promoting activities such as “Son da Aldea”, the flax cycle, “as Mallas” (a traditional activity to separate grain from chaff)...

## Its Origins

This project started in 1989. At the time it started there was a possibility of exponential growth since a high market demand existed. However, a limited business model was chosen. When it started, although an ecological production was not yet in use, its production activities were already environmental friendly. It began growing and diversifying its activities. It is an example of local development in small volume, as economy used to be in the past.



*At the present moment, it is confirmed that our model of promoting endogenous resources, minimising dependency, and committing to small-scale tradition, is more efficient to survive and overcome the present crisis. Right now, sustainable models are being heralded, but we have always done so.*

Arqueixal is the result of a familiar initiative. Its promoter is the youngest of four siblings. He had to migrate for four years, but, unlike his siblings that stayed in the city ,or in other parts of Spain, he returned to his village and decided to continue an activity that used to be carried out by his family: cheese production, a traditional agricultural activity previous to intensive dairy farming.

Previously, already his parents directly market the cheese they produced, even by going to Lugo's municipal market in the old buses used at that time. The commercialising system that predominated then was based in intermediaries that bought cheese products in the village at a low prize, so that they could sell them later to consumers incrementing in a high percentage the original prize of the product. His father had already realised this, which was the reason why he decided to sell his own products directly to the consumer.

The company was one of the first ones in the are to obtain the Quality Denomination of Origin. This meant that the product needed a name. Until that moment products were sell without a label. Therefore, Arqueixal was created: Arte do QUEixo de ALbá (Art of the Albá Cheese).

## Be Supported by Tradition



Nowadays, rural development has become fashionable, as well as recovering traditions and to get in touch with the past. However, years ago, farmers and live stock breeders were induced to break with traditional practises and to modernise by the administration and the technological agricultural perspective, which became mainstream. As a consequence, there was a transformation in different levels: land, landscape, and in social aspects. Right now, it is possible to observe the negative impact that these development models that promoted intensive agriculture and dairy farming without autochthonous base had in Galicia.

*The common idea at that time was to break with the past. For Arqueixal it was to maintain the past and keep the future. That is what helped us and made us be where we stand now: Only by understanding our past we can face the future.*

## Milk Production



The farm owns 35 cows of Alpine Brown breed, a type of breed that has a limited milk production, but it is a good breed for cheese production. The territory's landscape follows olden time patterns: a smallholding structure that respects the landscape, traditional farming divided in parcels of traditional pasture. According to technicians, this type of farm should be closed down, since it is not able to produce enough number of unities of human work.

This is called a positive smallholding, in order to break with the idea that smallholding farming is not profitable. The land division into parcels maintains landscape, biodiversity, it also allows a better plague control, etc. It generates positive externalities.

Traditionally, the Rubia Galega breed gave milk but they stopped being the dairy breed when they were changed into the Frisona breed. Therefore, the Pardea breed was brought to the farm. These cows produce less visual impact in the territory than the Frisona breed.

## Cheese Making

Most of the milk production is used for cheese making, under the designation of Origin Arzúa Ulloa, and under the label of Ecological Agriculture. They produce two cheese types: the creamy type and the "nabiza" type, which was traditionally made in the winter season and preserves for longer.

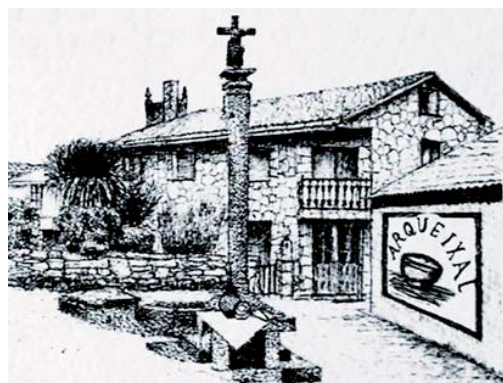
The making process follows the traditional method, although this is not a differential value in the market. However, the cheese's designation of Origin is a guarantee when placing the product in the market.

In addition to their ecological production, an ecological concern is also present in the packaging of the products and in their commercialization. Packages, such as yoghurt packages, have to be reusable, therefore they choose returnable glass and large units. Commercialisation is made in a market spiral way. An effort is made in direct and local selling, especially in channel zero (production-consume) and channel 1 (production-intermediary-consume). Selling in the local area is the most ecological and what leaves a smaller carbon footprint, which benefits both producers and consumers.



## Ecoagrotourism

The centre where Arqueixal is settled used to be uninhabited. It was considered an opportunity to recover that area. Many houses were recovered, "a parladoiro" was built (meeting centre), and a haystack was turned into a house. Green building criteria were followed, recovering traditional building techniques, but supported by modernity too. It was highly important to use autochthonous materials and accessible local resources. The houses are energetically autonomous. Solar thermal and photovoltaic solar panels are used. In the annual balance, more energy is produced than consumed.



Housing are individually rented. People can participate freely and without cost in the farm work. Everyone can choose: from taking photos, to even guide cows.

They belong to a European networking of sustainable tourism, that meets adequate standards of construction, food.... <http://ceres-ecotur.com/>



## Culture of Awareness based in Tradition

This is the last of the four pillars. It includes "Parladoiros", "Son de Aldea", the Ecomuseum Casa da Rebordela, the flax cycle, the mowing, autochthonous seeds,...Diverse activities related to culture, patrimony, and to recovered the forgotten past and the rural self-esteem.

The *Parladoiro* is enabled to offer formative activities, meetings, etc.



The Ecomuseum is a traditional village house, which is also habitable. The experience is not about visiting the house, but living in the house as people used to.

They seek to provide conserved elements a useful function. For instance straw from the mowing is used as roof for traditional barn of the area ("cabaceiro"), or to burn it in the winter ritual (it was used as light to move from one village to another). Activities, only considering the ethnographic factor, are not easy to maintain.



## “Son de Aldea”



It is an activity that tries to recover the past, carrying out on the 1st of September a performance of how life in a traditional village used to be. It is important to bare in mind that villages used to be full of life. Villages were the places where wealth generated and the wealthy lived, and where the social and political power were found.

There are walks around the village and performances are done in different places. There are also activities that recreate traditional activities that used to be done in the village in fourteen different settings: the use of the oven, the school, the wooden stove in the houses, the forest... People walk together observing how the village used to be.

Another important element of “Son de aldea” is to recover linguistic terms that have been forgotten. Long forgotten vocabulary is rediscovered when these activities are performed. Many people from the parish participate.

An important additional value is that people from the village, some of them for the first time, feel proud of their origins when applauded by the crowd. There is also a change of mentality. For instance, when an outsider comes to the village and observes that a wall instead of being made of stone, like traditional walls were, is made of concrete block, and the outsider points this fact out to the owner, the owner would try to use stone next time. The activity was a salutary experience for the village, and it recovered people who want to live there. In fact, Albá is one of the few parishes, or perhaps the only, that has Mass every Sunday, which is an important social stimulation, as people from other parishes go to Mass in Albá.

“Son de Aldea” attempts to carry out social development, using village products and involving producers from the area. There are stands where trades of the local areas are incorporated, and craftsmen and women come and show assistants how they work. Therefore, “Son de Aldea” attempts to be a showcase to generate additional value to the different initiatives which are carried out in villages.

For more information <http://www.sondaldea.es>

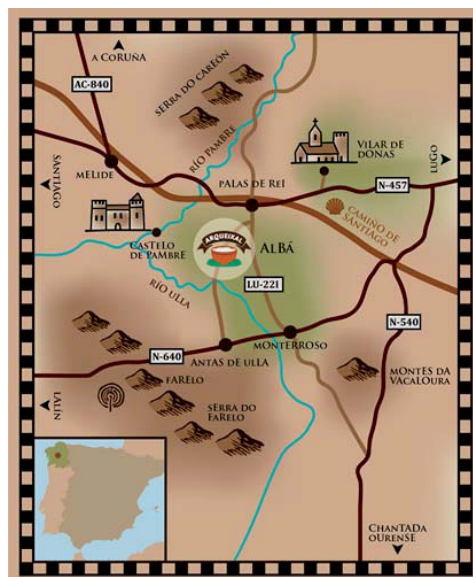




## The Territory

Ulloa's region is defined by activities in the primary sector related to cheese making. The type of cheese that is produced is related to the region's characteristics, especially its height above sea level. Inland territory was underdeveloped and suffered a high emigration.

The main idea was to develop a significant activity for the territory. The recovering of traditional products cultivation, a highly valued activity in Europe, was the cause for the promoter to undertake this business project in the region. The project emerges simultaneous to the designation of Origin "Arzúa Ulloa". The appreciation of the traditional product could be a way of life.



An element of vulnerability is that people leave rural areas, as it's more fashionable to live in cities. This influences people, and makes them believe that in the area is not possible to generate any economic value. It is said that villages do not have services, but it should be discussed which services are completely necessary or essential.

There is an important self-esteem problem among the people in rural areas. In fact, there is no analysis of whether it is worth to live in a village or not, and migration is produced by influence.

Towns such as Melide, Palas, Monterroso, are urban centres in rural areas and they do not guard the territory. They are in the middle of rural areas but they have an urban conception, they do not try to be similar to villages, but to cities. People do not want to identify themselves with the rural community or areas. Small craftsmen and women have to be in villages, not in the industrial area of the town, otherwise they would lose their touch.

At the present moment, there are many projects of rural tourism that fail because they are small residences in rural areas, but they are far from being representative of what takes place in villages.

## Key Agents and Participation Process



Arqueixal is in touch with organisms such as the "Centro para Investigacións Agrarias de Mabegondo" (Centre for Agrarian Investigation of Mabegondo), to recover autochthonous seeds. The project is integrated in "GDR Ulla Tambre Mandeo".

It is also integrated in the "Consello Regulador da Denominación de Orixe do queixo Arzúa Ulloa, e Mandeo" (Regulating Counsel of Designation of Origin Arzúa Ulloa, and Mandeo), and with the Consello Regulador de Agricultura Ecolóxica (Regulating Counsel of Ecological Agriculture). There are different agents working together, since it is a good platform to spread projects in other rural areas. In fact, the "parladoiros" were used in that way.

*We believe that when organising projects for rural areas, they should be organised in a rural atmosphere and not in urban centres.*

## Resources

There are seven or eight people working in Aqueixal, but if UTH indicators and the livestock unit were taken into account, there would not be any job.

The project benefited from financial help from development projects from Agader. To benefit from the administration funds made possible to gradually rehabilitate the village, during four years.



## Impacts



## Intelligent Territory

A company of this area, such as Arqueixal, generates added value for the territory in every activity that it performs, from milk production to the final stage of commercialization. The generated added value remains in the territory, and it showcases and recovers elements of cultural and landscape patrimony.

## Inclusive Territory

It favours population settlement, as it generates job opportunities in rural areas, as well as its commitment to showcase rural culture and identity.

## Sustainable Territory

Arqueixal's initiative favours territory guarding, a sustainable economic model, and it also favours social responsibility, as well as a commitment to the environment.