

Creando Conciencia

COOP CARD*

Location: Benavidez, Tigre municipality, Buenos Aires

Year of foundation: 2004

N° of members: 51

Sector: Waste recycling

Key themes: Women's empowerment, decent work, environmental protection



CONTEXT

Argentina is one of the largest economies in Latin America. It has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of approximately US\$400 billion and vast natural resources in energy and agriculture that make it a leading food producer with large-scale agricultural and livestock industries. However, the historical volatility of economic growth has impeded the country's development. A terrible economic crisis hit Argentina in 2001, leading to very high rates of unemployment, inequality and multidimensional poverty.

The first cooperative experiences in Argentina developed in the last decades of the 19th century. Today there are more than 8,600 cooperatives in the country, active in different sectors, of which nearly half are worker cooperatives.

AUTHORS

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*Information collected during a fieldwork carried out in September 2019.

COOP STORY

Creando Conciencia (Creating Consciousness) is a worker cooperative set up in the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis. It was founded in 2005 by a group of neighbours who were greatly concerned about the final disposal of urban solid waste and the issue of urban waste pickers (known as “cartoneros”). They were also interested in the possibility of generating alternatives that address these issues through social responsibility and sustainability. Today, the cooperative has 51 members, 60% of which are women. Their main services are the collection, selection and classification of waste, as well as recycling as much dry waste as possible. In addition, through the initiative Creando Equipamiento (creating furniture), the cooperative transforms recycled plastic into beautiful outdoor furniture.



HOW HAS THE COOPERATIVE CHANGED MEMBERS' LIVES?

- **Decent work:** It provides decent work opportunities to marginalized people, such as single mothers, waste pickers, and unemployed workers;
- **Wellbeing:** It provides benefits to its members, such as health care insurance, accident insurance, fair wages, retirement and paid holiday, maternity and sick leaves, loans and patronage refund distribution, among others;
- **Personal growth:** It provides opportunities of empowerment and possibilities to improve in terms of skills and responsibilities within the coop;
- **Environment awareness:** It increases members' environmental awareness and capacity to train others on environmental conservation, with special focus on groups of neighbours and students.
- **Working environment:** It creates a supportive working environment, based on trust and “compañerismo” (fellowship);
- **Local development:** It supports similar cooperatives, by providing training and acting as an incubator for new organisations.

SELECTED QUOTE

"Development is local. Cooperatives and other enterprises of the social and solidarity economy work in the development of our local communities. All money generated by Creando Conciencia stays in Benavidez. This is what we have to keep strengthening!"

Ramiro Martínez – Board member of Creando Conciencia



KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Experiences such as Creando Conciencia show that it is possible to combine climate action with decent work and the inclusion of marginalized people, while developing a sustainable enterprise. Even more, statistics on the coop's activity prove that there is still a huge potential to be unlocked: Creando Conciencia processes and reinserts in the market on average 220 tons of waste per month. While just in the Municipality where they are located, waste generated exceeds 800 tons per day. In other words, there is still plenty of room for coops like Creando Conciencia to increase their recycling capacity.
- Cooperatives are key drivers of local development. The positive results generated by the Creando Conciencia cooperative, in terms of wealth creation, environmental care and social inclusion, also have a positive impact in the immediate surroundings where the coop is located, making them a leading actor in a circular economy system.
- The people excluded by the economic and social system, such as single mothers, unemployed people, and waste pickers, become visionary leaders and key protagonists of their own story in a coop like Creando Conciencia. There, they are not only able to change their personal stories and those from their families, but also make an impact on the communities in which they live.

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