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## The Rural Creative Hub Reviving Portugal's Countryside

Buinho, a rural creative hub in southern Portugal, is transforming the local landscape by empowering artists, makers, and innovators to revitalise the hinterland through collaboration and community engagement. Its vision is to build a network of creative spaces in the historic town of Messejana, always available to members and residents

From the ECHN [Creative Hubs](#) Series

In the historic town of Messejana, in the rural heartlands of southern Portugal, a creative hub is breathing new life into the local community. [Buinho](#), founded in 2012 by a group of designers, artists, and researchers, has grown into a dynamic network of creative spaces, providing a sanctuary for artists, makers, and innovators.

The story of Buinho began as an "unofficial spin-off" from the University of Lisbon's Faculty of Fine Arts. Frustrated by the institutional constraints they faced in academia, the group decided to break free and forge their path.

"There were always problems in terms of use of spaces, availability of teachers, partnerships, and struggles of power, and we got very fed up with that situation. We wanted to escape,

so we continued what we intended to do but without being tied up with a lot of institutional constraints." explains co-founder Carlos Alcobia.

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"The residents' interactions with the locals became stronger because it created a routine and a culture. The vibe here became more international, it became more 'open doors'."

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Seeking to address the lack of creative opportunities in rural Portugal, the team began organising artistic residencies in small villages, tapping into their expertise in digital fabrication with an interdisciplinary team. This initial venture laid the foundations for Buinho's ambitious vision: to establish a permanent creative hub and a bigger commitment to make the project grow and be sustainable.

In 2014, Alcobia and his wife took the bold step of purchasing an old house in Messejana, kicking off a journey of renovations and the creation of a non-profit organisation. By 2016, Buinho had acquired the necessary equipment for its Fab Lab and began hosting its first residencies, testing the concept before the official launch the following year.

Buinho's relationship with the local territory is a complex one. The hub has developed strong ties with nearby schools, leading an Erasmus+ consortium and creating maker spaces that serve as educational hubs.

"We're doing structured curricula with a lot of schools in this region," Alcobia explains. "We are creating maker spaces, some of them voluntarily funded by us. We involve teachers and use them as laboratories for new practices. There are strong relationships with the local inhabitants, especially because of the residencies."

The residency programme has also played a pivotal role in fostering connections between Buinho and the local community. "The residents' interactions with the locals became stronger, it

created a routine and a culture," Alcobia says. "The vibe here became more international, more open to the world."

However, the policy landscape in Alentejo, the rural region where Messejana is situated, presents its own set of challenges. "Only a handful of municipalities in this region have a cultural strategy," Alcobia laments. "The support depends on you knocking on their doors and asking for help."

Alcobia emphasises the need for greater collaboration and engagement among private, public, and civil society stakeholders to create a more supportive environment for creative hubs like Buinho. "What's important is to get the private sector, civil society, and local authorities working together," he says.

The hub has recently opened a design space in Lisbon and is exploring partnerships with other Portuguese-speaking countries, such as Brazil. Alcobia envisions a future where Buinho's model of rural revitalisation can be replicated and shared, empowering creative communities across Portugal and beyond.

"We're focusing on local development strategies using the creative sector," Alcobia says, underscoring Buinho's commitment to harnessing the power of creativity to transform the hinterland. With its network of repair cafés, collaborations with formal education, and international partnerships, Buinho is proving that rural communities can be vibrant, innovative, and deeply connected to the world.

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## Spotlight Practice 1: Network of repair cafés

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Buinho is creating a network of repair cafes in nearby villages, with a focus on circular economy and education. They are creating a system where repair is part of education and culture. People from Messejana can work with people from other regions, creating a network.

Buinho coordinates a consortium school of Erasmus+, that gives teachers the chance to work across Europe. This sparks a continuation between Messejana and the rest of Europe, it connects to international creative hubs and enables the design

of common policies.

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The article was first published at [Creativehubs.net/](https://Creativehubs.net/) where you can read the full interview of Carlos Alcobia