



# LA BOLINA

Lush Spring Prize 2017:  
El Valle, Granada, Spain

Intentional Project  
Project started: 2016

## Project Summary

La Bolina's 12 co-founders are a diverse multicultural collective from Europe, West Africa, South America and the Middle East, including migrants and refugees. They came together to implement win-win solutions to the complex problems of migration, climate change, environmental degeneration, depopulation and economic instability. The La Bolina team live and work together on the key strands of integration, sustainability and regeneration. Their systemic change model was participatively designed by young locals, migrants, the local government and local organisations to support a regenerative revolution in rural communities by connecting, educating and empowering participants to create sustainable 'collective-enterprising'.

## Key Project Information (at 2018):

Climate: Mediterranean, dry mountains and upland plains

Focus: regeneration and repopulation, social and sustainable collective-enterprises, integration of migrants and refugees into rural areas.

Beneficiary audience: refugees, migrants and local people.

Education Activity: Cultivando Futuros 3 month permaculture, agroecology & enterprise training & internship scheme for refugees & migrants; annual PDC; creative, social and cultural activities (La Bolina Theatre Company); awareness raising around food systems and migration.

Beneficiary numbers: 12 core members of locals, refugees and migrants, plus supporters, volunteers, advisors & interns.

Target Scale: regeneration of municipality of depopulating rural villages (goal); aiming to create a repeatable model.

## La Bolina's Permaculture Education Lessons

The Action Research cycle helps us to investigate, plan, put in practice, evaluate, learn and adapt with each iteration cycle. This means that each of our interventions generate small scale results which are adapted depending on feedback, becoming more relevant, sustainable and successful each time. Adopting Action Research as a project methodology is a key lesson that creates continuous learning on the land, in our trainings and within our community.

## La Bolina's Vision & Aims

The project's vision is to create a cooperative of thriving multicultural sustainable enterprises in El Valle in the province of Granada, Spain whilst regenerating the ecosystems and economy of the area.



Preparation Refugee Week - sharing ideas with members of Association Dar Al Anwar

La Bolina has been working on this win-win project since 2016, aiming to create a positive solution out of 'problematic factors': the depopulation of Spanish countryside and villages, degradation of land, high local unemployment, migrants and refugees who need income and housing.

The project aims to be an inspiring, replicable example of:

- 1) Land regeneration:** identifying neglected or unused agricultural land and making it productive again. Using regenerative agroecology and permaculture principles to cultivate organic crops and increase ecological diversity. Mixing traditional and modern farming techniques, renewable technologies and regenerative agriculture.
- 2) Regeneration of lives:** Improving the wellbeing of all participants through working in nature, creative community activities and self-realisation in a supportive and respectful environment. Giving refugees/migrants an opportunity to build a new life for themselves and their families.
- 3) Creation of new livelihoods:** Developing new and viable productive activities that provide sustainable livelihoods for project members and local people, while also contributing to local economical regeneration. Using new economic models and seeking out under-utilised resources in the area.
- 4) Co-creation of new cultures:** Celebrating intergenerational, multicultural living and working. Creating a thriving example of diversity; a place where all people, regardless of their background, are equal members, and treat each other with respect, appreciation and support.
- 5) Long term systemic change:** The project hopes to change consciousness and dialogue around the refugee "crisis" and contribute to change at a systemic level by demonstrating a positive and tangible alternative that utilises new social and economic models and a holistic approach.



## An IPEN Case Study

International Permaculture Education Network (IPEN)

IPEN Case Studies have been enabled by the Lush Spring Prize

Case Study date:

November 2018



Muctar, a project beneficiary

## Muctar's Story, an asylum seeker from Guinea Conakry

*"La Bolina is an association that is helping me to have a better future. I am very content and have lots of thanks for La Bolina and the team. I have gained many new practical skills during the Cultivando Futuros training in permaculture, agroecology and commercialisation. La Bolina have organised an internship for me with a very experienced man who is teaching me traditional ways to cultivate orange trees. If everything goes well in my internship I will continue to work with him to run the business as his children have moved away to work in the city. This would mean I can contribute positively to the local economy and the environment whilst building a life for myself here in Spain."*

## Sam's Story – project team member for over a year

*Sam, a Gambian asylum seeker, says: "This project aims to build a mutual relationship and trust between refugees and rural communities through the regeneration of landscapes and building new sustainable enterprises. My main role has to do with applying permaculture on the land and conducting permaculture and agroecology training to migrants and refugees. I think the concept of permaculture is always the same but the difference between The Gambia to Spain is that the techniques used are influenced by the traditional irrigation systems, the soil type, the climate and weather. I am enjoying exchanging my knowledge from The Gambia with farmers in Spain. During my internship with Ecosuper (one of La Bolina's partners and vegetable buyers) it gave me joy to see how happy customers were buying ecological produce and eating healthily. I think this is what La Bolina is about, sustainable practices for regeneration, and working with refugees to give back to and exchange with their new communities through win-win solutions by working with nature."*



Sam, a project team member

## La Bolina's story

The La Bolina core team met in an Eroles Project residency in Spain where 16 people from all over the world (including international development workers, artists, lawyers, migrants, permaculturists, farmers, activists, and academics) gathered to bring their knowledge together to create an integrated, holistic approach to borders, climate change, new economy, human rights and migration. A shared vision and set of values emerged, along with a deep understanding of each other and a commitment to radical friendship. This resulted in the group deciding to live, work and develop La Bolina together. After a year of site visits to depopulating villages in Granada province in a search for the project's long-term base, the municipality of El Valle fitted the project's criteria (proximity to a city, local services, school, public transport, severe depopulation, empty building & available land), with a welcoming response from the local council and local people. The team moved to El Valle in late 2017, and have focused on understanding and becoming fully engaged with what is happening at the local and regional level in the fields of regeneration, sustainability, social economy and migrant integration and is adapting the project's model in response.



The first harvesting and selling



## La Bolina: WHAT Has Been Done

**VISITS + WORKSHOPS:** July-Sept 2017: i) Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) linked us to their network of land regeneration experience; a **RefuGEN** project started by GEN members led to 5k€ funding to our project; ii) an event at **Lakabe**, a Spanish ecovillage with more than 40 years experience, led us to set up a volunteer scheme, strengthened our links with the network of Spanish ecovillages and is seeding further collaborations; iii) Visit to **Almocita**, a rural transition town in Almeria to experience and learn from the town and their mayor about changing the future of this rural village; iv) a **Rural Codes workshop** taught us how to engage with our community, active locals and identify needs and desires for the future; v) took part in the global **Sick of Waiting** event to demand governments comply with their refugee commitments. This helped the project's visibility, role in other events and local collaboration.

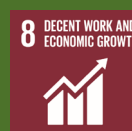
- Nov-Dec 2017: i) workshops to promote the **Social and Solidarity Economy in Granada** helped us meet local social entrepreneurs and improve collaboration with local government; ii) a day trip to the **Ecosystem Restoration Camp as part of** our refugee and migrant training led to a work exchange between projects; iii) attending the **1st Fair for the repopulation of rural Spain** and meeting other projects, such as the **NGO Cepaim** which works to repopulate rural areas with migrant families.

- Jan-June 2018: i) participated in many civil society, NGO and governmental events, workshops, forums and cultural activities to learn about the local context; ii) gained a grant from the EU's **Make Europe Sustainable for All** project producing on the **Fighting Inequalities Campaign handbook** and creating Refugee Week, with 12

## High Level Outcomes

April 2018: La Bolina collaborated with the regional government, Vamos Granada, to submit a motion through the Diputacion de Granada, for the development of local social integration that guarantees workers' rights for refugees and migrants in Granada province. The motion was unanimously approved by all political parties.

La Bolina contributes to these SDG's (Sustainable Development Goals) being achieved.





participatory activities attended by more than 400 local people and migrants in Granada; iii) attended the Spanish ecovillage network gathering, giving a La Bolina presentation, followed by a workshop on African wisdom and spirituality.

- July 2018: i) attended the GEN Europe conference in Estonia, leading a workshop on the responsibility and potential ecovillages have for regenerating land and lives at a local level including those of migrants and refugees; ii) shortlisted as the semi-finalist out of 729 projects from 39 countries for **RE:THINK LOCAL**, the European Social Innovation Competition. This enabled La Bolina to receive a week of EU social innovation training in Romania and 20 hours of social innovation mentorship with a financial sustainability expert.

- Sept 2018: gave a presentation at the **Re-Generation Festival** at our sister project (Ecosystem Restoration Camp) and the La Bolina Theatre Company presented an outdoor performance based on their experience of migration, diversity and belonging. The LUSH Spring Prize are funding La Bolina to go to the festival to give a presentation of how other projects focused on Regeneration can win the Spring Prize.

**ORGANISATION STRUCTURE:** July 2017: 'Asociación La Bolina' set up in Spain (as a registered organisation) to support the financial and legal aspects of the project.

- March 2018: La Bolina becomes 12 core members including 4 refugees and migrants from The Gambia, Lebanon and European countries, supporters, volunteers, advisors & interns.

- A cooperatives advisor is helping us set up the legal and collaborative aspects of a cooperative, and create financial viability. We are exploring the possibility of setting up several micro enterprises under the umbrella of one overall cooperative.

- The project continues to develop its internal organisational structure, mixing agile methodology and sociocracy.

**TRAINING:** completed 2 programmes of Cultivando Futuros (Cultivating Futures), a **3 month Permaculture, Agroecology and Enterprise training** for refugees and migrants, taught by in-house and partner trainers. 20+ migrants and refugees have completed the training and many are beginning internships.

- February 2018: a **Permaculture Design Course accredited by Rowe Morrow**, advocate of permaculture in areas of conflict / refugee camps; taught by Gilbert Jassey and a local permaculture teacher with local people, refugees and core team members as participants. Annual PDC trainings with refugees and local people will be run to promote regeneration and cultural integration; and to bring revenue to the project.

La Bolina collaborate with Vamos Granada and the Reeconomy Centre in Totnes to run a **Local Community development programme** to support initiatives looking to local sustainable and solidarity development in rural areas.

- Oct 2018 the third **Cultivando Futuros programme** in partnership with Provienda (financiers of the training), University of Granada (accreditors of the training) and Vamos Granada Regional Government (collaborators).

- Dec 2018 **Permaculture Teaching Matters** – training for trainers taught by Candela Vargas and Alfred Decker.

**INTERNSHIPS:** 3 course participants have internships with local ecological enterprises and coops; demand for internships exceeds the participants to take them.

**LAND:** We have secured 10 pieces of land in El Valle, for free, on a 10 years contract with our local council, who are increasingly responsive and supportive of our project.

**ENTERPRISE:** various enterprise activities include:

**Productus de la Bolina:** launched in 2018, this includes a veg box scheme and consumer group, selling our vegetables in



The final day of Cultivando Futuros training, whose participants grew the food eaten during Refugee Week

restaurants, hotels and enterprises in Granada and beyond. A range of preserves in beautiful jars made from our ecologically grown food including Pisto, Gazpacho de Calabacin, Chard and a range of soups. We intend to partner with schools in Granada to sell our weekly Veg Box to parents whose kids come on school trips to La Bolina to learn about regeneration.

**Moringa:** Gilbert Jassey, co-founder of the project, has begun cultivating moringa from seed using ecological methodologies he learnt back home in The Gambia. We are currently looking into commercialization strands for the moringa, and are hoping to sell these wholesale rather than to individual customers.

**Olive Oil:** In 2017 we produced a small batch of olive oil to prototype the harvesting and processing methods. In 2018, we predict about 2000kg production, giving approx 600 litres of high quality pale yellow oil for deluxe food and making soaps.

**Citrus Fruits:** Surrounded by many abandoned fields of orange and lemon trees, local people have asked the project to take on care of the trees and harvesting the fruit. A La Bolina refugee will have an internship with an experienced citrus farmer. Oranges are not a competitive crop locally, so other markets outside of the region will be explored - as well as the fruit, we have been looking into harvesting the orange and lemon blossom which has highly beneficial properties.

**VOLUNTEERS:** We have a small number of volunteers, as it takes a lot of time to train and support volunteers - we want to invite long-term volunteers and volunteers of diverse origins.

**RESEARCH:** The project's publicity generated interest from students and researchers. Two students have completed their Masters thesis on the project and Co-founder Maria Llanos del Corral is focusing her PhD on the development of the project using Action Research as her key method. Research helps us learn as we go, documenting and disseminating the learnings and models we have used, so they can be adapted and replicated elsewhere.

## La Bolina: HOW it has been done

Two 'visioning and development weeks' have used many methodologies to develop our vision, review our organising structure and decision making process, and refine how we work together, by accounting for our diversity of styles and approaches to work. A blend of Sociocracy, Action Research and agile project management means that we operate in thematic circles - land & commercialization; communication; funding; integration and events; livelihoods; etc.

'Action Research' involves continual attention to how change happens. It benefits innovative projects that embrace complex interrelating issues such as migration, biodiversity, depopulation, socio-economic rural development, new forms of governance, sustainable livelihoods and self-realisation.



See the **Refugee Week Fighting Inequalities Handbook** [here](#) - produced by La Bolina as part of the EU's **Make Europe Sustainable For All** project, the Handbook relates La Bolina's work to how these SDG's can be achieved.

## HOW - continued ...

Taking time to learn from and collaborate with local land projects and cooperatives helped deepen our understanding of:

- \* the local people & culture
- \* ecological growing & commercialisation
- \* existing coops & how they function
- \* current regenerative practices used
- \* migrants & refugees support networks
- \* the specific needs of refugees & migrants in our local area.

There is ongoing cross-pollinating of ideas, knowledge and practices with Los Portales, a long-established ecovillage in the province of Sevilla.

## Permaculture Principles & Design in Action

Permaculture Principles in Action: observe & interact; small change for big effects; multi-function; relative location; start at the backdoor and work out on a controlled front.

La Bolina shows how the application of permaculture design is as relevant to the design of the project as a whole as it is to the on-the-ground application of permaculture techniques.

The project demonstrates education and design in many areas that focus primarily on creating beneficial relationships; ecologically, socially and economically.

Building from the Spring Prize success, a good publicity strategy has generated multiple benefits, helping to secure extra funding and collaboration opportunities.

## Lessons from Project Outputs & Outcomes

The big early lessons of this project are:

1. The combination of permaculture, agroecology and enterprise provides a solid base to the foundations of the project's education activity. PDC training builds on this, with "Intro" and PDC levels really helping the 'training of trainers'.
2. Internships really deepen hands-on learning and skills development, following on from initial training. External research students can undertake valuable projects that 'grow' different outputs, within and outside the project.
3. Cultural awareness is vitally important for enabling change in difficult situations:
  - Within and outside the project team, participatory methods allow for a range of voices to be heard and valued.
  - Cultural knowledge can be greatly developed through engaging with local organisations and projects, which is highly important for a project focused on integration of different cultures.

## Lush Spring Prize Difference

"Winning the Prize has meant a lot for me and my team. It means that the hard work, love, and dedication we are giving to this project has been recognised. This has added to my motivation to do more in making the world a better place..." Gilbert Jassey, co-founder of the project and Gambian refugee seeking asylum in Spain after being persecuted by his government for environmental activism.

## From Inspiration to Action

La Bolina provides strong lessons about linking permaculture education and skills development to integration of refugees and migrants into the social life of an area, by being directly involved in the care for and regeneration of the local landscape, economy and communities. This is as relevant for other disadvantaged groups, as for refugee / migrant projects.

As permaculture education is a system of 'education for action' it engages people in positive action. Through that action the participants can be seen to be making a positive contribution to the local area, and valued for that. This is particularly effective when existing local knowledge is respected and integrated into the learning process.

The project provides particular inspiration by focusing on a core issue that has many significant challenges associated with it, and developing a successful project concept and approach that has significant potential to be replicated or adapted in other areas.

## Practical Next Steps

1. Build increasingly solid relationships with local organisations and activities, and with international contacts alike.
2. Generate examples of practical and repeatable solutions.
3. Increase the number of refugees and migrants benefitting from the project.
4. Integrate research results and share them with other similar projects.

**Legal Status, Structure & Size:** Asociación La Bolina registered in July 2017 as a not-for-profit organisation - soon to become an 'Empresa de Inserción Laboral'. Organising structure: agile and sociocracy. 12 members at October 2018.

**Funding, Finance, Resources:** Funding secured includes: GAIA Trust (1,500€); Spring Prize funding (£10,000); RefuGEN (€5,000); Network for Social Change (£15,000); Lush Madrid store Charity Pot (€9,000); Making Europe Sustainable European Union (7,000€); International Target (£6,000). Free leases of 10 pieces of land from the council and local people for 10 years. Income from Veg Box enterprise and other 'Productos de La Bolina'. Growing micro-eco-enterprises is central to the project's financial strategy.

## Potential Areas for Collaboration (Local, Regional, National or International)

**La Bolina Needs:** experienced agroecology growers and ecological business experts, refugee & migrant Spanish legal support, generous financial backers, filmmakers, reporters & media support, online & in-person translators for trainings.

**La Bolina Offers:** open day visits, cheap accommodation & food for long term volunteers - see website for information.

**Collaboration opportunities:** research projects (Masters; PhD); partnering with like mind projects for funding, exchanges.

## Contact Information

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### International Permaculture Education Network (IPEN)

*Increasing the effectiveness and coherence of permaculture education internationally*

IPEN Case Studies have been enabled by the Lush Spring Prize

IPEN website: <https://www.permaculture.org.uk/ipen>

