

DYNAVERSITY

Brotes Compartidos (Spain)

Case study analysis

**DYNAmic seed networks for managing European diversity:
conserving diversity *in situ* in agriculture and in the food chain**



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PART 1: DESCRIPTION

1.1 Contextualising the case



Source: Photo shared by Estefania (CSA Brotes Compartidos)

Brotes Compartidos (meaning “shared buds”) is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) located in Segovia, Spain. According to the definition coined by URGENCI (The international Network for community supported agriculture), “a CSA is a direct partnership based on the human relationship between people and one or several producer(s), whereby the risks, responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared through a long-term, binding agreement.”

In the European project called Dynaversity (Dynamic seed networks for managing European diversity), our goal is to understand how CSA can help fostering biodiversity-friendly initiatives on farms. Our hypothesis is that this close partnership between consumers and farmers provides an excellent economic and human background for the cultivation of traditional/local/peasant seeds on farms. This case is relevant as the CSA Brotes Compartidos was created after 7 years of collecting, multiplying and adapting traditional varieties of vegetables and aromatic plants in farm environments. The CSA emerged through the network and the dynamic built among and between the people caring and cultivating traditional seeds. The CSA has more formally come to support the work of a group of people already working together on cultivated biodiversity.

The information we obtained from this CSA was collected through various interviews with Estefania Egido (one of the two vegetable growers) and Elena Pascual del Barrio (in charge of the Communication working group of the CSA). Brotes Compartidos is a new CSA, created just one year ago. Estefania’s work on agroecology with traditional varieties, however, is much older. Seven years ago, she started to collect traditional seeds from local farmers and from a seed bank in Segovia. Thanks to this work of collecting local and traditional varieties, she has been able to cultivate around 50 varieties of vegetables and 50 varieties of other plants including aromatics, medicinal plants, flowers since she began this work. This diversity of plants is now supported and preserved by a partnership of around 100 CSA members.

The creation of the CSA came late compared to the work Estefania was doing collecting and cultivating traditional varieties of vegetables and aromatic plants. She tried to create the CSA the first time in 2013. This initiative, however, failed since times were simply not ripe. CSAs, at the time, were still something new and marginal. The opportunity came again when a small group of committed consumers who already knew Estefania’s work proposed to form a CSA, to provide her with a fixed income each month and participant consumers with fresh, good quality produce. The CSA uses their own currency which they have called “La Canica”.

1.2 « Doing »

1.2.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

For 7 years, Estefania Egido collected, multiplied and adapted traditional seeds of vegetables and aromatic plants coming from local farmers and local seed banks. Estefania and CSA's shared vision is to find varieties that are well adapted to Segovia's environmental and climatic conditions. Estefania has been working with the Segovia seed network, "Red de Semillas de Segovia" (RDS SG), since the beginning. Furthermore, she was among the cofounders of the network 6 years ago when she started cultivating local varieties on her own accord. The network is trying to adapt traditional varieties/landraces, which come from Spain or other parts of the world and have climatic and environmental conditions similar to the Segovia area, where the growing season is quite short. Indeed, because of climate change, spring and autumn are shorter every year.

Seed production is well organised and the plants are grown in separated fields. The best vegetables and the best fruits, and the earliest maturing ones, are always kept for following year's seeds. Nowadays, CSA members come and help Estefania with this work, producing seedlings, harvesting, or co-organising specific workshops on the farm. Seed exchanges also happen among members of the CSA, in a spontaneous fashion and with the participation of non-CSA members such as local professionals and non-professional producers. Individually, Estefania works a lot with the Segovia seed network (RDS SG), with regular seed exchanges. Indeed, the network also aims to promote the use of local varieties among hobby gardeners and farmers in place of buying seeds from companies. Estefania is also in close contact with another seed network called "La Troje", from which she buys seeds, seedlings, and fruit plants of traditional varieties.

1.2.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

It is Estefania's opinion that traditional varieties can't be sold because they are not part of the capitalist system. In this way, all the seed exchanges she takes part in are for free. The Segovia seed network (RDS SG) organizes events three times a year. At each of these events, seeds are exchanged among all interested people. Seeds exchanges are also done when people contact the CSA or the RDS SG directly to obtain seeds.



VII Encuentro de la Red de Semillas de Segovia

11:00 h Recepción hortalizas para la exposición y concursos (tomates, salsas de tomates y calabazas)

11:30 h Bienvenida. Presentación de la Red de Semillas

12:00 h **Charla:** "La Custodia del Territorio y las prácticas Agroecológicas. Conservación de paisajes campesinos." Manuel de la Puerta. Asociación *Arriba las Ramas*

13:00 h **Recogida de semillas** tradicionales para el futuro

14:00 h **Cata de tomates** (crudos y salsas). Trae y participa

14:30 h Entrega de premios

Durante toda la mañana, disfruta y participa en:

Exposición variedades tradicionales (semillas y hortalizas)

Concurso "Doña Calabaza"

Concurso "Identificación de Semillas"

15:00 h **Comida de Traje** (*me traje mi comida y nos la comimos entre todas*). Trae tu menaje

17:00 h **Visita** a los huertos de ocio de Rianza

Compartiendo Semillas Vivas

Sábado
21 OCTUBRE 2017

RIAZA

Antiguo Matadero
(detrás de la Plaza Mayor)

Las charlas serán en el Ayuntamiento

Poster of an event organised by the Segovia seed network

1.2.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

Estefania is working closely with the RDS SG to maintain local varieties. Together they organize workshops on seeds, showing and teaching seed extraction to the members, involving more people to use traditional seeds. Moreover, the CSA group releases a monthly journal called "El Calabazal", which occasionally also deals with seed issues. A recent

issue in October 2018 was dedicated specifically to seeds and entitled “Traditional Varieties, vitally important”. The issue explains the importance of traditional seeds for health and climate change, and it also explains the work that is done by the CSA vegetable growers with the RDS SG and with “La Troje”, where more than 200 species of vegetables and plants are maintained. The journal also contains recipes using the vegetables from traditional seeds.

El Calabazal

4
Octubre 2018

Boletín informativo de la ASC Brotes Compartidos. Caballar (Segovia)

Contacto: ascbrotescompartidos@riseup.net

Variedades tradicionales. La importancia de la Vida

Las semillas tradicionales llevan circulando por nuestros pueblos más de 10.000 años, con la labor de millones de nuestros antepasados campesinos que las han cultivado, cuidado y conservado. Son variedades de gran importancia, ya que durante generaciones y tras una selección continua se han ido adaptando a nuestros suelos, climas y posibles plagas, haciéndose más fuertes, resistentes y productivas para nosotros; dando como resultado unos cultivos más sabrosos y más sanos, no sólo como alimentos, sino también más resistentes a las plagas y enfermedades de las plantas y cuyo cultivo se hace menos dependiente de venenos y productos fitosanitarios.

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Front page of the Calabazal journal (special issue on seeds)

1.3 « Organizing »

1.3.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

In the beginning, the CSA was launched in an informal way. Recently, the decision was made to make the CSA into a formal association. The registration is still a work in progress. The choice to change its designated status was made in order to allow the two vegetable growers to be registered in the social security system. In addition, this legal status will allow the CSA to receive some public subsidies (although the network is still discussing whether they should accept public funding or not). The CSA is organized into 6 working groups (“Commissions”) composed of 1 to 8 people. Two new working groups will be created in the future. The following working groups are active or will be working in the future:

- Communication
- Vegetable Growing
- Newsletter
- Accountability
- Care (in charge of taking care of CSA members with economic difficulties and if those who have any doubt or difficulty with participation)
- Deliveries
- Events

Furthermore, an assembly where all the CSA members are invited is held once or twice a month. The aim of this meeting is to inform everybody of what’s happening in the CSA (cultivation, financial situation, events, on farm activities, etc.) and to take common decisions. The assembly is organized following several rules. For instance, agreements are taken in a consensual way and some people have specific roles during the session (i.e. time watching, speaking slots, etc.).

1.3.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

The CSA core members organize regular open-day activities and conferences to talk about the initiative with new people.

The CSA group is also working with consumer associations, to promote responsible and sustainable consumption. CSA members also join seminars on hot topics for agriculture, such as climate change, and organise a monthly event called the “Garden Market Day”. The events of this day usually hold a workshop or a debate on a specific topic. Some people from the CSA also go to a Spanish CSA meeting in Salamanca and in Alcazar de San Juan. Estefania herself went to Greece in November 2018 and to Hungary in May 2018 to respectively, take part in the European Meeting of CSA movements and participate to the European train-the-trainer event designed for CSA groups.

1.3.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

The creation of the CSA has empowered the two vegetable growers Estefania and Raul by guaranteeing them a fixed income, and thereby maintaining the financial security to make their work sustainable in the long term. Moreover, the CSA plans to be legally registered as an association, in order to gain formal recognition and to be able to give social security benefits. Registering as a formal association will also give the group opportunity to get public subsidies. The CSA members adhere to basic democratic rules: for example, their regular assemblies are open to every group member and each can join and participate in the decision-making process; they seek for enduring dialogue between members and strive for consensus-based decisions. The CSA is farmer-led, with Estefania as its dynamic protagonist and team manager. Other members (consumers and friends), however, seem to be equally dynamic with a strong propensity to take on many initiatives at once, including choosing the varieties to be cultivated, suggesting the organization of workshops, and participating in the CSA events.

PART 2: ANALYSIS

2.1 Knowing

2.1.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

One of the ways that participants create knowledge inside the CSA is through the different workshops they organize on-farm. The CSA organizes frequently what they call “Garden Market Day”, where all members can participate in a specific workshop, experience the assembly, and share food together. If the Day falls in a time for sowing, the participants will sow together. Other workshops concern practical activities such as making compost or creating green fences.



Working together in the field (photo from Estefania, CSA Brotes Compartidos)

Another way of sharing knowledge is through the mailing list managed by Elena Pascual del Barrio. Elena forwards information she receives about agroecology, compost, health or any issue relevant to the CSA to all participants. She is also involved in another project called “Madrid Agroecológico” which allows her to make bridges between what’s happening in Madrid with what is happening in Segovia. The Journal “El Calabazal”, dealing with thematic topics (such as agroecology, seeds, etc.), and the newsletter distributed with the vegetable boxes, are also good ways of exchanging knowledge between members or partners (newsletter also contains political reflections, as well as practical ideas, recipes and cropping techniques).

2.1.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

The CSA is part of a bigger movement called “Segovia in transition” where a group of people are trying to change how society functions through local actions. This movement organises conferences or local campaigns against what they cite as unsustainable initiatives. The CSA was created within this movement and thus, makes Brotes Compartidos already part of a bigger process of change in Segovia.

2.1.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

Collective action and community management are considered crucial by CSA members. The community is therefore supporting itself in economic ways while also in helping each other in everyday activities. Estefania explains that if someone can’t pay the financial subscription to get the vegetable boxes and to be part of the initiative, this person will not be excluded. The CSA will attempt to support him/her.

The work of the CSA is not just about getting vegetable boxes. Group orders carry an ethical reflection within. For example, the community does common purchase of oranges and oils, trying to engage at the same time in a dialogue and a debate about contemporary orange trade with the community. Elena Pascual del Barrio explained to me that she had sent an article to the community from Gustavo Duch, a scholar who wrote a study on the topic. The community behind the CSA is challenging the current food system by reinforcing solidarity of consumers and producers. They also challenge the way trade is conducted at national level by making collective purchases in line with their ethical reflections.

2.2 Framing

2.2.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

The initiative aims at feeding the local people of Segovia and the members of the CSA. It also has a more general objective behind it, which is to spread their way of farming and feeding people. They also wish to communicate on topics such as seeds or agroecology through their internal newsletter and through the public events and conferences they give.

2.2.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

The awareness-raising efforts are under the responsibility of the Segovia seed network, and Estefania and Raul are part of it and participate in their events. Although the CSA does not include communication on seed issues as its primary objective, raising awareness on seed issues comes naturally as a consequence of the CSA's activities.

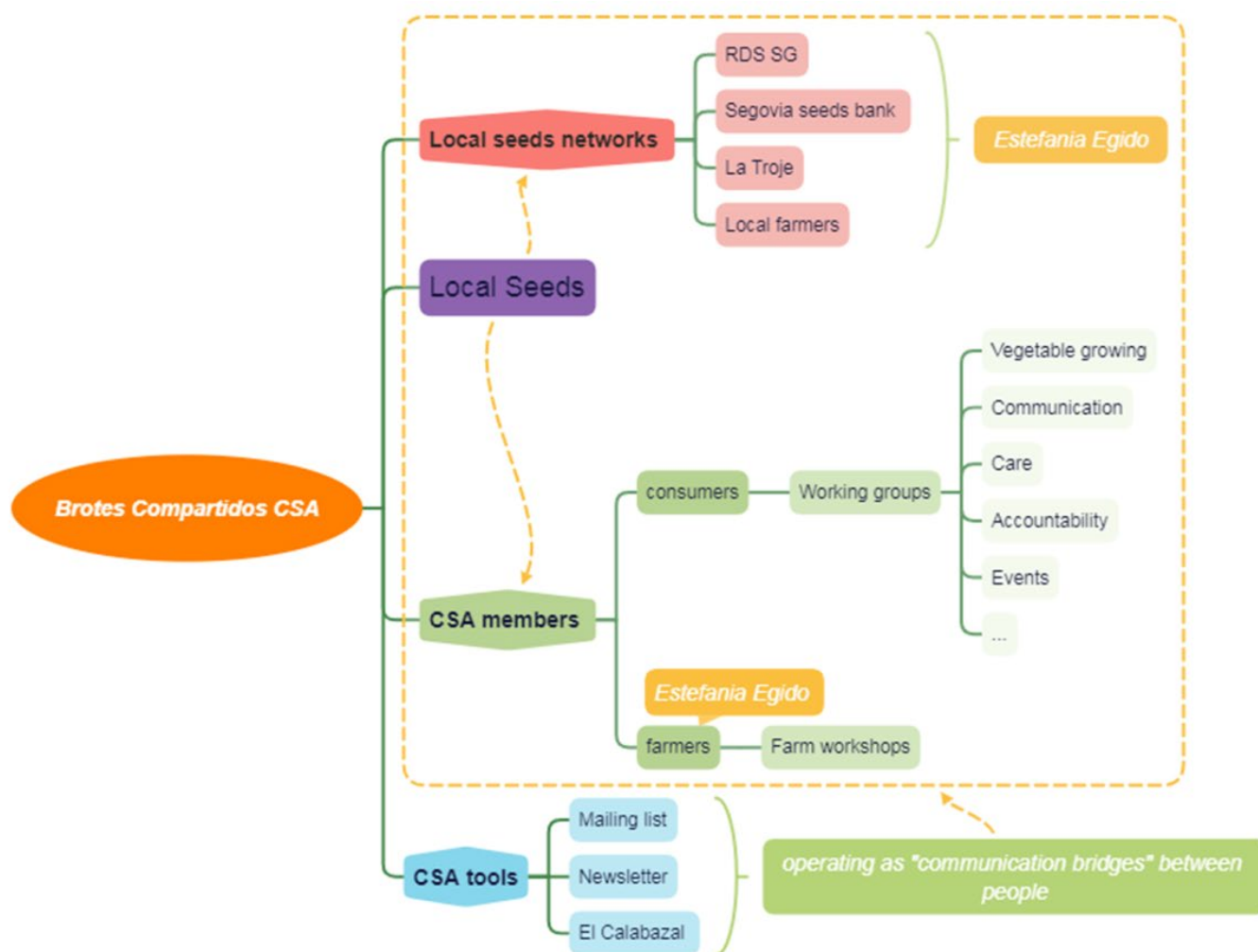
2.2.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

The CSA organizes different kinds of events (i.e. open doors, conferences, workshops on specific topics) which allow the CSAs members and new people to debate on food and seed matters. Some of these events are also part of a wider movement called “Transition network”. Here, the goal is clearly political and aims at changing the way food systems function. Moreover, the CSA members form a community of people that want to solve issues and share debates or reflections through creative means, such as poetry.

2.3 Networking

Estefania has a central role in the network as she is at the heart of the collection, production and adaptation of local seeds for the CSA. She is also making the link between the CSA consumers and the seed networks (e.g. the RDS SG and “La Troje”). In the CSA, most of the consumers participated, in different working groups (Commissions). Elena Pascual, for example, is involved in the Communication group where the mailing list is managed. Some members have been deeply involved in the functioning of the CSA and for this reason have chosen to take some specific training to enhance their community skills. Elena Pascual did the first part of a course called “group facilitation”, to learn how to resolve

conflicts between members, how to facilitate communication, and how to make collective decisions. Although she hasn't felt comfortable enough to put what she has learned into practice during the General assembly, she thinks that these skills will be useful to strengthen communities and collective processes. Other CSA members are also taking this course and have started to moderate and organize the debate during the General CSA assembly.



In the above map, Estefania's central role in creating an alternative food system (CSA) around traditional and local seeds is highlighted. Indeed, she is the one linking different stakeholders, local seed networks, and the CSA members. Some objects or tools also operate as bridges, such as the newsletter or the Calabazal journal.

PART 3: SUMMARY

The history of the CSA Brotos Compartidos is interesting because the network was created by a farmer who had already been working for seven years with traditional varieties. During her experience as a traditional seed-producer, Estefania got to know people interested in creating the CSA in order to support her work. The CSA creation has been a great form of economic security for Estefania and Raul who now earn a fixed income every month. The network also aims at creating a collective dynamic on the farm. People often come to help during the open-door days, or during the "Market Garden Day", both of which events where they can participate in workshops. The network seems to be active and strong because of its democratic governance that consists of the General assembly and the 6 to 8 different internal working groups. Moreover, the internal journal and the newsletters also help strengthening the network. This CSA shapes its community around the objective of changing the food system by integrating itself within a more global movement called the "Transition Network". The CSA also makes collective solidarity/supportive purchases of other kinds of products,

accompanied by a collective reflection on the products bought.



Sharing food (photo by Estefania, CSA Brotes Compartidos)