

## GAP ANALYSIS COPE 2020

### ITALY

Italy has a long history about non-profit organisations, cooperatives and social enterprises.

Thanks to the Italian Constitution (art. 2, 3, 18, 38, 45 and 118) and Christian values, the associative movement had the opportunity to develop and structure itself during the years, giving rise to associations, voluntary organisations, charities and mutual benefit societies, foundations, cooperatives and social enterprises.

The first cooperative in Italy, a consumer cooperative, was born in 1854 and was named “Magazzino di previdenza”, placed in Torino.

At the end of 2019, the cooperative movement comprehends the following numbers: 79.000 cooperatives, over one 1.800.000 employees and 131 billion € in turnover. The main regions by number of cooperatives are: Sicily (12.094), Lombardy (10.647), Lazio (8.865), Campania (8.805) and Emilia-Romagna (4.786). In particular, the region with the highest number of turnover is Emilia-Romagna (40.680 million €)<sup>1</sup>.

For the rank “Top 300 largest cooperative and mutual organisations by turnover/GDP per capita”<sup>2</sup>, in Italy we have: Coop (23°), Conad (26°), Cattolica Assicurazioni (61°), Reale Mutua (67°), Agricola Tre Valli (140°), GESCO (180°), CEF (196°), SACMI (198°), Gruppo ITAS (208°), Granlatte (209°), Unione Farmaceutica Novarese (226°), Coopservice (262°), Banca Popolare di Sondrio (263°), Conserve Italia (279°) and CNS (294°).

Based on the Italian culture and the increase numbers of the cooperative movement, in Italy were born different kinds of organisations of representation, assistance and protection of the cooperative movement and social enterprises, such as: **Confcooperative** <sup>3</sup>, **Legacoop** <sup>4</sup> and **AGCI** <sup>5</sup>. Each organisation is member of an important European and international organisation that represents cooperation, contributing to the protection and promotion of this movement.

<sup>1</sup> <https://mk0wwwaicconitmk98w.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rapporto-Biennale-Cooperazione-2018-2019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.euricse.eu/it/publications/world-cooperative-monitor-2020/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.confcooperative.it/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.legacoop.coop/quotidiano/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.agci.it/>

**Confcooperative** (Confederazione Cooperative Italiane) was established in 1919 and is one of the biggest confederation that represents the Italian's cooperative movement. In 1947, the Italian law recognised officially the social function of cooperation through the art. 45 of the Italian Constitution. Confcooperative inspires its action on the social doctrine of the Catholic Church and the aim is to represent, assist, protect and audit the cooperative movement. It promotes the development, the growth and the diffusion of the cooperative movement through its regional (22), territorial unions (46), and one in Bruxelles.

Over the years, Confcooperative has implemented a policy sensitive to the needs and changes of the social, civil and economic world. That allows the constant increase of members. In 2019 the Confederation is composed by **18.117 cooperatives**, 531.836 employed person and 68.865 million € turnover achieved.

**Legacoop** (Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative e Mutue) was born in 1892, being another confederation representing the Italian's cooperative movement. It inspires its action on the socialist and laic values. Legacoop aims also to represent, assist, protect and audit the cooperative movement. In 2019 is composed by **10.697 cooperatives**, 448.490 employees and 82.780 million € turnover achieved. It promotes the development, the growth and the diffusion of the cooperative movement through its regional and territorial unions.

**AGCI** (Associazione Generale Cooperative Italiane) was born in 1952 and inspires its action on the republican, liberal and social-democratic values. AGCI aims to represent, assist, protect and review the cooperative movement. It promotes the development, the growth and the diffusion of the cooperative movement through 19 regional, 7 provincial and 5 interprovincial representations. In 2017 is composed by **6.054 cooperatives**, 104.838 employees and has achieved 7.241 million € turnover.

Together, the confederations have decided to create a common model of industrial relations which gave rise to 15 national collective labour agreements and various bilateral bodies. In 2010, the three confederations have decided to promote the birth of a national coordination named **ACI**<sup>6</sup> (Alleanza delle Cooperative Italiane) in order to coordinate the action of representation towards the Government, the Parliament, the European institutions and the social partners. This coordination has allowed the born of different common initiatives such as:

-**Cooperfidi Italia** which has unified nine of the largest credit consortium and now guarantees a big amount of funding;

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.alleanzacooperative.it/>

-**Previdenza Cooperativa** the single supplementary pension fund which represents the fifth fund for members (112.000) and the eighth for assets (1.9 billion €) created from the fusion of the three previous funds (Cooperlavoro, Previcoper, Filcoop);

-**Fon.Coop** the continuous training fund with training interventions that have enriched and developed the skills of workers and cooperative members (13.600 companies, 630.000 workers);

-**CFI** a financial company whose corporate purpose is the temporary participation in the risk capital of cooperatives;

-the negotiated supplementary **health funds** (Coopersalute, Filcoop agricultural and Fasiv) having 110.000 members;

-**Coopform** the bilateral cooperation body that operates on health and safety in the workplace.

### EMILIA-ROMAGNA

In Emilia Romagna Region the cooperative movement starts developing right after the unification of Italy (1861). The first work cooperatives were born in Ravenna, Budrio, Bertinoro, Forlì and Meldola, while in Reggio Emilia and Imola another type were born: consumer cooperatives.

In all the regional territory were developed the rural and mutual banks.

In Emilia-Romagna the role of non-profit organisations has helped the community's growth and development. In particular, the Region has always recognised that the actions of this kind of entities have enable the construction of a democratic participation on different sectors such as social sector, environmental sector, labour sector and health sector.

Thanks to this partnership, Emilia-Romagna is able to realise innovative projects, to take care of social and economic changes, to listen to all people's needs, and to make laws for the communities' well-being. In fact, in 2019, Emilia-Romagna Region has decided to do an Action for the growth of the cooperative movement based on the SDGs<sup>7</sup>:

- the first area is about the promotion and competitiveness of the cooperative movement (goals 8 and 9),
- the second area is about social cooperation and innovation (goals 1, 3, 10 and 11),
- the third area is about the circular economy and sustainable development (goals 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15)

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<sup>7</sup> SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals ([https://unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/sustainable-development-goals/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwna2FBhDPArisACAEC\\_Wr6r7Izixc5SUUvux4LqaBJ2lhr3Q74V1hpaZM\\_ehmfCmQil9tLhgaAhooEALw\\_wcB](https://unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/sustainable-development-goals/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwna2FBhDPArisACAEC_Wr6r7Izixc5SUUvux4LqaBJ2lhr3Q74V1hpaZM_ehmfCmQil9tLhgaAhooEALw_wcB))

- and the fourth area is about training, competencies and governance for the future of cooperative movement (goals 4 and 5).

In Emilia-Romagna there are 4.786 cooperatives<sup>8</sup>, 639 recognised associations<sup>9</sup>, 426 foundations<sup>10</sup> and other not recognised non-profit organisations. Currently, the main sectors are: services (974), agricultural (738) and logistic (653) for 40.680 million € turnover achieved.

In Emilia-Romagna there are different confederations and associations that represents cooperative model. Organisations like Confcooperative Romagna, Legacoop and AGCI are developed in different ways on the regional territory.

**Confcooperative Emilia-Romagna** has 20 different local offices and is composed by a significant number of medium-large associated cooperatives. In particular, it is composed by 1.586 cooperatives that employs 88.000 workers and has 27 million € of turnover achieved.

**Legacoop** has got around 10 local offices and is composed by 1.143 cooperatives that employs 178.000 workers and achieved 31,8 million € of turnover.

**AGCI** has 4 local offices and is composed by around 390 cooperatives.

Each organisation gives different services and advice on the basis of the cooperatives' sector and request (i.e. agricultural sector, work and services sector, credit sector, etc.). Each organisation collaborates with local administrations, universities, private organisations, training institutions, labour associations, business actors and other organisations to promote the cooperative model around Emilia-Romagna.

### CONF COOPERATIVE ROMAGNA

Confcooperative Romagna is one of the territorial union headquarters, located in the south east of Emilia-Romagna Region.

Confcooperative Romagna's purpose is to help cooperatives during their activities, to take charge of their problems, to be involved in the community and to develop new innovative projects and services. It has different areas of specific expertise to attend its cooperatives: legal, environmental, social, cultural, tourism and sport, agriculture, financial and credit, health, labour, production and services,

<sup>8</sup> <https://mk0wwwaicconitmk98w.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rapporto-Biennale-Cooperazione-2018-2019.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://wwwservizi.regione.emilia-romagna.it/registropersonegiuridiche/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://wwwservizi.regione.emilia-romagna.it/registropersonegiuridiche/>

tax area, cooperative's audit, promotion of cooperative entrepreneurship, and the area dedicated to youth.

It consists in 640 members, 35.000 employed person and 7 million € turnover achieved.

Confcooperative Romagna collaborates with a lot of local and private organisations (trade unions, local and regional administrations, employee funds, banks, business actors, non-profit organisations, political groups, universities, schools and training institutions) and takes part in different local, regional and European projects.

Thanks to these partnerships, Confcooperative Romagna contacted different local organisations to collect questionnaires and interviews for "COPE project": cooperatives associations and trade associations, associated cooperatives, cooperative banks, training institutions, University of Bologna, AICCON (Italian Association for the Promotion of the Cooperation and Non-profit Culture).

To engage participants, these entities used their direct contacts and prepared emails with all the information about the project.

It collected quantitative and qualitative data through:

- QUESTIONNAIRES,
- INTERVIEWS,
- FOCUS GROUPS.

The interviews and focus groups have made and recorded with an online platform. Each interviewee signed the informed consent. Moreover, each interview and focus group has been coordinated by a moderator and facilitator to help the discussion between the participants.

## **QUESTIONNAIRES**

It has been collected **33** questionnaires, composed by 8 questions to understand better the needs of the target group of the training on entrepreneurship education, the main topics and their methods.

The results were:

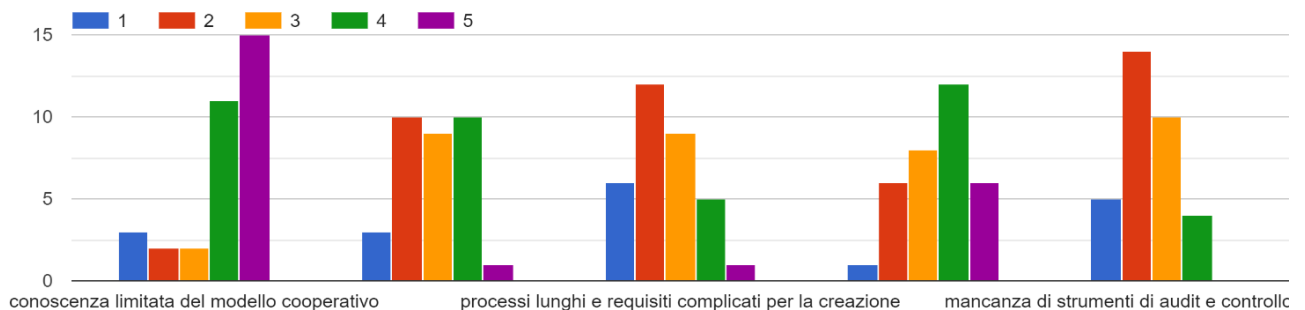
- 1. Have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education for how long?**
  - Less than 3 years: 16%
  - Between 3 and 5 years: 25%
  - More than 5 years: 59%
- 2. Who is your main target group?**
  - Groups in pre-start-ups phase: 38%

- Students at University: 3%
- Unemployed people interested in entrepreneurship: 7%
- Other: 52%, specifying: high school students, trainers and entrepreneurs

**3. Please rate the importance of the following aspects pertaining to obstacles encountered when creating new cooperatives: (1 being less relevant and 5 more relevant)**

- limited knowledge of the cooperative model: 15 answers with level '5': more relevant
- lack of financing tools designed for cooperatives: 10 answers with level '4': relevant, and 10 answers with level '2': little less
- long and complicated process and requirements for creation: 12 answers with level '2': little less
- lack of trainings: 12 answers with level '4': relevant
- lack of cooperative audit and control tools: 14 answers with level '2': little less

Valuta l'importanza dei seguenti aspetti relativi agli ostacoli incontrati durante la creazione di nuove cooperative: (1 meno rilevante, 5 più rilevante)

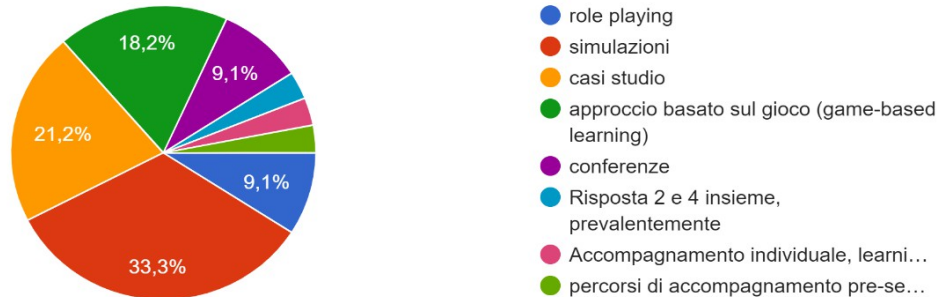


**4. Which of these learning methods do you use to improve learning development?**

- Role-Play: 9%
- Simulation: 34%
- Case study: 21%
- Games- based training: 18%
- Lecture: 9%
- Other: 9%

Quale tra questi metodi di formazione utilizzi per migliorare l'apprendimento nei corsi sull'educazione all'imprenditorialità?

33 risposte

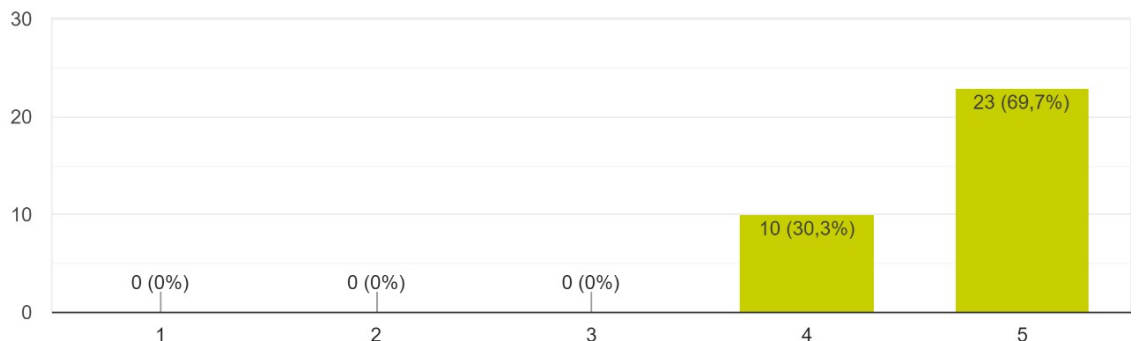


## 5. How important is it to present the cooperative model as an alternative business model?

(Linear scale 1 to 5, being 1 not relevant and 5 very relevant)

Quanto è importante presentare il modello cooperativo come modello di business alternativo?

33 risposte



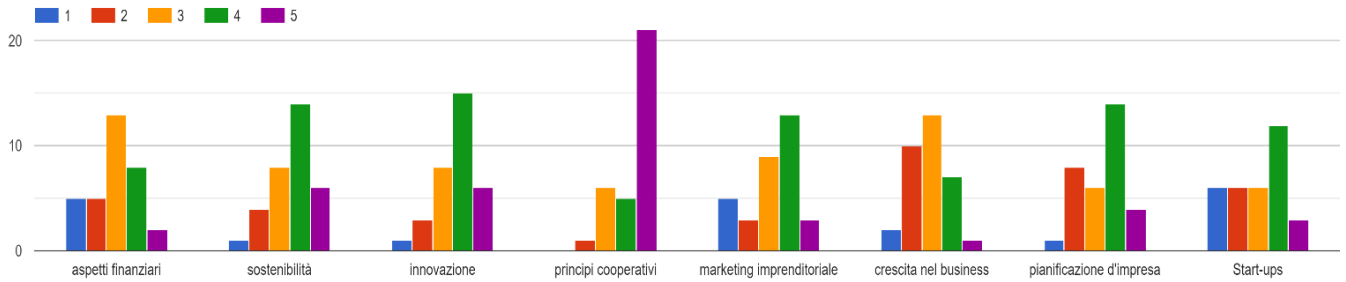
## 6. Which of the following topics is explored most in your training? (being 1 less explored and 5 more explored)

- Financial aspects: 39% (sufficiently explored)
- Sustainability: 42% (explored)
- Innovation: 15% (explored)
- Cooperative principles: 64% (more explored)
- Entrepreneurial marketing: 39% (explored)



- Scaling in business: 39% (sufficiently explored)
- Business planning: 42% (explored)
- Start-ups: 36% (explored)

Quale dei seguenti argomenti viene approfondito maggiormente nella tua formazione? (1 meno approfondito -5 più approfondito)



## 7. According to your experience, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?

- 13 people answered: principles and values of the cooperative model and the differences with the other economic models;
- 5 people answered: scaling in business, business planning and financial aspects;
- 9 people answered: simulation, work group, case study, testimony, guided tour, networking with other organisations;
- Other answer was training of the cooperatives' members.

## 8. According to your experience, what makes a training on cooperative entrepreneurship successful?

20 people answered: meetings with senior entrepreneurs, guided tour, simulation and alternating between school and work (traineeships).

## CONSIDERATIONS

Thanks to these quantitative data, it is possible to identify two different groups:

- the first (group A) is composed by trainers that have a long experience (more than 5 years) and their biggest target group is (new) entrepreneur.



- b) the second (group B) is composed by trainers that have a long experience (more than 5 years) and their biggest target group is high schools students.

The answers were analysed focused on these two groups.

**Group A** (11 participants):

- **Please rate the importance of the following aspects pertaining to obstacles encountered when creating new cooperatives?** The biggest obstacle is the limited knowledge of the cooperative model (6 people), the lack of financing tools designed for cooperative and the lack of trainings (4 people).
- **Which of these learning methods do you use to improve learning development?** The most used is case study (5 people).
- **How important is it to present the cooperative model as an alternative business model?** 8 people considered it important.
- **Which of the following topics is explored most in your training?** The main topics explored are cooperative principles, business planning, financial aspects and start-ups.
- **According to your experience, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?** The main aspects missing or to be developed in training are the promotion of the cooperative model as an alternative business model, to work on projects and case studies, the audio-video materials and networking process.
- **According to your experience, what makes a training on cooperative entrepreneurship successful?** The main aspects are bring testimony to the class, as well as case studies, work in projects, be concrete during the training and know the background of the participants.

**Group B** (9 participants):

- **Please rate the importance of the following aspects pertaining to obstacles encountered when creating new cooperatives?** The biggest obstacle is the limited knowledge of the cooperative model (6 people); being quite relevant the lack of financing tools designed for cooperative (5 people); and the lack of trainings (4 people).
- **Which of these learning methods do you use to improve learning development?** Simulation is the method used by most of them (5 people).
- **How important is it to present the cooperative model as an alternative business model?** 7 people considered it important.

- **Which of the following topics is explored most in your training?** The main topics explored are sustainability, innovation and cooperative principles.

- **According to your experience, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?** The main aspects missing or to be developed are the promotion of cooperative model as an alternative business model, guided tour and simulation.

- **According to your experience, what makes a training on cooperative entrepreneurship successful?** The main aspects are bring testimony, simulation and to be concrete during the training.

In general, both groups said that the main obstacles for the creation of new cooperatives were the lack of knowledge about cooperative model and the lack of training. For group A the useful method is the case study, while for the group B is the simulation. Then, for both groups, is important to present the cooperative model as an alternative business model. The main topic explored in both cases is cooperative principles, but group A fosters aspects such as economic topics, while group B explores aspects such as sustainability and innovation. For both groups, the promotion of the cooperative model as an alternative business model should be increased in a training. In both cases, the main aspect that makes a training on cooperative entrepreneurship successful is to bring the testimony.

In conclusion, to allow a better growth of cooperative movement and, in general, the social economy of the institutions, organisations and confederations must invest in more training to raise the knowledge about the cooperative model as an alternative business model, involve more testimony of cooperative entrepreneurs and use simulation or guided tour to make this kind of business more concrete and available to people and communities.

## **INTERVIEWS**

It has been submitted around 15 questions to different actors located in the Romagna area.

The interviews were submitted to:

- **Andrea Pazzi** – Chief Executive Confcooperative Romagna (Cooperative association)
- **Barbara Bovelacci** – Innovative actions and strategies area and project Manager of Technè (Training institution)
- **Cristina Borghesi** - Manager ISCOM Training for Enterprise - Confcommercio

- **Chiara Piva** – Federcasse mutuality development and training office (Cooperative credit bank federation)
- **Federica Bandini** – Professor of Management for social economy – Campus Forlì – Alma mater Studiorum University of Bologna
- **Giancarlo Turchi** – Social enterprise, social cooperative and welfare area Confcooperative Romagna
- **Katia Gulino** - Social cooperative area Confcooperative Romagna
- **Lia Benvenuti** - Chief Executive Technè (Training institution)
- **Luca Bartoletti** - Chief Executive Irecoop Forlì-Cesena (Cooperative Training institution)
- **Matteo Marchi** – Manager Legacoop Forlì-Cesena (Cooperative association)
- **Renato Lelli** - Chief Executive AGCI (Cooperative association)
- **Riccardo Guardigli** – Manager training area in CNA (Trade association)
- **Paolo Venturi** - Chief Executive AICCON (Italian Association for the Promotion of Cooperation and Non-profit Culture)
- **Pier Nicola Ferri** – Services and production area Confcooperative Romagna
- **Simone Ferri** - Chief Executive Ce.se.co. Soc. Coop.

Questions for interviews:

**For how long have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education? How did you accumulate the knowledge you currently have?** Most of interviewees have a long experience (20 years on the average), in promoting entrepreneurship education, having accumulated their knowledge by working directly in the field and through training.

*“I’ve been a professor for 28 years and I have accumulated my knowledge by training, research in different universities in Italy and working in the field.” (Federica Bandini).*

**How do you and your organisation work in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship with adults (i.e., working individually or with groups)?** The working methods are several: Some of the interviewees work firstly individually and then in team; some with groups; some during their work activities try to engage new interesting ideas; and other organise events and workshops to attract new entrepreneurs.

*“We do the university education such as the course in management for social economy<sup>11</sup> (two courses on the cooperative model), master in cooperation, executive master’s in social enterprise, a module in collaboration with Legacoop Romagna based on the promotion of the cooperative model to all the students of Bologna university.” (Federica Bandini).*

*“We plan our training, first of all, on the cultural elements, we organise a lot of events such as “Le giornate di Bertinoro per l’Economia Civile<sup>12</sup>” to promote cooperative entrepreneurship, by our research e.g. social innovation, we are partner of the master in cooperation “MUEC<sup>13</sup>” of Bologna University and by networking.” (Paolo Venturi).*

*“I managed the one-stop shops for businesses in Confcooperative Ravenna for 15 years. The method is a first meeting with the new members to discuss the business idea and the second step are different activities to support the constitution of the new cooperative. We work in team to assist and support all the needs and requests of the members and the business idea (training about cooperative model, democratic management, business plan, credit...). We organise different courses in the schools in collaboration with an associated cooperative and the main topics are values and principles of the cooperative model and business plan. We have organized another training course in collaboration with Giovanni Dalle Fabbriche Foundation for cooperative managers and new cooperative members. In this case, the training module is based on economic aspects and management aspects. Now, we have another course in collaboration with Irecoop called “ALTAMENTE <sup>14</sup>” for the board of directors of the cooperatives, where the main topics are cooperative values and principles, relationship between member and cooperative, board of directors, annual financial statements, financial aspects and business planning, communication and work in team, sustainability and business ethics.” (Pier Nicola Ferri).*

**How do you reach your target group?** Most of interviewees organise advertising campaigns through social networks, web sites, newsletters and press, to reach the target group. In many cases, they have direct contact with schools or other territorial organisations to create specific projects or to participate in regional calls. In other cases, they organise events or workshops to reach the target group. Finally, they promote their services or projects through the main media channels.

*“We have two different levels: in one hand, Federcasse organise specific territorial youth groups (in each credit bank territorial cooperative there is a youth group) and, in the other hand, the cooperative’s*

<sup>11</sup> <https://corsi.unibo.it/magistrale/EconomiaSociale>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.legionatedibertinoro.it/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.unibo.it/it/didattica/master/2020-2021/economia-della-cooperazione-muec-1>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.irecoop.it/corsi/altamente-scuola-alta-formazione-ravenna/>

credit banks are free to share training initiatives through web site, flyers, social networks.” (Chiara Piva).

“First of all, we receive people who has a business idea; we have an incubator in Rimini “Primo Miglio<sup>15</sup>” and we participate to the meetings organised, promoting the cooperative model; every year we do a course in the local schools called “SCOOP<sup>16</sup>”; we collaborate with schools for the alternation between school and work, an Italian program for traineeships; we collaborate with the University of Bologna and the Certified Public Accountants Register.” (Katia Gulino).

“We have direct contact with the schools’ coordinators and teachers, and during the meetings we present the projects and modules. In the past years, we reached about 10.000 participants. Moreover, we have specific office in CNA called “CREA IMPRESA”, where the consultants support and assist the business idea (e.g. business plan...). We participate in some Calls of Emilia-Romagna Region for the promotion of the entrepreneurship. We’re thinking about a permanent school project, where the senior entrepreneurs help and assist the junior entrepreneurs.” (Riccardo Guardigli).

**Which groups or sectors have reached out to you as an instructor? Where is the strongest demand for the cooperative model?** Most of interviewees said that the strongest demand for the cooperative model was local demand. In fact, the cooperative model is able to respond in equal way to the requests of the communities such as workers, young generation and families. The cooperative model is based on values and principles that have the goal to reduce inequalities, to achieve a democratic governance, to respond to the need of the community and to be innovative about social and environmental issues.

“We are present in the local community, with the public administrations, other associations, schools, local Parish, where we can reach young people. We try to reach all the requests, needs and wishes, sharing useful information.” (Giancarlo Turchi).

“Yes, the local sector. The users participate in our course, because they want to implement activities, services, and products to answer to community’s needs.” (Luca Bartoletti).

**Did you organise mentoring activities for groups in pre-start-up phase?** A lot of interviewees organise different mentoring activities such as specific meetings, training modules or specific projects. In other case, they participate in Regional Calls or European projects about start up.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.primomigliostartup.com/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.confcooperative.it/LInformazione/Notizie-Quotidiano/forl236-cesena-e-rimini-i-vincitori-di-scoop>

*“Yes, thanks to GIM<sup>17</sup> (European project), we had to assist and support foreign people setting up a business. We organise two different courses: advanced ad basic. Once finished the modules, we do some mentoring activities to answer the questions about specific topics learnt during the course. We have recruited some business actors in our community as “tutors” to help our participants (i.e. for a food truck business, the tutor is a chef). We have a lot of partners in this project such as business actors, external consultants, accountants, accelerator and incubator enterprise, trade associations and other companies.” (Barbara Bovelacci).*

*“Yes, for youth group. We assist them in pre-start-up phase and in the development phase in collaboration with the local cooperative credit banks and federations. We give them the principal elements and share with them the national initiatives and programmes that exists. We work with them on the training. In the past, we organised a course called “Buona Impresa”, in which we informed the young members on the principal elements to create a new cooperative. Everything is shared through an APP. In the end, the local cooperative credit bank assists operatively the group to start a cooperative.” (Chiara Piva).*

*“We organise the course in collaboration with external consultant, especially for the feasibility study of the business plan and with the support of a tutor-entrepreneur who has a lot of experience in the sector chosen by the new entrepreneurs.” (Lia Benvenuti).*

*“Yes, we organise mentoring and coaching activities such as training courses (once in presence, now through online platforms). We have a Call called “COOP START UP<sup>18</sup>” and activities in the schools.” (Matteo Marchi).*

*“We assist the new group for the first time when designing the idea, from the constitution of the cooperative to the start of the activities. Then, we offer other services to the new cooperative such as managing the accounting, fiscal aspects and assessing pay. The aim is to give all the information to the new members, and to help and support the business. We offer, at the same time, mentoring and monitoring.” (Simone Ferri).*

**How do you plan and implement training courses on cooperative entrepreneurship? Are you following training modules?** There are three different groups: a) the first group (cooperative associations, cooperative banks, trade associations and training institution), plan and implement the training course on the basis of the requests of the cooperatives’ members, creating specific modules

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<sup>17</sup> <https://gimimpresamondo.com/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.coopstartup.it/>



in collaboration with local training institutions and consultants; b) the second group (trade associations and training institutions), plan and implement the training courses on the basis of the guide lines of the regional calls; c) the third group (university), plan and implement the courses on the basis of the request of the market.

*“The training courses are based on content and topics in the Regional Calls and European Social Fund. We follow updating courses such as marketing, communication, software and digital platforms and privacy issues. We have an annual training plan.”* (Cristina Borghesi).

*“We have some annual appointments such as national forum of youth members, meeting with the referent of the youth group and winter school (e.g. the last topics have been credit cooperation and sustainable finance). We organise some internal courses such as digitalization, public speaking or other specific courses. In the last year, a new training organisation was born, the cooperative school CCB, with different courses for administrators, being the main topics cooperative identity and law.”* (Chiara Piva).

*“We have a lot of courses based on the promotion of cooperative model and each course has got a different range of topics, activities and credits. For example, in the Cooperative Economy Master for adults, the main subjects are cooperation and innovation, institutions, market and cooperative enterprise, cooperative and sustainability, culture and history of the cooperative movement, annual financial statements, innovation, digital transformation and organisational impacts, mission, governance and accountability, performance measurement, strategy and organisation, cooperative law, cooperative governance and possible scenarios.”* (Federica Bandini).

*“We organise a lot of internal course, like team building course or guided tours. Every 15 days, we do specific internal course such as training prepared by the consultant senior for the consultant junior. At the beginning of the year, I make a survey to understand the training needs of my colleagues, like digitalization, marketing or English course.”* (Lia Benvenuti).

**Which are the training topics?** Most of interviewees said that the main topics are: the differences between the cooperative model and the capitalistic model, values and principles, governance, business plan, financial aspects, performance audit, internal and external communication.

*“We explain the main differences between the cooperative model and the capitalistic model; the vision, mission and the aim of the cooperative model; the mutualistic relationship between the cooperative and its members.”* (Andrea Pazzi).



*“In the advanced course, the main topics are digital marketing, digitalized services, financial aspects, business plan, performance audit, legal aspects, export to their origin Country, access to credit and funding, fundraising and crowdfunding and access to local administration services. In the basic course, the main topics are digital marketing, financial aspects, business plan, legal aspects, export to their origin Country, access to credit, fundraising and crowdfunding and access to local administration services. In particular, we do the business plan of each project through a workshop.” (Barbara Bovelacci).*

*“The main topics are values and principles of the cooperative model, number of the members, governance, responsibilities of the board, duties and rights of the members, management of the cooperative, financial and fiscal tools and, based on the sector of the cooperative, we explain the network and how to contact the stakeholders like public administrations.” (Giancarlo Turchi).*

*“The main topics are cooperative identity, values and principles, social innovation, cooperative model in Europe, community cooperative, social entrepreneurship, digitalization and platforms cooperativism, mutuality, measurement of the impact and Agenda 2030. The main tools are lectures, case study and workshops.” (Paolo Venturi).*

### **In your training courses how did you present the financial aspects and the business planning?**

Most of interviewees agreed on the importance to start by explaining the economic and financial aspects, since it is a strategic aspect.

*“We have specialized consultants who use the traditional training with lectures and project works.” (Matteo Marchi).*

*“We explain these topics based on the needs of the users (e.g. in the middle school we give some basic notions about economic aspects, while in the high school we give more specific information about business plan).” (Riccardo Guardigli).*

*“For adults, we do a general introduction and we try to understand their background, then we create the business plan based on the business idea. For the students, we do a general introduction and we try to understand their background, then through a simulation, we create a business plan based on the idea.” (Pier Nicola Ferri).*

**In your training courses how do you present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model?** The interviewees use different ways to explain cooperative principles and governance model such as simulation or work on projects.

*“I present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model through a trip simulation, where the students have to choose the boat, the crew and the direction and, after their choices, I introduce model, values, principles and governance.” (Katia Gulino).*

### **How do you present, in your training courses, the topics of sustainability and innovation?**

Some of the interviewees present these topics thanks to the ONU SDGs, while others use some Regional Calls based on these subjects.

*“I present these topics thanks to the 2030 Agenda or with other innovative type of cooperative such as workers buyout cooperative of community cooperative and so on.” (Katia Gulino).*

*“Yes, we explain process and product innovation in schools, but we hope that the next Regional Call will be based on these elements. Once, we based a course on the women’s entrepreneurship, digitalization and technological innovation.” (Riccardo Guardigli).*

### **How did you introduce the topics of entrepreneurial marketing and scaling in business? Most**

of interviewees introduced these topics through lectures and projects’ work, or contemporarily to the business plan and market survey. Others said that these topics are explained through specific Regional Calls.

*“We have a specialized consultant that use the traditional training with lectures and project work.” (Matteo Marchi).*

*“In schools we try to explain these topics in the best way we can; while we organise a module on the local marketing for our enterprises based on the Regional Call “STRATEGIE D’IMPRESA”.” (Riccardo Guardigli).*

### **Which training methods do you use to improve learning development (Case study, Games-based training, lecture, Role-Play, simulation...)? Which ones do you think are more suitable?**

Some interviewees use e-learning platforms or APPs; others use simulation, role play, storytelling and testimony. The main concern of all is to understand the background and the expectations of the participants.

*“We have created an e-learning platform free to all the participants, with different modules on demand. We have personalized every tutoring activities thanks to our partnerships. We have organised testimonials and workshops.” (Barbara Bovelacci).*

*“Case study, role playing, lecture, testimonials and project work.” (Federica Bandini).*

*“First of all, the trainers need to be prepared and qualified. Then we should to use all the tools to create a good participation (e.g. case study, project work...). It is important to understand the background and the expectations of the students.” (Luca Bartoletti).*

*“We do theory lessons and simulation with the new members (business plan, economic and financial aspects, bankability indicators...). Recently, we have done a course on the enterprise crisis code (theory lessons and final practise).” (Simone Ferri).*

**According to your experience, as instructor, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?** Most of interviewees agreed that is necessary to increase the promotion of the cooperative model, being still unknown. Moreover, for the interviewees is important to create modules on internal and external communication, soft skills and projects’ impact. Finally, it might be useful to collect best practices around the world to compare other experiences and models.

*“The cooperative model is quite unknown; the first thing is to spread this model around the communities and the countries.” (Matteo Marchi).*

*“One thing is the internal and external communication and the measurement of the impact of the activities. For the new cooperatives, we try to explain the importance of the measurement of the impact in terms of social, environmental and economic aspects.” (Katia Gulino).*

*“Innovative and creative elements. The training has to allow the development of different characteristics of the people in term of competences and soft skills (e.g. work ethic or team work).” (Lia Benvenuti).*

*“The main element is the testimony (e.g. a cooperator, a senior entrepreneur...). The second aspect is the confrontation with experiences and models of other Regions and Countries.” (Luca Bartoletti).*

**According to your experience, what makes a training successful? Present a good practice from your experience.** Most of interviewees said that is important to be empathic and make the participants the real actors of the training (active participation through exercises, tutors, be concrete, projects’ work, simulation, and so on). Moreover, is important to explain the cooperative model as a model able to answer to the social challenges and use their feedbacks to plan the next training sessions.

*“When the participants are the protagonists of the training. Currently, we use an attractive platform where the users are stimulated by the notions, the methodologies for communication and training (such as videos, chat...) and the platform display.” (Chiara Piva).*

*“We have to use all the tools such as role playing, lectures and so on, because it’s important to give all the theory notions, but also to make active the participation, through project work, discussion between the students or simulation. Currently, we have a big problem with the online lessons due to coronavirus, because it is more difficult to be active and try to simulate some cases or discuss with the student. Despite of that, we have tried all the tools. We focus on the valorisation of the students as part of the educational and training process. The point is to share the experiences of the students (junior or senior, such as entrepreneur), trainers, experts, and others. Some difficulties, needs or experiences can be part of the project work or the discussions.” (Federica Bandini).*

*“The capacity of the trainer to be empathic, to understand the needs of the new cooperative members, to create a good participation and to involve actively the students.” (Katia Gulino).*

*“The main aspect is to make clear that the cooperative model is a competitive economic model and it is able to give an added value to the community (i.e. ethic work, democratic participation, corporate social responsibilities).” (Matteo Marchi).*

*“Testimony and storytelling; simulation and work in group on the values and principles of the cooperative model. Another way might be introducing the cooperative model through social challenges, such as inclusion, social relations or democracy.” (Paolo Venturi).*

*“Feedback and exercises.” (Simone Ferri).*

**What are the biggest challenges in your work? And how do you try to overcome these challenges?** Most of the interviewees agree that the biggest challenge is to be innovative and to be in step with the times. About that, the main way to overcome this challenge is to introduce new topics, new tools to answer the participants’ needs, the market’s needs and the needs of the community in general. Another challenge is to clarify to all members the internal procedures, such as the democratic management or the feasibility of projects.

*“We have to be innovative and be in step with the times. Moreover, the training may be personalised on the needs of the participants. It is important to record all the courses to be always accessible. We have to create a solid relationship with the participants.” (Chiara Piva).*

*“To be innovative. Present the course based on the market’s demand, such as risk capital or ethical finance. Each course has to be innovative on topics and methodologies. For example, we presented a course about impact measurement and impact investment.” (Federica Bandini).*

*“We analyse all the aspects about a business project (feasibility, business plan...), but the main aspect is the role of the members with the task to manage and develop the cooperative. In a cooperative, all the decisions are shared by the members. You shouldn’t decide by yourself, you have to share and confront with other members. This is a strength, in one hand. But, sometimes, the democracy can be seen as a waste of time. Nowadays we are used to have all the things immediately, not waiting for anything.” (Giancarlo Turchi).*

*“The biggest challenge is the speed of the social change (new technologies, new tools, new models). We have to be ready to take part to the change and to innovate the training.” (Luca Bartoletti).*

*“Now, the online platforms allow to everybody to be linked, to take part in a course, to be involved, but we don’t forget to personalise the training. For my organisation, the online platforms have enhanced the training offer, having now participants from all the Italian Regions. This period has required a strong management change in all the organisations and institutions, in all sectors.” (Paolo Venturi).*

*“Sometimes we have to say ‘no’ to the business idea. There are some issues to clarify, such as the values and principles of the cooperative model, the democratic governance or the main activities’ market.” (Pier Nicola Ferri).*

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

Each group of interviewees has a long experience in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship and most of them work mainly with groups. They reach their target group through direct contacts, advertising campaigns and events. They agree on the fact that the strongest demand is local and the cooperative model is able to respond to the requests of the communities, because the mission of the cooperative movement is to reduce inequalities and unemployment, to give attention to the social and environmental issues, and to create participation and trust between people and communities. Most of interviewees organise mentoring activities (meetings, training modules, specific projects) or participate in Regional Calls or European projects. The feedbacks about the implementation of the training courses have a very interesting response: interviewees implement the courses on the requests of the cooperatives’ members, based on the guidelines of the Regional Calls, or on the market’s demand.

The main topics are values and principles, governance, business plan, financial aspects, performance audit and internal and external communication. They explain the financial aspects, marketing, principles and governance through simulation and project work. Sustainability and innovation are explained through ONU SDGs. They agree about the fact that the best methods are e-learning

platforms, lecture, simulation, role play, storytelling and testimony. The choice about the method depends on the background and expectations of the participants. Most of interviewees agreed on the importance of three aspects that should be developed: a) increase the knowledge about the cooperative model, b) new topics such as communication, soft skills and impact, c) and the confrontation with best experiences and models around the world. They all defend that a successful training is possible when the participants are the real protagonists and when there are a lot of feedbacks to improve the next training. The biggest challenges are to keep being innovative and in step with times, to introduce new topics and tools, and to answer to the market's demand and communities' needs.

## **FOCUS GROUPS**

Two focus groups were organised, with 3 participants each.

In the **first focus group** the participants are:

- **Davide Pieri** – Confcooperative Emilia Romagna
- **Laura Filippi** – Member of Librazione social cooperative
- **Silvia Pirini Casadei** – Responsible of the credit area in Confcooperative Romagna and in Ce.se.co. soc. cooperativa

**For how long have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education? How did you accumulate the knowledge you currently have?** Participants are instructors since 2000 and they have gained their knowledge by working directly in the field.

*“I have an economic degree and during the last year I have participated in different trainings. One was about economic management, that promoted collaboration with a lot of cooperatives of our territory. It is important to give all the notions and tools to maintain a solid economic situation.”* (Silvia Pirini Casadei).



**How do you and your organisation work in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship with adults (i.e., working individually or with groups)?** Most of interviewees said that they worked with groups of high schools students or new cooperatives members.

**How do you reach your target group?** Most of interviewees said that they reached their target group through direct contacts.

**Which groups or sectors have reached out to you as an instructor? Where is the strongest demand for the cooperative model?** Some of interviewees had different projects in high schools; others said that the main demand arrives from long time cooperatives, that needs to work on its values, rights and duties of the members; others said that the cooperative model helped the rescue of enterprises in crisis (e.g. workers buyout enterprises).

**Did you organise mentoring activities for groups in pre-start-up phase?** Most of interviewees organised activities with high schools, while others organised mentoring activities especially about economic and financial aspects.

*“Yes, I do especially modules on the financial aspects and the business planning, using simulation methods. Thanks to my economic knowledge, I help members to understand if the activities are sustainable during the years and in the programmed way. I try to make clear that there are some aspects and some tools that can help the members to do an effective and aware leadership.”* (Silvia Pirini Casadei).

**How do you plan and implement training courses on cooperative entrepreneurship? Are you following training modules?** Most of interviewees organised courses based on the participants' needs and, in general, realised modules on the values and principles of the cooperative model and about economic and financial aspect. With the students, it depends on the possibilities of the high schools. All interviewees follow updating courses.

*“Direct contact with professors at the high schools. At the beginning, we did courses about history, values and principles of cooperative model. Then, we started to do the simulation and role play, and, at the end of the course, we gave a prize to the best cooperative projects. Now, we do a lot of online courses, even if the course in presence is a better option, because it allows to be more effective and, before coronavirus, we used to organise a final event, where the groups of students have to present the project to the other groups, professors and other organisations, such as cooperative credit banks.”* (Laura Filippi).



*“Now, we organise online courses. We do some courses in collaboration with other consultants and Irecoop (training institution). I do lessons especially about financial aspects and business plan. Last year, I followed some courses about business plan.” (Silvia Pirini Casadei).*

**Which are the training topics?** The training topics are: values, principles and governance of the cooperative model, financial aspects and business plan.

*“I don’t have a lot of time to explain a lot of topics. I try to concentrate my modules on the values, principles and governance of the cooperative model, and what are the different elements from other economic model. Then, there is a cooperative testimony.” (Davide Pieri).*

*“I do specific course about financial aspects and the business plan and I support and assist the new cooperatives and their members. I organise different meetings with the new cooperatives to give all the information about the financial aspects. I try, in collaboration with other colleagues, to raise awareness about the meaning of being a co-operator and being an entrepreneur.” (Silvia Pirini Casadei).*

**In your training courses how did you present the financial aspects and the business planning?**

Most of interviewees present these topics through a simulation of a business plan based on the project idea. They try to explain the main aspects and, especially with the new entrepreneurs, they clarify that this is one the most important aspect, since all entrepreneur’s idea must be economically sustainable.

**In your training courses how do you present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model?** These aspects are presented through role play and simulation in which students or new entrepreneurs became part of the Director’s board and they have to take a decision through a democratic discussion. It is important to clarify everyone’s role in the board and the duties of each member.

**How do you present, in your training courses, the topics of sustainability and innovation?**

Sustainability is presented and connected with the financial and economic aspects.

**How did you introduce the topics of entrepreneurial marketing and scaling in business?**

Scaling in business is presented together with the financial and economic aspects. At high schools, trainers explain communication and marketing when the students have to prepare the projects’

presentation. The projects are presented during the final event, and the winner is chosen by other students, the professors and the partners (such as banks or cooperatives associations).

**Which training methods do you use to improve learning development (Case study, Games-based training, lecture, Role-Play, simulation...)? Which methods do you think are more suitable?** The interviewees use lectures, role play, simulation and testimony.

*“It depends on the module: if it is a short module, we explain the cooperative model, what it means to work together and how to reach the aims, using the methods of role playing and simulation; if it is a long module, we explain the cooperative model, rights and duties of the members, governance, business plan, marketing aspects, and present the project to the other students, everything also by role playing and simulation.”* (Laura Filippi).

**According to your experience, as an instructor, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?** All agreed with the fact that the cooperative model is not well-known. For that, it would be important to increase training about this model in all the sectors: schools, high schools, universities, training institutions, public administrations, etc. The democratic governance is an aspect to work on, since most of the participants are used to work individually and not in team. It is important to work on soft skills and team building to create trust between the members of the cooperatives.

*“A big problem is to be able to make clear to the younger generation that the main aspect of cooperative model is to work together, to collaborate, to do all the tasks in a democratic way. They are used to work in an individual way. The educational system method thrives them to work individually, not together.”* (Laura Filippi).

**According to your experience, what makes a training successful? Present a good practice from your experience.**

*“The main aspect is to organise a training where the students, the participants are the protagonists/players.”* (Davide Pieri).

*“Training customised according to the participants, use updated tools and be innovative.”* (Laura Filippi).

*“Provide moments where the participants have to make questions or give answers. Create a discussion with the participants.”* (Silvia Pirini Casadei).

**What are the biggest challenges in your work? And how do you try to overcome these challenges?** One challenge is to increase the training about cooperative model and values outside

the cooperative movement, but also promote it inside the cooperatives. It is important to raise awareness about this economic model, but, in the other hand, it is important to continue organise training to the cooperative members. Another aspect is connected with the pandemic crises, that changed the traditional method on doing training, leading trainers to use a lot of online platforms. This new method can be very useful because participants can be involved in the courses being everywhere and at any time, but, in the other hand, the direct contact has been lost and the possibility to share more contents is limited.

*“I graduated in 1995 and I have never heard about cooperative model. I think that, from the 70s to 00s, the main economic model was the capitalist. In the last few years, the cooperative model became the alternative model and, now, we have different university courses. We hear about this on newspapers, tv, social and so on; but we arrived too late. We have to think about the youngest and the next generation. Another challenge is to explain to the senior cooperators that their testimony is very important.”* (Davide Pieri).

*“There is a big problem about the new members in a cooperative, when that is notable to transmit the vision, mission, values and principles of the cooperative model. That means that, sometimes, new members leave after a short period. We have to work about the transmission of the values to the members. Another challenge is to sensibilise to the importance to promote in the schools the cooperative model as an alternative economic model. To explain to the senior cooperators that their testimony is very important, it became a challenge in these days.”* (Laura Filippi).

*“Now, due to coronavirus, it is difficult to pass the message and not always is clear that the users understood the topics. In the other hand, the training online allows you to find more collaborations, because we have eliminated the displacements, making people more available.”* (Silvia Pirini Casadei).

In the **second focus group** the participants are:

- **Barbara Zanetti** – Responsible of the law and environment area and trainer in Confcooperative Romagna
- **Claudia Gatta** – Coordinator of equal opportunities area, trainer and member of Librazione social cooperative
- **Daniela Selvi** – Coordinator, tutor and planner in Irecoop Emilia-Romagna

**For how long have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education? How did you accumulate the knowledge you currently have?** They have been instructors since around 2000 and they got their knowledge mainly by working directly in the field.

*“Since 2000. I have a degree in Law and I have accumulated my knowledge by field experience.”*  
(Barbara Zanetti).

*“Since 1996. I have a degree in Sociology and different course about training. I achieved the first project for promoting cooperative model in schools during the 90s in Ravenna territory. I accumulated my knowledge through field experience.”* (Claudia Gatta).

*“Since 2000. I have a degree in Economy of non-profit enterprises and organisations. I have worked in Serinar (institution of the university) and in a school. Now, I work in Irecoop, a training cooperative. I coordinate different courses for students and unemployed people or new entrepreneurs.”* (Daniela Selvi).

**How do you and your organisation work in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship with adults? (i.e., working individually or with groups).** Most of interviewees work with high school students or with new members of cooperatives, and mainly they organise the training based on the Regional Calls or in collaboration with colleagues or other organisations.

*“Our team is composed by specialised figures (legal, economic, financial and labour area). We work in collaboration with different associations, training institutions, cooperatives and universities.”* (Barbara Zanetti).

*“We work in group. We have courses at schools and courses on entrepreneurship, especially about soft skills. We work in collaboration with different associations, training institutions and other organisations.”* (Claudia Gatta).

**How do you reach your target group?** The interviewees reach the target group through direct contacts and, in general, by advertising campaigns.

**Which groups or sectors have reached out to you as an instructor? Where is the strongest demand for the cooperative model?** The interviewees agreed that the main sector is the agricultural sector followed by the ones where there is a social need.

**Did you organise mentoring activities for groups in pre-start-up phase?** Most of interviewees organised mentoring activities in collaboration with consultants, organisations and associations.

*“Yes, in collaboration with Confcooperative. We organised some training packages: role of the members, governance, networking, communication, and business plan. We organised courses inside the cooperatives about vision, mission, values and principles of the cooperative model and role of the members. We organised courses for the Cooperatives’ board of directors.” (Claudia Gatta).*

**How do you plan and implement training courses on cooperative entrepreneurship? Are you following training modules?** Interviewees implemented the courses based on the participants’ requests or based on the Regional Calls. They follow every year updating courses.

*“We organise the courses on the basis of the needs and background of the participants or the cooperatives.” (Claudia Gatta).*

*“In one hand, we plan the courses on the basis of the guidelines of the Regional Calls, in the other hand, we organise on the basis of the needs and background of the participants. Then we organise the specific module on the request of the teacher/consultant.” (Daniela Selvi).*

**Which are the training topics?** The main topics are vision, mission, values and principles of the cooperative model, role of the members, governance, networking, communication and business plan.

**In your training courses how did you present the financial aspects and the business planning?** They present these topics through a simulation of a business plan based on the project idea.

**In your training courses how do you present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model?** They present these aspects through lectures, role play and simulation. In particular, about the governance, they use the statute of the cooperative to explain the rules of the relationship between member and cooperative.

**How do you present, in your training courses, the topics of sustainability and innovation?** Sustainability is presented while explaining the financial and economic aspects.

**How did you introduce the topics of entrepreneurial marketing and scaling in business?** They explain communication and marketing by project work and lecture.

**Which training methods do you use to improve learning development (Case study, Games-based training, lecture, Role-Play, simulation...)? Which methods do you think are more**

**suitable?** They use lecture, role play, and simulation. Another important element is the feedback of the participants.

*“We use simulation and research. We ask the constant feedback to the participants. Now, we use a lot of online platforms.” (Claudia Gatta).*

**According to your experience, as an instructor, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?** Most of interviewees said that should be organised testimony and guided tours in cooperatives.

*“Guided tour and give the possibility to the students to participate in a Cooperative’s board of directors.” (Barbara Zanetti).*

*“Time, testimony and organise a guided tour.” (Daniela Selvi).*

**According to your experience, what makes a training successful? Present a good practice from your experience.** The main aspect is to be practical and answer to the participants’ needs.

**What are the biggest challenges in your work? And how do you try to overcome these challenges?** For the interviewees, the biggest challenges are future social changes (such as green economy, community...) and the collaboration with the youngsters and next generation.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

Each group of interviewees has a long experience in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship. Most of them work mainly with groups, and in collaboration with other colleagues, associations or consultants. Others based their training on the guidelines of the Regional Calls. They reach the main target through direct contacts or advertising campaigns. They reached high schools, new entrepreneurs, long time cooperatives, in social and agricultural sectors, and members of enterprises in crisis. They organise mentoring activities especially about economic and financial topics and, about promoting the cooperative entrepreneurship. They organise courses based on the participants’ request, that can be cooperatives’ members, new entrepreneurs or students. They follow courses to keep update.

The main topics are mission and vision, values, principles and governance of the cooperative model, financial and economic aspects. Mainly, they present all these topics through lecture, simulation, role play and project work. All the interviewees agreed that this economic model is still unknown,



concluding that an important aspect is to increase training and collaborations to promote the model around the territories. A successful training is based on the requests and feedbacks of the

participants and it should involve the participants as main actors. Is important to design customised training, be practical/concrete and organise guided tours.

The biggest challenges are to raise awareness about economic model, to organise training for the members of the cooperatives, to be innovative and in step with times, to use innovative tools and methods and to be attractive for the new generations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In general, in Italy there is long tradition about cooperative model and there are different organisations that take care about every type of cooperatives. In particular, in Emilia-Romagna there is a great number of cooperatives and an interesting number of turnover achieved, more higher than other Italian Regions. Thanks to that, it has been contacted a lot of participants from cooperatives associations, training institutions, cooperative banks, trade associations, University and cooperatives. In total it has been collected 33 questionnaires, 15 interviews and 2 focus groups. The results of these big number of information can be summarized in some interesting aspects.

First of all, there is a lack of knowledge about cooperative model as an alternative economic model, especially for the new generations. All the interviewees agreed that that this economic model is still unknown, so it is important to increase the training and the partnerships in order to raise the knowledge and awareness around the countries.

Secondly, most of interviewees agreed that the main demand of cooperative model is local and the cooperative model is able to respond to the requests of the communities and to pay attention to the social and environmental issues. Sometimes, the training is directed to cooperative members to grow and raise their role in the cooperative contest and to improve their competencies and skills. Most of the time, the target groups are new entrepreneurs and students. In the first case, the training is specific and complete, from the values and principles, business plan and access to credit until to start the main activity. In the second case, the training is planned to give the mainly notions and to spread the knowledge about the cooperative model.

Thirdly, the main topics are values and principles, governance, business plan and financial aspects and the main tools are traditional methods with testimony, simulation and guided tour.





About training, for all the interviewees it is important to make the participants of the training the real protagonist and request them constant feedbacks to improve modules and tools.

Finally, for all the interviewees the training has to be innovative (new topics and tools, in step with the times, anticipate the market's demand), attractive (for the new generations and for the communities) and concrete (case study, workshop, testimony).





Co-funded by  
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## COPE Project

Promoting innovation through a cooperative model  
in entrepreneurship education for adults

### Data Analysis (IO2)

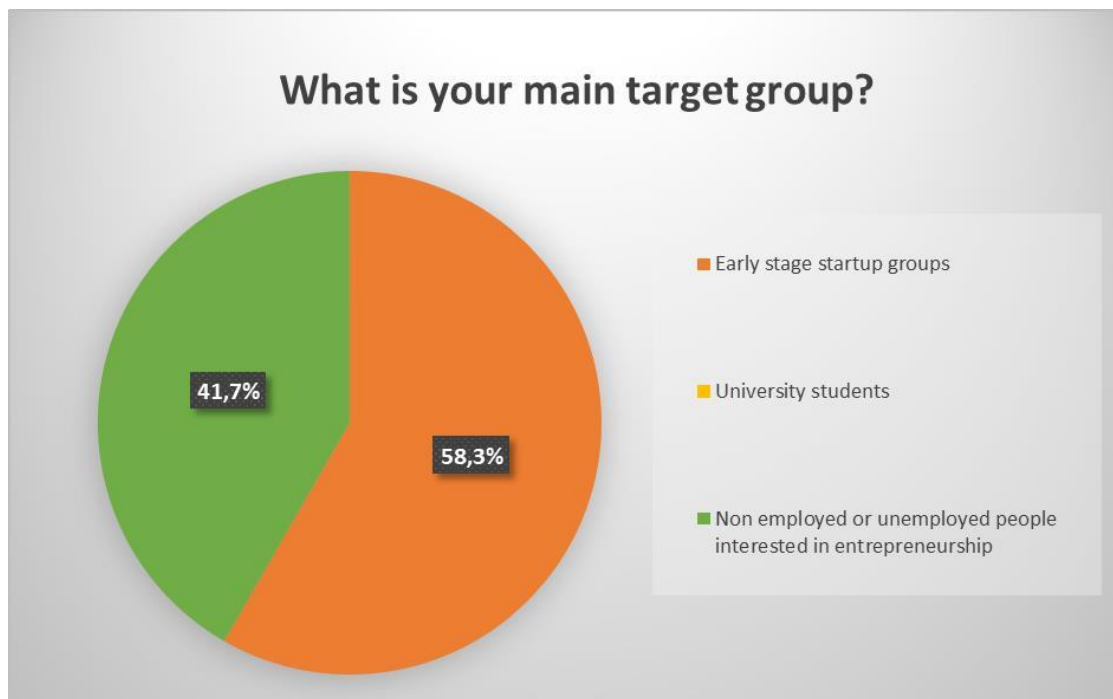


## Analysis of quantitative data

Number of administered questionnaires: 24



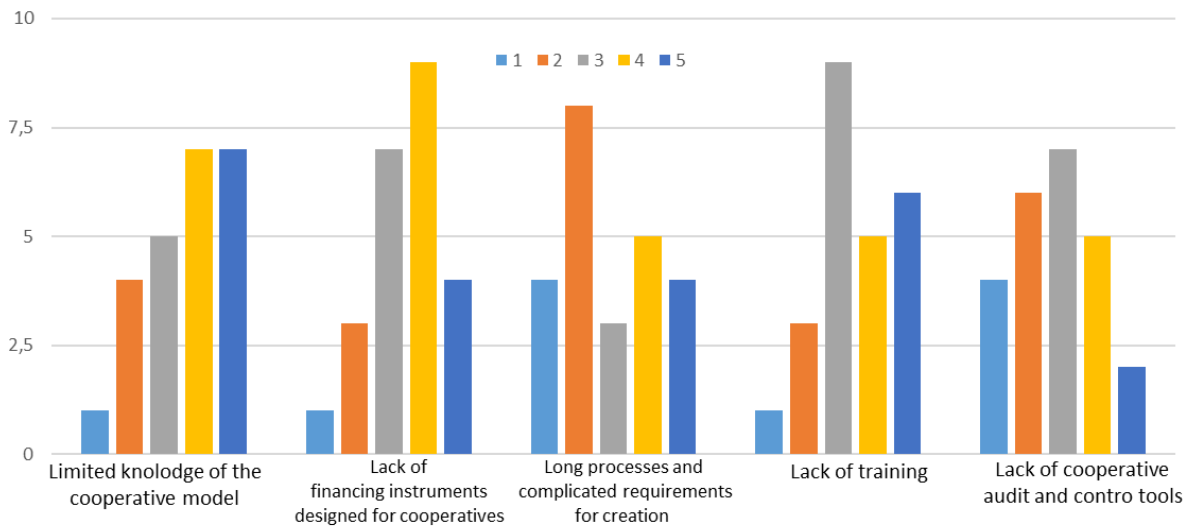
**54.2% of trainers have been promoting entrepreneurship education for more than five years**, so the background of the skills and knowledge of the trainers interviewed is solid.



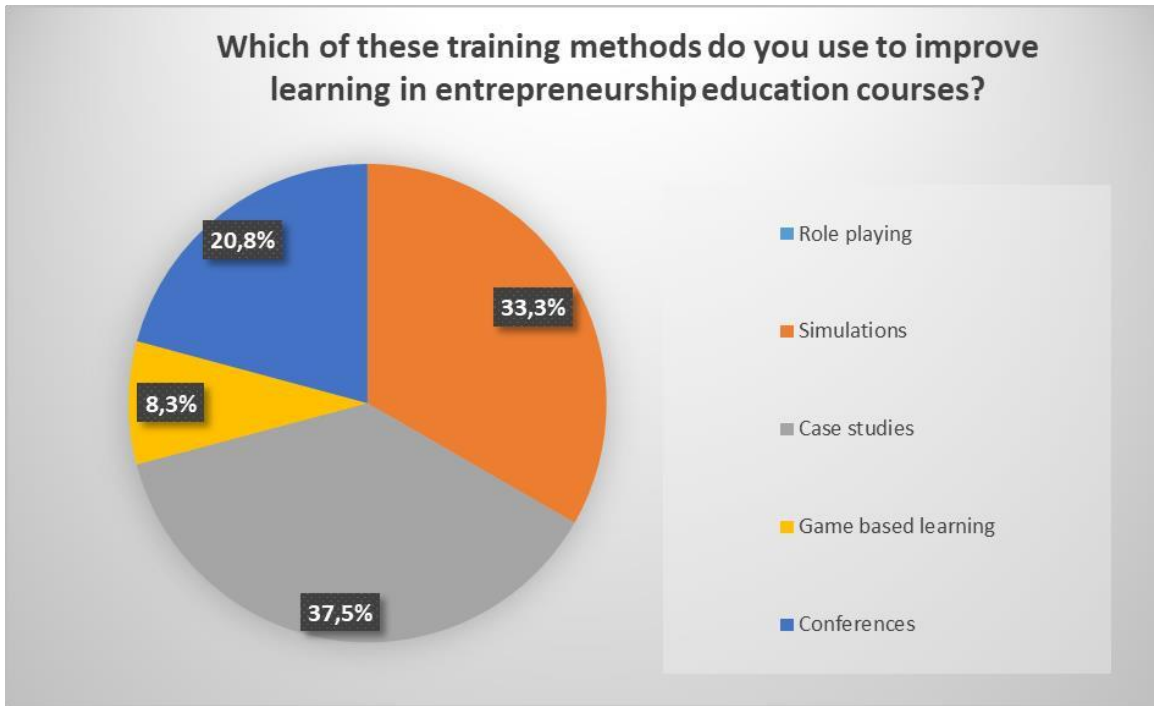
**58.3% of trainers have early stage startup groups as their target group.** This figure highlights the need for adequate training in order to run start-ups, i.e. enterprises that are in the early state of their life cycle and are looking for resources and funding for development.



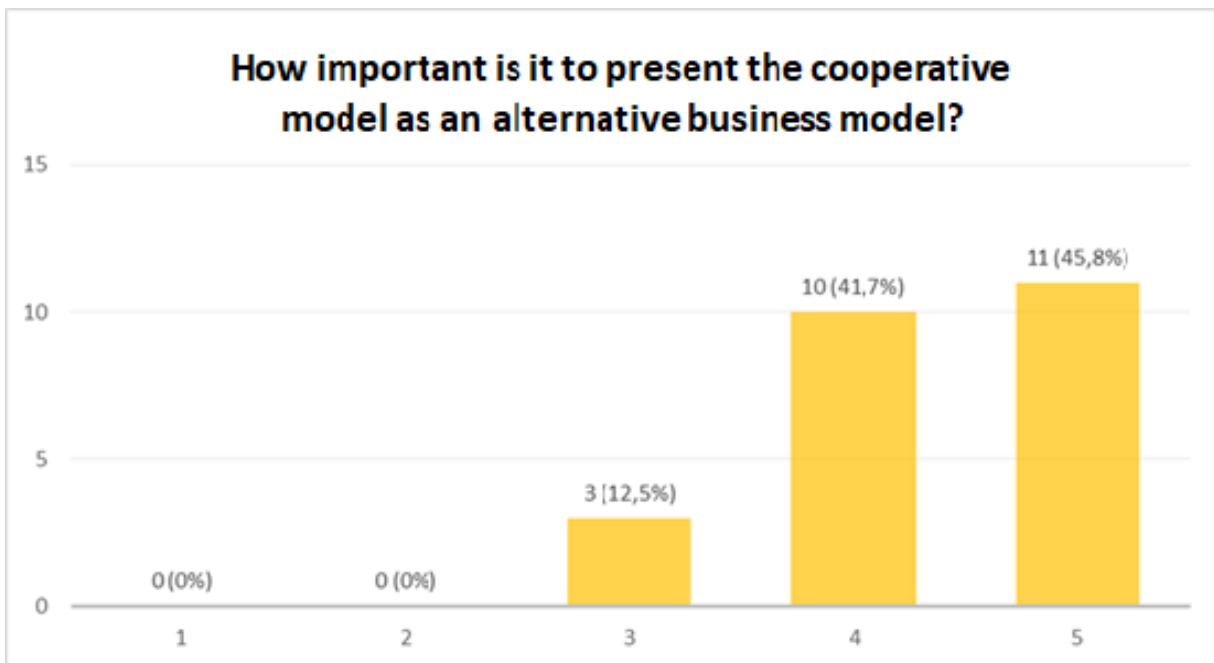
Evaluate the importance of the following obstacles encountered during the creation of new cooperatives: (1 less relevant, 5 more relevant)



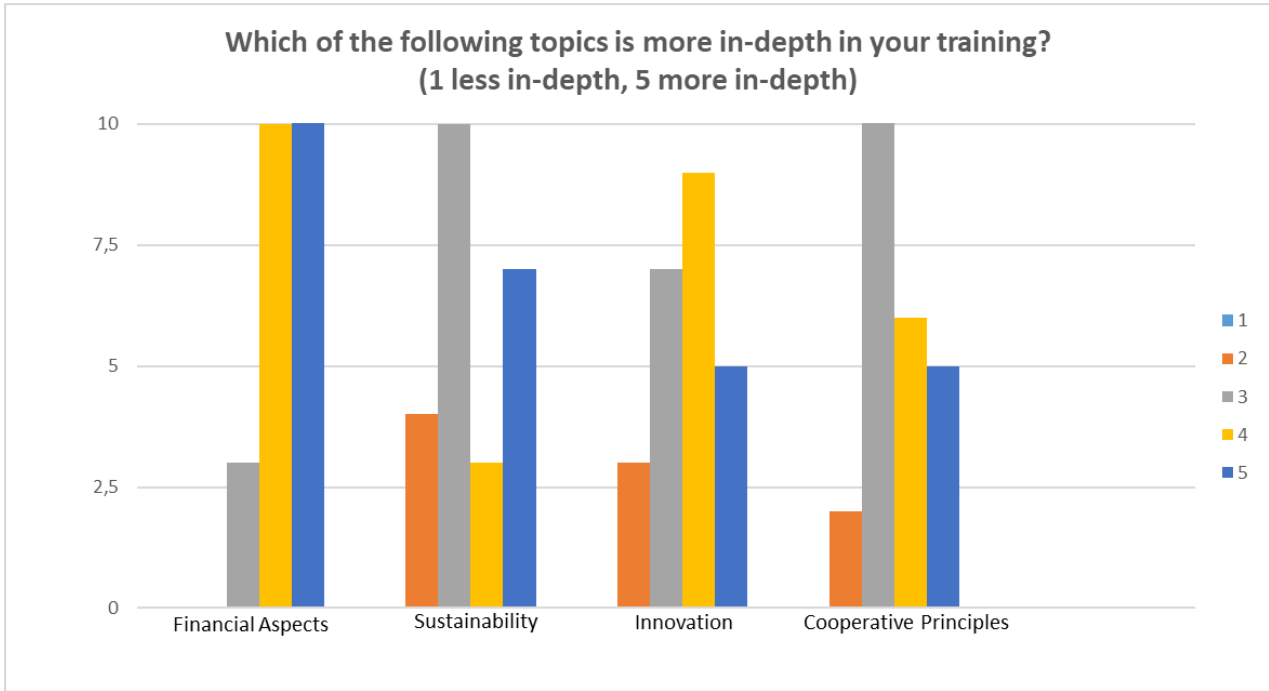
- **Limited knowledge of the cooperative model:**
  - 29.2% replied 5/5, 29.2% replied 4/5.
  - The answers indicate the need to spread knowledge of the cooperative model.
- **Lack of financing instruments designed for cooperatives:**
  - 37.5% replied 4/5, 29.2% replied 3/5.
  - The answers indicate that the lack of financing instruments designed for cooperatives is relevant.
- **Long processes and complicated requirements for creation:**
  - 33.3% replied 2/5, 20.8% replied 4/5.
  - The answers indicate that the processes and requirements for creation should be simplified.
- **Lack of training:**
  - 37.5% replied 3/5, 25% replied 5/5.
  - The lack of training is important among the obstacles encountered during the creation of new cooperatives.
- **Lack of cooperative audit and control tools:**
  - 29.2% replied 3/5, 20.8% replied 4/5.
  - Trainers consider the lack of cooperative audit and control tools to be relevant.



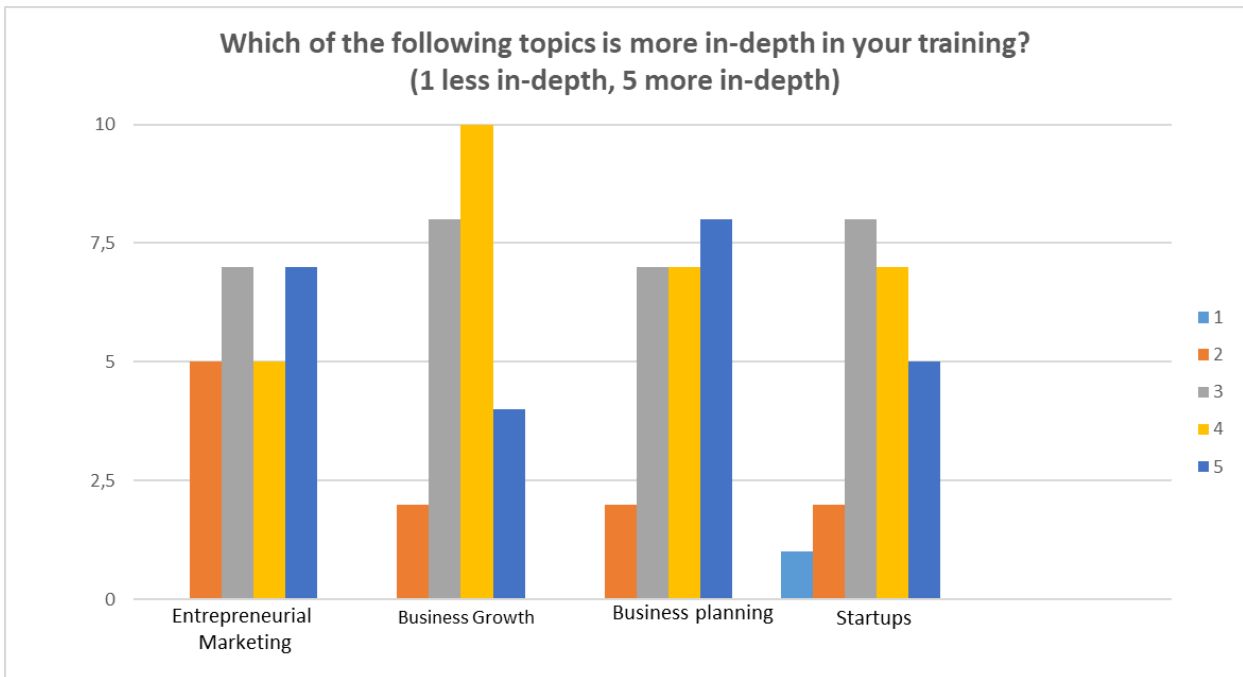
**37.5 % of respondents said they use case studies as a method to improve learning in entrepreneurship education courses. On the other hand, 33% of respondents use simulations.** These data suggest the importance of using teaching methodologies that have a strong link with the practical reality of entrepreneurship.



**45.8% of the trainers surveyed felt it was very important to present the cooperative model as an alternative business model, while 41.7% felt it was quite important.** The analysis of these data implies the presentation of the cooperative model as an alternative business model is relevant.



- **Financial aspects:** 41.6% replied 3/5, 29.2% replied 5/5.
- **Sustainability:** 37.5% replied 4/5, 29.1% replied 3/5.
- **Innovation:** 45.8% replied 3/5, 25% replied 4/5.
- **Cooperative principles:** 45.8% replied 5/5, 37.5% replied 3/5.



- **Marketing:** 29.2% replied 3/5, 29.2% replied 5/5.
- **Business growth:** 41.6% replied 4/5, 33.3% replied 3/5.
- **Business planning:** 33.3% replied 5/5, 29.2% replied 4/5, 29.2% replied 3/5.
- **Startups:** 33.3% replied 3/5, 29.2% replied 4/5.



## Analysis of qualitative data

### Socio-economic context

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a very severe impact on the Italian economy and society. An analysis of the most recent data on employment trends shows that in the fourth quarter of 2020 the labour input measured in terms of ULA (Full-Time Equivalent Work Units) decreases both from a cyclical point of view (-1.7%) and on annual basis (-7.3%); GDP fell by 1.9% and 6.6% respectively. Employment, on the other hand, is on the rise compared to the previous quarter, although still in decline on an annual basis. The impact of the pandemic crisis has been felt clearly throughout the business world, mainly involving small businesses. A recent survey conducted by ProntoPro on a sample of 2000 self-employed and owners of micro-enterprises and small businesses shows that in no region of Italy the support from institutions has been deemed sufficient. While around seven out of ten professionals complain of difficulties opening new businesses, one in two professionals say they have experienced a 50% drop in turnover in the last year. 76% considered the government's economic support for the most distressed groups to be insufficient, although 57% of respondents requested an economic support. A more optimistic attitude concerns the analysis of future scenarios, so much so that 60% of the self-employed are waiting for the launch of an effective plan for access to the Recovery Fund through the PNRR of the Italian Recovery Plan. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the entrepreneurial birth rate is reflected in a significant decrease in the new registrations of cooperatives in the Register of Cooperative Societies held by the Ministry of Economic Development. Empirical checks on cooperatives with first registration in 2020, compared to those of first registration in 2019, show a general decrease in the cooperative birth rate. On the basis of the information available as of January 4, 2021, the reduction in registered entities is, in fact, -26.4% compared to the previous year (2,484 companies in 2020 compared to 3,376 in 2019). As far as the territorial profile is concerned, in the last year there has been a reduction in the number of new registrations of cooperatives throughout the country. The largest decrease was found in the central Italy, with -3.6% compared with the previous year, the least marked in the Islands with -18.2%. In North-East, the decline is -19%, and in the North-West the decrease is -32%. Finally, in the South the decrease stands at -24.2%. Overall, the Mezzogiorno (South and Islands) is confirmed as the territorial area characterized by the highest cooperative birth rate. More than 53.2% of the cooperatives of first registration in the National Register during 2020 are located, in fact, in the regions of the Mezzogiorno (the previous year the share of cooperatives with registered office in the southern regions stood at 50.2%).

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## Open questions of the questionnaire

The analysis of the answers to questionnaire's open questions reveals interesting aspects about improvement of training on cooperative entrepreneurship.

According to the experience of the interviewees, what is missing or should be developed more in training on cooperative entrepreneurship education could be summarized as follows:

- There should be a greater awareness that cooperative entrepreneurship can make the economy 'more civilised'. Training should instill in the conscience of learners the concept of prevailing mutuality and aim at the enhancement of human capital over financial capital. It is also necessary to spread knowledge of the cooperative principles on which to base sustainable and lasting growth in the business.
- Training must be of a "long life" nature, including the analysis of tax systems and entrepreneurial marketing.
- Entrepreneurship education should not be based exclusively on economic and financial aspects, but should promote innovation by developing a greater sensitivity of young people to the opportunities of world of work.
- It is necessary to promote the cooperative model as a working tool in all services.
- The financing instruments are not sufficient.

According to the experience of the interviewees, the factors that make (or would make) entrepreneurship training effective can be summarised as follows:

- Enhancement of skills such as creativity, self-effectiveness and, above all, planning and problem solving skills.
- Training should show clearly the benefits of good cooperative planning.
- Training should help develop a sense of belonging to a working group by working on personal growth.
- Training should include case history of business experience, success stories and best practices cases.
- Training should include the study of real cases, simulations of business creation and direct internships.
- An active and constructive support to the brilliant entrepreneurial minds that can guarantee the construction of bases for innovative entrepreneurship with more sustainable financial aspects.



## Interviews

**Recording mode:** voice recording

**Types of interview:** video call and telephone interview

**Professionals interviewed:** the 10 professionals selected for the interviews belong to the following occupational categories:

- 7 auditors in agri-food cooperatives, with experience in entrepreneurship training.
- 1 business economy teacher in secondary school.
- 2 scientific researchers engaged in entrepreneurship training in fisheries and aquaculture fields.

The answers to the questions are summarised as follows, considering the highlights that emerged from the interviews.

**Question n.1:** "How useful can it be to spread the cooperative model among adults, also in light of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic event? How useful can it be to present the cooperative model as an alternative business model?"

**Summary of the answers to the question n.1:** All the professionals interviewed believe that the economic crisis, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, can give rise to new opportunities for entrepreneurial growth, because the needs that the market shows are new. All the professionals interviewed believe that presenting the cooperative model as an alternative business model is very important, because it has many advantages over others, from an economic point of view and from the point of view of personal growth.

**Question n.2:** "With regard to the obstacles encountered during the creation of new cooperatives, what are the most important aspects? "

**Summary of the answers to question n.2:** All the professionals interviewed consider that the lack of training is an important obstacle encountered during the creation of new cooperatives. The adults concerned, although very motivated and have good business ideas, do not have the basic cognitive and learning tools to deal with the creation of a new cooperative and the accountants themselves, to whom they often turn, do not have adequate training in the field.

**Question n.3:** "What is more in-depth in your training?"

**Summary of the answers to question n. 3:** The group of auditors deepens the growth in the business, the financial aspects, business planning and marketing, as most of their learners asks for clarification on these topics. The teachers and the researchers interviewed, in addition to the financial aspects, also give a lot of space in their training to environmental, economic and social sustainability and cooperative principles; they believe that, without instilling in the conscience of learners cooperative principles, it is difficult to lead a successful cooperative.



**Open questions of questionnaires:** In order to make cooperative entrepreneurship training effective, what is missing and what should be developed more? What makes (or would make) cooperative entrepreneurship training effective?

**Summary of the answers to the open questions of questionnaires:** Most of the interviewees believe that, in order to be effective, training must be continuous and not be exhausted within a single course of lessons, as in most cases. The update is essential to inform learners about the changing needs of the market and the new opportunities that are emerging at the moment. In order to be effective, training should modulate teaching methods on the level of education of adults to whom it is addressed and be predominantly practical, close to reality.

## Focus Group

### Focus group members:

- **Moderators:** Vincenzo Griffo, Ester Mocerino
- 1) **G.S.**, President of a union of cooperatives in the national agri-food sector, with many years of experience in entrepreneurship training.
- 2) **O.A.**, marine biologist, researcher engaged in entrepreneurship training in fisheries and aquaculture fields.
- 3) **D.F.**, President of a union of cooperatives in the regional agri-food sector, with many years of experience in entrepreneurship training.

**Partecipation Mode:** Google Meet

**Duration:** 1 h

**Recording mode:** voice recording

**Management of the focus group:** after a brief presentation of the project, the following questions (the same as the interviews) were asked orally:

- 1) "How useful can it be to spread the cooperative model among adults, also in light of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic event? How useful can it be to present the co-operative model as an alternative business model?"
- 2) With regard to the obstacles encountered during the creation of new cooperatives, what aspects are most important?
- 3) What is more in-depth in your training?
- 4) Open questions of questionnaires: in order to make cooperative entrepreneurship training effective, what is missing and what should be developed more? What makes (or would make) cooperative entrepreneurship training effective?

The responses of the focus group participants were summarised as follows.

**O.L.** I believe that at this time it is extremely important to promote entrepreneurship and the cooperative model. New points of view emerge from a crisis, new opportunities that can be caught, such as the launch of innovative startups. The cooperative model is very important



to be disseminated in order to break down certain prejudices that characterise it, in particular those concerning the costs and obstacles encountered during the opening of a new cooperative. Effective training should focus on the potential and benefits of the cooperative model, including from a fiscal point of view. Effective training should be important for the mutual purpose of the cooperative, that is to say, the importance of “*one is worth one*”. The cooperative was born to found something great that can last even in years and generations, it is not a momentary society, but a set of partners who have a long-term project to lead together. Entrepreneurship training, in order to be effective, should use different teaching methodologies according to the audience to which it is addressed and, above all, be continuous. Training must not only be aimed at the concerned adults, but also and above all at the accountants to whom adults turn, in order to open a cooperative and manage it from a fiscal point of view.

**D.F.:** Cooperation can be an excellent tool for conducting projects and launching new startups, especially for young people. In times of crisis, opportunities can arise, think of the current growing of e-commerce. Educating and training to cooperate is key to giving basic information on how to make cooperation and how to access all funding instruments. Effective training must aim to disseminate the economic and fiscal benefits of a cooperative over a company which has much higher contribution and social security costs. Those who want to set up a cooperative often rely on accountants who are not very experienced in this field, especially in the context of sectoral cooperation such as fisheries and aquaculture. It is necessary to create a new figure of trainer who is a facilitator and has transversal skills and knowledge.

**G.S.:** I think we need to move from a financial economy, to a social economy. The new European CAP (the EU's common agricultural policy) has also highlighted the importance of cooperatives as a means not only of production but also of job opportunities. Effective training must aim to disseminate the economic benefits of the cooperative model. It would be interesting to disseminate the cooperative model, in a simple and clear way, within schools, targeting, in particular, students attending their last year of secondary school, in order to give them the cognitive and learning tools to face the creation and management of a new cooperative in the future.

## Conclusions

The most relevant aspects arising from the analysis of qualitative data are as follows:

- The training should be carried out using teaching methods diversified according to the audience to which it is addressed, giving priority to those of a practical nature.
- Good training should focus on the potential and benefits of the cooperative model, compared to other business models.
- Effective training should give importance to the mutual aim of cooperation, that is to say, to the importance of the “*one is worth one*”.
- Training should not only be aimed at the concerned adults, but also at accountants, to whom adults turn in order to open and run a cooperative.



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- The training should be continuous, adapting its focus to the economic and social changes of the country. It should support learners throughout the evolutionary path of a cooperative, from its creation to its management, *in itinere*.
- The training could be aimed at students attending their last year of secondary school, in order to give them the basic cognitive and learning tools to open and lead a new cooperative in the future.
- Entrepreneurship education should not be based solely on economic and financial aspects, but should promote innovation by developing a greater awareness of the changing needs of the market. In addition, training should not neglect the aspects of entrepreneurial marketing.
- It is necessary to create a new figure of trainer who is a facilitator and has transversal skills and knowledge.

## COPE PROJECT: GAP ANALYSIS IN CYPRUS (CARDET)

### Context

The co-operative model in Cyprus has an extensive history that can account for more than 100 years. Co-operatives started being created in the early 1900s when Cyprus was under the British Empire, and co-operatives have been created and existed since then. The first co-operative company was created in 1909 with the name “Χωρική Τράπεζα Λευκονοίκου”, and the co-operative movement started.<sup>1</sup> The Legislation for co-operative companies in Cyprus was adopted in 1914.

As mentioned by the interviewees, the co-operative sector in Cyprus was flourishing, with Cyprus being a leading example for other countries. Co-operatives had a significant presence in the financial sector, as most towns had a co-operative credit institution. However, the fall of the co-operative credit institutions in 2013 has signalled the downsizing of the co-operative sector.

More than 300 co-operatives existed in Cyprus, which is a significantly large number for a country with approximately one million people. Today, 92 co-operative companies are registered, with a significant number of them being inactive or a holding company. Today, the greatest number of registered companies is found in Limassol with 34 registered companies, followed by Nicosia with 31, Paphos with 9, and Larnaca with 8<sup>2</sup>. Accurate numbers are uploaded on the website of the [Co-operative Societies Supervision and Development Authority](#).

Even though there is extensive knowledge and experience in Cyprus regarding co-operatives, there is no formal education on co-operatives. However, some actions are being taken to integrate education on co-operative business model in education. Education and training on the co-operative business model is frequently found under education/training opportunities for social entrepreneurship. Events that occur include the [COOPathons](#) by the British Council, student competitions by [JA Cyprus](#), and training and coaching by the [Youthshare](#) project.

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<sup>1</sup> Lefkoniko Municipality (2020). Χωρική Τράπεζα Λευκονοίκου 1909. Available at: <https://dimoslefkonikou.org/choriki-trapeza-leykonoikoy-1909/>

<sup>2</sup> CSSDA (2021). List of Cooperative Companies. Available at: <http://www.cssda.gov.cy/cssda/cssda02.nsf/All/9F1F6CD52489CA5CC2257F73003F8A88?OpenDocument>

## Production Process

Given the lack of formal education on the co-operative business model, it was challenging to find educators that are focused on training on the co-operative business model specifically. Therefore, we have interviewed people who are offering training on social entrepreneurship and have knowledge about the co-operative business model, such as adult educators, coaches, and informal training educators. We also interviewed individuals who were engaged with hackathons during which the co-op model was taught, and an individual with extensive knowledge from the Co-operative Societies Supervision and Development Authority.

The interviews could not be conducted face-to-face due to COVID-19, and most of them took place via the ZOOM platform and a few of them via telephone. The interviews were recorded, except in instances where individuals preferred not to be recorded, and thus, the researcher was taking extensive notes during the interview.

## Qualitative Analysis – Interviews

### 1. For how long have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education? How did you accumulate the knowledge you currently have?

All interviewees have at least two years of experience in the field of social entrepreneurship. Those who engage in training more broadly have up to 7 years of experience. Two individuals who have expert knowledge on the co-operative model have at least 8 and at least 17 years of experience.

None of the interviewees has mentioned having formal education on the co-operative business model. They have gathered their knowledge from their own experience, and through different training programs, they have taken part, such as Erasmus+ and train the trainer.

### 2. How do you and your organisation work in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship with adults? (i.e., working individually or with groups)

#### Groups

- Two interviewees, apart from their experience as trainers, have mentioned their experience with the COOPathon. Individuals join the COOPathon, which is a hackathon focused on social entrepreneurship and the creation of co-operatives. The hackathon is a two-day intensive training, and each group has a mentor that helps them throughout the process and monitors the team's progress.



- Another interviewee creates team building sessions and skills development sessions through the use of board games. He/she has provided training to co-operatives through the use of board games.
- Another interviewee is engaged in a project on social entrepreneurship and tries to revive the co-operative model in Cyprus. Through this project, the interviewee offered career support and training to individuals who want to create something of their own.
- One interviewee works with groups, and the experience he/she has with co-operatives through projects.

### One-to-one

- One interviewee works directly with individuals when people approach him/her due to the fact that the individual is a researcher. His/her organisation does not offer advice on co-operatives.
- Two interviewees mentioned that they help individuals and promote entrepreneurship. They mentioned that they try to bring people together to discuss and find ways to cooperate.
- One interviewee said that he worked with both groups and individuals, but not due to his organisation, but based on his own initiative.
- One interviewee has mentioned that he and his organisation support co-operatives = regarding the application of the legislation.

### 3. How do you reach your target group?

The target group is reached through events such as the COOPathon, which is run by the British Council, and JA Cyprus. One interviewee also mentioned that they reach their target group through strategic collaborations with organisations that are already engaging with the target group.

Many interviewees mentioned that they are approached by the target group because of their experience or from the promotion of their work on social media.

### 4. Which groups or sectors have reached out to you as an instructor? Where is the strongest demand for the cooperative model?

An interviewee has mentioned that she sees strong interest in areas that have to do with food waste and recycling and sees demand in production, transportation and cultural spaces. Others have seen prospects and interest in agritourism and agriproducts. Two interviewees mentioned that the strongest demand he/she identified was in Commerce. One of the interviewees mentioned that the established co-ops are more in agriculture and manufacturing. Another interviewee mentioned that he/she sees demand in youth, culture and the circular economy.

As it can be understood from the interviews, there is no significantly stronger demand in one area over another, and it remains to be seen in what areas new co-operatives will engage with.

Interviewees also noted that many times the co-operative business model falls under social entrepreneurship. Many of the events that take place are focused on social entrepreneurship, and the co-operative business model is a part of it. However, many trainers interviewed are placing more focus and have more experience and knowledge on social entrepreneurship rather than the co-operative business model. It was mentioned that might be due to the fact that the legislation for social entrepreneurship has recently passed.

### **5. Did you organise mentoring activities for groups in pre-start-up phase?**

Mentoring activities take place during the COOPathon, the two-day and a half hackathon that takes place every year. People at a pre-start-up phase take part in the competition, and some of them might take their ideas further and implement them after the competition. This competition is focused on social entrepreneurship and offers information and mentoring to the participants; however, the educators, trainers, and judges do not advise them regarding what type of business they will create. It is up to the participant to create a social enterprise, a co-operative, an NGO or an organisation of a different legal form.

Mentoring also takes place from the interviewees as part of their work as educators/trainers.

### **6. How do you plan and implement training courses on cooperative entrepreneurship? Are you following training modules?**

One interviewee engaged with the COOPathon has shared that they use a handbook that is relevant to social entrepreneurship. Another interviewee mentioned that the training they offer, the formal aspect of it, has been developed by academics.

It was also noted that in the past, the Pancyprian Cooperative Confederation was active, which has offered education/training to co-operative members, but after the fall of the credit co-operatives in Cyprus, it became inactive, but it is still registered.

### **7. What are the training topics?**

The vast majority of interviewees have mentioned that they use the business model canvas during their training, and they focus on the areas that are on the canvas, e.g. what is the social problem, how to promote the product/service, etc. Other topics

covered include market analysis, assessing the impacts of the business, profit management, how the product competes with others in the market, what the goals will be in the next 5 or 10 years. It was also noted that they present the co-operative principles and other areas such as sustainability and that they try to inspire people to engage in sustainable sectors.

### **8. In your training courses how did you present the financial aspects and the business planning?**

Most interviewees did not cover or did not place much focus on financial aspects. Some of them covered financial aspects as part of the business model canvas. They also noted that social enterprises and co-operatives are different, there is a social purpose beyond the profit. Social enterprises have to give part of their profit for a social purpose and co-operatives do not have as a main goal the maximisation of profit, but profit is a way for co-operatives to be sustainable.

### **9. In your training courses how do you present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model?**

This is not adequately addressed in training. Those who cover these topics usually do a presentation, while one informant mentioned using a flipchart and a slideshow to make it more interactive.

### **10. How do you present, in your training courses, the topics of sustainability and innovation?**

Sustainability and innovation are brought as topics when the Sustainable Development Goals are discussed, while others see them in a more holistic way.

In the example of the COOPathon, different SDGs were covered, and sustainability is not linked only to environmental sustainability. The topics of sustainability and innovation are part of the needs analysis sessions.

In other projects, they are presented through videos and success stories. One interviewee mentioned that these topics are always indirectly involved and that an individual needs to be innovative to attract attention to the product or service and that regardless of what they do they still need to offer something sustainable and environmentally friendly. Innovation is also seen when co-ops are created in innovative sectors.

### **11. How did you introduce the topics of entrepreneurial marketing and scaling in business?**

These topics are not adequately covered. A few of them noted time-constraint as a reason for this, while another interviewee mentioned that he/she does not think that anyone works in the space of marketing for co-operatives.

A few interviewees mentioned that they cover these topics as part of the business model canvas, while another interviewee mentioned that he/she does PowerPoint presentations and then gives individual projects to participants who work on their ideas.

### **12. Which training methods do you use to improve learning development? (Case study, Games-based training, lecture, Role-Play, simulation,...) which methods do you think are more suitable?**

It was frequently mentioned that it is important for training to be practical and experiential. The methods used include: experiential workshops where a social business is created in a short time, role-playing, individual projects, case studies and using examples, study visits, lectures, simulations, and games. One interviewee noted that case studies might not be the best case because if individuals from abroad are invited, they would say that the situation in Cyprus is quite different.

### **13. According to your experience, as instructor, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?**

First, it was mentioned that it is important for education on cooperative entrepreneurship to exist in the first place. It was noted that social enterprises and co-operatives have specific features and that people need to know about them and a momentum to be created so that people know these sectors exist and that they can do great things and build a community around these.

It would be helpful to introduce topics that showcase the benefits of cooperation and include training methods that promote cooperation among individuals and makes participants work in groups.

The cooperative principles and values also need to be better understood. Individuals need to know exactly why a co-operative is created and interest them, and this is where the principles and values of co-operatives come in. Governance is also an aspect that co-operative members themselves need to give more attention to. Participation in the general assembly and presence at that meeting is needed; if members are not present then, it is not possible to talk about cooperative governance.

The wider public need to understand what social entrepreneurship is, and what the cooperative business model is. Hence, more awareness and promotion of these types

of entrepreneurship and making people understand how these types are different compared to other types of entrepreneurship.

Finally, people need to learn how to get out of the box and even in the classroom. Individuals need to learn how to be innovative in general and get out of the box, beyond just thinking of the product they will deliver.

#### **14. According to your experience, what makes a training successful? Present a good practice from your experience.**

- For the training to be experience-based and to bring people in touch with individuals from that space.
- Have a training that has chapters such as: what is social entrepreneurship, how do the co-operative business model and social entrepreneurship, the idea and principles of co-ops to attract people to the co-op model, and core business models to attract the youth and start-ups.
- The trainer to love what he/she is doing and have positive energy, otherwise he/she will not communicate well to others what they want to communicate.
- The training to take place in an inspiring environment, e.g. in nature, and get into the right mindset and not think of other things to do. At the same time, emotion to be the medium for education and training.
- A training is successful if the individuals who leave the training continue working on the topic, or if the participants consider the training memorable. If participants create something after a training/competition, regardless if their ideas were chosen by the jury or not.
- Education/training to give the opportunity to individuals to participate in a practical way, and for education on the co-op model to start from a pre-primary level with games and collaboration.

#### **15. What are the biggest challenges in your work, and how do you try to overcome these challenges?**

The pandemic of COVID-19 is a serious challenge for educators/trainers since they cannot make face-to-face events. The fatigue of people with online events is evident. Even though people who are interested in the topic still participate, difficulties are still evident.

It is even more challenging for educators/trainers of non-formal training who use non-formal methods during their training. Educators/trainers have mentioned that it is hard to do training online and transmit the emotion. The opportunity to learn online was available before the pandemic, so individuals always had the chance, but those who want to deliver non-formal training and use non-formal methods

The small sector in Cyprus is also a barrier that makes people be realistic with their expectations. It is challenging to go beyond “the usual suspects” and attract new people in the area. The COOPathon has been ran in English and it was able to attract NEET individuals, students who study in Cyprus who are from other countries, asylum seekers, and refugees among others. However, it is challenging depending on the language of the training. There are interested groups who do not speak English, and groups who do not speak Greek, and perhaps a solution would be to have interpretation if the budget allows it or to do the training in two languages.

Finding participants is a challenge, even if it does not fall under the responsibility of the trainer but under the responsibility of the body who organises the event. Trainers are still concerned with having enough participants so the training is successful, otherwise it might only be mentoring for a small group of people.

Moreover, there is not enough awareness of the benefits of co-operatives and the process of the creation is not the simplest. There is no formal education on the co-operative business model. At the same time, young people who are interested in social entrepreneurship more broadly are facing challenges of survival and funding.

Finally, the fall of the co-operative sector after the fall of the credit co-operative institutions in Cyprus is a significant challenge. This has been a significant event in the history of both the co-operative sector and the economy of Cyprus. A way it could be overcome is to persuade the society that co-operatives will be completely independent and politics do not get into them.

## Conclusion

As it was noted during the interviews, there is no formal education and/or training on the co-operative business model. The basic principles and values of the co-operative business model are not well understood and there is a lack of public awareness both about the principles and values, and the benefits of creating a co-operative.

The co-operative business model in Cyprus is usually linked to the social entrepreneurship model, whereas perhaps the creation of a social enterprise might be a more attractive choice as the new legislation of social entrepreneurship has passed.

The co-operative sector has downsized after the fall of the co-operative credit institutions, and it is unclear whether more interest will be created for co-operatives if a momentum around social entrepreneurship is created in Cyprus.

## Context

Iceland has a long history of co-operatives, though in the last few decades the co-operative model has fallen on hard times. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century some farmers joined hands in purchasing supplies, and with foreign trade being made free in the middle of the century, after a Danish monopoly for over 2 centuries, there was finally a basis for Icelanders to establish businesses themselves. After a few tries, where lack of experience resulted in extensive debt, the first purchasing co-operative was founded in 1882. More followed, and eventually the purchasing co-operatives mostly became all-around co-operatives – handling most everything the inhabitants of the relative region needed (Sigurðsson, 1978).

Starting from around 1990, following heavy inflation in the 1980's and social changes, most of these co-operatives folded or reduced their activities heavily. In 1990, there were 152 co-operatives in Iceland and they were down to 96 in the year 2000 (Jónsson, 2006). Currently there are around 30 co-operatives in Iceland.

Many of the interviewees mentioned that the image of the co-operative model in Iceland is stained. For example, any reference to cooperatives outside some co-operative stores were removed in the 1990's as it was bad for business, and the Cooperative University (former college) in Bifröst distanced itself from the cooperative model by changing its name in 1997 and removing co-operative references from the premises or disguising them.

Despite this, there are still about 45,000 members in Icelandic co-operatives, which is equivalent to the number in 1985 when it was at its highest, though that is still not as high a percentage of the total population as it was then. According to our interviewees, these members currently mostly receive discounts in stores run by a limited company, owned by cooperatives, so there is a distance to the co-operative model despite the high number of members.

As co-operative business has almost gone extinct in Iceland, there is not much current knowledge in Iceland about co-operatives, and no formal education available.

## Process

As a result of the downfall of the cooperative model in Iceland, it proved challenging to find educators currently teaching the co-operative model. Additionally, as it has been decades since the downfall, it proved hard to find educators at all.

In the end, the interviews were all conducted with either individuals who have experience and knowledge on teaching the co-operative business model, or high-ranking individuals (i.e. CEOs) who have experience and knowledge in working in the few co-operatives left in Iceland.

Some of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, while others were conducted through either Zoom or Microsoft Teams due to Covid-19. The researcher took extensive notes during the interviews, as they were not recorded.



From a total of ten interviewees, five represented cooperatives, two of which were CEOs and the other three were chairmen of the boards of their Cooperatives. Four of the remaining interviewees were instructors or academics, from the vocational or higher education sector and one interviewee is a specialist at a public regional development institute. Nine interviewees were male and one female.

## Qualitative analysis

### 1. For how long have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education? How did you accumulate the knowledge you currently have?

Some interviewees were educated at the Cooperative College in Bifröst, and as such received cooperative education. All of those then worked extensively in co-operatives, and acquired practical knowledge in addition to their education. Other interviewees gathered their knowledge through experience. Two interviewees have been involved in Entrepreneurship training of various forms for approximately 10 year each.

### 2. How do you and your organisation work in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship with adults? (i.e., working individually or with groups)

One interviewee, who is now retired, was an instructor in the Cooperative College in Bifröst, and mentioned that from 1977-1986, they regularly toured the country to promote the co-operative model. One current academic and educator is regularly involved in entrepreneurship training of groups of students through courses (both university level and vocational) but this is not focused on cooperative models.

One non-instructor interviewee mentioned that the co-operative they work for introduce the co-operative model externally, as that is a part of their regulations.

Another non-instructor interviewee mentioned that those involved in co-operatives focus too much on the history of the co-operative model in Iceland, rather than trying to engage new people and look to the future.

### 3. How do you reach your target group?

One non-instructor interviewee, who works for a co-operative whose regulations state that they should introduce the co-operative model externally, mentions that this work is done through subsidiaries.

One interviewee, who was an instructor in the Cooperative College as mentioned before, said that when they were touring all those years ago they did so in co-operation with the “purchasing co-operatives” (traditional name, though in practice they were all-around co-operatives) around the country.

#### 4. Which groups or sectors have reached out to you as an instructor? Where is the strongest demand for the cooperative model?

One interviewee mentioned that the Directorate of Labour had a course for people who lost their work following the 2008 financial crisis, and that some of the students there showed interest in the co-operative model to get themselves back on their feet through co-operative entrepreneurship, but nothing came of it as the law framework around co-operatives proved hostile.

Another interviewee also mentioned that, through their co-operative, they introduced co-operatives to unemployed people in the region. The same interviewee did state that the legal framework in Iceland was not favourable to co-operative entrepreneurship, and in fact, all interviewees who mentioned the legal framework did so in reference to how ill-suited it is to the promotion of the co-operative model.

#### 5. Did you organise mentoring activities for groups in pre-start-up phase?

As mentioned by many interviewees, the legal framework in Iceland is not favourable for co-operative entrepreneurship, and as such aspiring co-operatives most often stumble in the pre-start-up phase because of legal difficulties. Specifically, the biggest hurdle is that 15 people are needed to establish a co-operative. One interviewee mentored a group as they were trying to establish a co-operative, but in the end they didn't have enough people to be able to move on from the pre-start-up phase.

One interviewee did mentor a student in making a business plan for a co-operative, but once the instructor got involved the co-operative was already 4 years old.

Otherwise, educators regularly mentor students as part of their work as educators.

#### 6. How do you plan and implement training courses on cooperative entrepreneurship? Are you following training modules?

Instructor interviewees have not had many recent chances to implement training courses on co-operative entrepreneurship.

Curricula from within a university are developed within faculties/departments and confirmed by a university committee. Some of the curricula are developed in cooperation with other institutions, e.g., through funded work akin to the COPE project.

#### 7. What are the training topics?

Instructor interviewees would, given the chance, mostly follow the same pathway they do in normal entrepreneurship training and emphasize the business model. PEST analysis and SWOT analysis, as well as market analysis and sustainability. Soft skill training is given more weight now days, as learners need

to acquire skills in communication, negotiation, and management. Digital skills are also important, for instance when it comes to marketing and communication.

## 8. In your training courses how did you present the financial aspects and the business planning?

All interviewees emphasized that no operation is sustainable if it's run at a loss. As such, business planning is essential to making any sort of business sustainable in the long run. While all interviewees agreed that there is an additional social benefit to cooperatives that enables cooperatives to think long-term, instead of only in short-term profits, there wouldn't be any long-term if the business folded prematurely due to debt. As such, the financial aspects and the business planning would be integral to the process, and consequently presented in-depth.

## 9. In your training courses how do you present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model?

One interviewee, retired instructor, mostly presented it through class discussion, after a short lecture on the model. By having a class discussion, the instructor felt that the principles of the model would be better absorbed, as it is a model of democratic principles.

## 10. How do you present, in your training courses, the topics of sustainability and innovation?

The topics would be introduced through lectures and discussion. These are core themes in many cases, and one interviewee mentioned cases and success stories to introduce these topics.

## 11. How did you introduce the topics of entrepreneurial marketing and scaling in business?

No clear conclusion here from the interviews, but marketing and operations are part of the curricula as mentioned above.

## 12. Which training methods do you use to improve learning development? (Case study, Games-based training, lecture, Role-Play, simulation,...) which methods do you think are more suitable?

One interviewee focused on discussion, after short lectures. In general, there would be a focus on a mixture of lectures and practical assignments (that is, assignments that reflect the expected future work environment of the student).

## 13. According to your experience, as instructor, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?

One interviewee stated that there is no education on legal forms until people start studying at some sort of business school. When legal forms are presented, there needs to be more focus on the co-operative model. The interviewee thought it unlikely that the co-operative model is even mentioned, aside from maybe the fact that it exists. His opinion is that it should be taught in comparison to the limited company form, to properly teach students about the pros and cons of each legal form.

The interviewees in general agreed that, effectively, everything is missing, as there is no education to be sought in these matters.

## 14. According to your experience, what makes a training successful? Present a good practice from your experience.

The training needs to pique students' interest and motivate them so that their interest in the subject is genuine and for the sake of the subject itself. The training needs to be practical, so that students are not like fish out of water once they are on their own. Bringing students closer to industrial activity (by making contacts etc.).

## 15. What are the biggest challenges in your work, and how do you try to overcome these challenges?

The biggest challenge in co-operative entrepreneurship in Iceland is the inaccessibility to establish a business in the co-operative model. The legal framework is outdated and hostile to entrepreneurship. Thus, it does not effectively serve a purpose to give start-up courses on co-operative entrepreneurship, as the legal hurdles are too big to make people think about using the co-operative model. By contrast, it's relatively easy to establish a limited company.

The main problem with the legal framework mentioned is the amount of people needed to establish a co-operative, as a minimum of 15 people are needed.

Additionally, the negative political connotations the co-operative model has in Iceland present a big hurdle.

Purchasing co-operatives were a relatively big part of the Icelandic economy and for example the purchasing co-operative KEA was the third biggest company in Iceland in 1980. The purchasing co-operatives operated across sectors, but now they limit themselves to the consumer sector. Traditionally, there were purchasing co-operatives for almost every community, with their growth potential limited by the size of the community. After a period of recession in the 1980's, where the purchasing co-operatives along with the Federation of Icelandic Cooperatives went under due to debt, the co-operative model has never recovered.

The co-operative model in Iceland has political connotations that hinder co-operative progress, as the co-operative image is stained. The co-operatives became an institution, rather than an association, in people's mind, and the co-operative model is still linked with the agrarian political party. The problem with teaching the cooperative model lies in the negative political connotations. They need to be eradicated so the emphasis can be on the co-operative model as a form of operation. There have been talks about starting to use the CO-OP name, instead of the Icelandic traditional translation, to lose the stigma associated with the co-operative model.

The biggest challenges are thus not necessarily educational in nature, though the interviewees agree that educating people on the co-operative model is needed so that the model can recover as a legal form in Iceland.

## Conclusion

There is no formal education available in Iceland in the co-operative model, nor training of any kind outside of the still functioning co-operatives who need to educate their new staff on what a co-operative is. There is next to no awareness of the co-operative principles outside of the co-operatives themselves.

The co-operative model in Iceland suffers from historical negative political connotations and a hostile legal framework, hindering entrepreneurship. The model survives mostly through long-established co-operatives, such as producer co-operatives and purchasing co-operatives, though those mostly use limited companies for the actual operations.

The co-operative model declined, starting 30-35 years ago, and the process had not yet been reversed. Extensive work is needed to reverse the process.



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***Promoting innovation through cooperative  
model in entrepreneurship education for adults  
(COPE)***

***Intellectual Output 2:***

***GAP ANALYSIS***

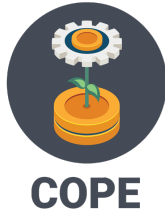
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## ILO RECOMMENDATION 193

*The promotion of cooperatives should be considered as one of the pillars of national and international economic and social development.*



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## AIM OF THE GAP ANALYSIS

The GAP analysis is the initial part of investigation in the framework of the Erasmus + COPE project, aimed at contributing to strengthen a competitive social economy in Europe through the spread of new cooperatives. More specifically the specific objectives of the project are:

1. Strengthening the skills of entrepreneurship trainers promoting cooperative business
2. Exchanging experiences on social entrepreneurship education among trainers across Europe
3. Developing innovative tools and methodologies to assist trainers in their promotion of the cooperative model among adults

The seven project partners Coompanion Östergötland (Sweden), Bifrost University (Iceland), Consorzio Icaro (Italy), CARDET (Cyprus), SERN (Italy), Confcooperative Romagna (Italy) and Mikrofonden Väst (Sweden) developed and conducted a GAP analysis aimed at investigating the gaps in terms of tools and knowledge of advisors promoting the cooperative model.

## COOPERATIVE DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS

The definition of cooperative given by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) is “an autonomous association of persons united to meet common economic, social, and cultural goals. They achieve their objectives through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.”<sup>1</sup>

The defining characteristics that distinguish the cooperative model from other business models according to the European Commission are:

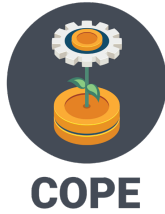
- an open and voluntary association
- a democratic structure with each member having one vote
- an equitable and fair distribution of economic results according to the volume of operations made through the cooperative
- the fact that cooperatives are enterprises that serve the needs of their members who contribute to their capital.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy/cooperatives\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy/cooperatives_en)





## The history of cooperatives in Europe

Europe has a long history of cooperatives, the earliest record of a co-operative comes from Fenwick, Scotland in 1761 forming the Fenwick Weavers' Society.

During the 18th century, in the wake of the experience of the UK, cooperatives were also born in many other European countries. Focusing specifically on the four countries involved in the COPE project, Sweden, Iceland, Italy, Cyprus, we see that the first cooperatives are all born within a hundred years from 1800. The cooperatives then have developed over the years in different sectors depending on the country.

### Sweden

In Sweden in 1801 the first mutual insurance company was established and during the first half of the century, above all, producer cooperation grew. In 1923 Sweden's first tenant cooperative, HSB, was formed and extensive housing cooperation emerged in Sweden. Today, all the large, Swedish cooperatives have their roots from this time. During the 80s and 90s, the co-operation went through a revival of sorts and a "new co-operation" emerged. Parental cooperative preschools, rural schools as staff cooperatives and various forms of artists' and craft cooperatives gradually became more common. So-called work-integrated social enterprises / work cooperatives were also started, mainly to create meaningful jobs for people far from the regular labour market.

Despite the emerging new co-operation, compared to many other countries, the cooperative model is less in demand in Sweden. One explanation for this, can be found in the extensive welfare construction that the country underwent after the Second World War and until approx. mid 70s. The turnover for the 100 largest cooperative companies in Sweden in 2019 was € 44,2 billion. To this sum another € 21,4 billion can be added as turnover of the largest mutual companies that same year.

In total, the co-operation accounts for about 10% of GDP in Sweden. The number of full-time jobs in total, with the 100 largest Economic Associations and the Mutual Companies together was approx. 77,500 in 2019. However, it should be added that many employees were part-time and / or short-term employees and this means that cooperative and mutual companies together have an estimated close to 100,000 employees in total.

### Italy

The first cooperative in Italy, a consumer cooperative, was born in Torino in 1854 and was named "Magazzino di Previdenza". But it was in the last century, at the end of the Sixties and throughout the Eighties that the cooperation had its most significant development, favored by the political and social climate particularly attentive to the cooperative form and by the legislative interventions of those years. In the late 1970s Social cooperatives, a noteworthy and impactful experiment in itself, were invented in Italy, and then extended all over the world.





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Nowadays the cooperative movement comprehends the following numbers: 79.000 cooperatives, over one 1.800.000 employees and 131 billion € in turnover (data for 2019). The region with the highest number of turnover is Emilia-Romagna (40.680 million €).<sup>3</sup>

## Cyprus

In Cyprus co-operatives started being created in the early 1900s when Cyprus was under the British Empire, more specifically the first cooperative company was created in 1909 with the name “Χωρική Τράπεζα Λευκονοίκου”, initiating the cooperative movement in the country. The co-operative sector in Cyprus was flourishing, with Cyprus being a leading example for other countries. Co-operatives had a significant presence in the financial sector, as most towns had a co-operative credit institution. The fall of the co-operative credit institutions in 2013 has signalled the downsizing of the co-operative sector. Before the fall, the number of cooperatives had grown to 300, a significant number for a country with 1 million inhabitants but today, only 92 co-operative companies are registered, with a significant number of them being inactive or a holding company.

## Iceland

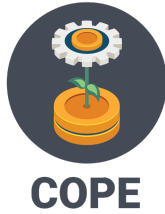
In Iceland, the first purchasing co-operative was founded in 1882, then more followed, and eventually the purchasing co-operatives mostly became all-around co-operatives – handling most everything the inhabitants of the relative region needed (Sigurðsson, 1978). Starting from around 1990, following heavy inflation in the 1980’s and social changes, most of these co-operatives folded or reduced their activities heavily. In 1990, there were 152 co-operatives in Iceland and they were down to 96 in the year 2000 (Jónsson, 2006). Currently there are around 30 co-operatives in Iceland.

The different level of turnover, the presence of cooperatives today, seems quite different according to the countries involved in the COPE project. On the one hand we see Cyprus and Iceland that after a moment of growth and development of cooperatives, we are witnessing a rapid fall of the cooperative business model. On the other hand we can see that in Italy cooperatives represent an interesting slice of the market: the last two decades, despite the recent crisis in some sectors and the global economic-financial situation of recent years, testify to a constant development of cooperation, which manages to link the challenge of business modernization and globalization with the recovery of the founding principles cooperation such as solidarity and the centrality of the member. In Sweden as well, cooperatives maintain a good turnover, a high number of employees in the sector and an interesting percentage an interesting percentage of national GDP

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<sup>3</sup> <https://mk0wwwaicconitmk98w.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rapporto-Biennale-Cooperazione-2018-2019.pdf>





## DATA COLLECTION FROM STAKEHOLDERS

### Methodology

The GAP analysis was conducted on the basis of data collected through interviews, online questionnaires and focus groups in the 4 countries of the project partners. All the 7 partners Coompanion Östergötland (SE), Bifrost University (IS), SERN, Consorzio Icaro (IT), CARDET (CY), Confcooperative Romagna (IT), Mikrofonden Väst (SE) contributed to the collection of qualitative and quantitative data and to their analysis.

The interviews and the focus groups were all conducted with individuals who have experience with social entrepreneurship and the co-operative business model.

The interviews and focus groups have made and recorded with an online platform only a few of the interviews were done in person due to the Covid 19 restrictions.

## PROMOTION OF THE COOPERATIVE MODEL

### The advisors

All the interviews and focus groups involved consultants, advisors who in all countries examined, have a solid experience in the world of cooperatives or in the world of entrepreneurship education (on average over 10 years of experience for the majority of respondents).

One aspect that emerges from the various interviews in the four countries is that none of the interviewees has mentioned having formal education on the co-operative model. For what is concerning the way they accumulate their knowledge, the majority of the advisors involved in the interviews have some form of academic background, most of which are not within the entrepreneurial or business sector (Coompanion, Cardet, SERN). They have gathered their knowledge from their own experience, working in co-operatives, learning directly in the field and then working alongside experienced colleagues (peer-to-peer learning) and also attending training programs offered during the years. Some of the advisors interviewed in Italy specified that for those who are consultants on issues such as auditing, labor regulations, there are annual compulsory training they need to attend as to be sure to always be updated on new regulations and trends. But no one has received any particular training on how to be a “trainer”. They know the contents and topics to be addressed but have not received specific training on how to be a trainer. Among the advisors interviewed in Iceland,





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(half of them coming from CEO and Chairman of cooperatives) we can find a specific educational path as they were educated at the Cooperative College in Bifröst, and as such received co-operative education. Among the advisors interviewed by Mikrofonden we can see that a number of persons have a related background as business advisors or as financing and/or business developers

## The promotion of the cooperative model

Some of the interviewees work firstly individually and then in team with other colleagues. The counselling is provided free of charge for individuals, groups and start-ups.

The training opportunities for those who want to deepen their knowledge of the cooperative model and entrepreneurship education are varied. Most of the training related to cooperative themes is done in groups

In groups:

- entrepreneurship training courses (at University) based on agreements between organisation
- events as hackathons, workshops to attract new entrepreneurs.
- In some cases, the advisors/counsellors are being contacted by entrepreneurs, non-profit associations, business networks and other similar organizations that are in need support in the form of advice, business development and financing solutions.

One-to-one

- Offering counselling to individuals approaching the advisors because they have an idea they would like to develop.

## Target Group

People interested in following trainings are both employed and unemployed adults interested in entrepreneurship.

In Sweden and Iceland mentorship activities aimed at groups in the pre start up phase are less practiced among interviewed, considering that none of the respondents had worked with this specific group. It should be noted, however, that in Sweden, in the questionnaire online over the 60% answered that groups in pre-start-ups phase are the main target of the trainings and this suggests that support for start-ups is an important part of the advisors' work. In Iceland the biggest challenge for start-ups is not the lack of mentorship but is the legal framework, not favourable for co-operative entrepreneurship, which is why it becomes difficult to find pre-start-up groups that meet all the required requirements and have a real chance to become a start-up. This is the main reasons why mentorship to start-ups is very little practiced.

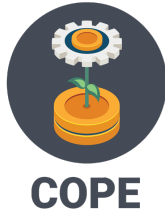
A lot of interviewees from Italy organise different mentoring activities such as specific meetings, training modules, specific projects and in some cases organize annual call. In Cyprus, the mentoring for pre-start-up groups is linked to the COOPathon, the two-day and a half hackathon that takes place



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every year. Some of the groups involved in the competition might take their ideas further and implement them after the competition.

It emerges that a fundamental aspect behind a mentor's credibility is the experience in managing established companies. The mentor has the task of supporting start uppers during the pre- start-up phase, creating conditions that lead to a decrease in the risk of failure, have a good ability to analyze and evaluate, a good knowledge of emerging trends and an in-depth knowledge of business tools.

For this it emerges that those who accompany the start-ups in the initial stages must have specific knowledge that goes beyond the general theoretical knowledge of business models.

### Existing trainings on cooperative entrepreneurship

In most cases, the existing trainings are tailored on the target group (cooperative associations, cooperative banks, trade associations, training institution, trade associations and training institutions and Universities) on the basis of available hours for the training. The programme is structured in training modules divided into units, each unit consists of a precise number of hours.

From the interviews it emerges how essential it is that the trainer adapts the modules to the target group, and that the language is also modulated according to the group.

For what is concerning the trainings, in Sweden the established cooperation in Sweden use mostly templates and materials developed on a national level. Advisors/counsellors within Mikrofonden Väst and Coompanion usually start out with their own templates and material together with modules and material from their respective national federations. The reason for these methods is, according to the advisors/counsellors, that each group is unique and that they adapt the training modules and material based on the group's level of knowledge and needs.

In Italy, for the interviewed that are part of organisations of representation of cooperatives ( Confcooperative, Legacoop,..) the modules and materials are developed on a national/regional level by the organisations.

### Training topics

The advisors who work directly with the target group, to increase the knowledge of the cooperative model and promote new cooperatives and start ups are mainly focused on business development, finance, marketing, law and knowledge regarding forms of associations (MIKROFONDEN)

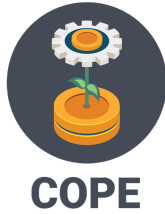
What emerged among the interviews by Coompanion, is that the most important topics are social entrepreneurship, social innovation and community entrepreneurship in the broadest sense. These areas include, for example, business development, board training, budget, financing, LEAN Startup, democratic methods, work integration, cooperative history, marketing and fundamental values.

In Italy, most of interviewees said that the main topics are: the differences between the cooperative model and the capitalistic model, values and principles of the cooperative model, governance, business plan, financial aspects, performance audit, internal and external communication. Certainly one reason why cooperative principles appear among the topics most dealt with in the trainings in



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Italy is related to the fact that most of the advisors interviewed already organize specific training courses on the promotion of cooperatives rather than general training on entrepreneurship education.

In Iceland and in Cyprus in trainings greater importance is given to the financial aspects and the business planning, market analysis, than values and principles. This depends on the fact that unlike Italy and Sweden, most of the interviewees in these two countries are not those who work directly in promoting the cooperative model, but more generally on entrepreneurship education.

### Cooperative principles and governance in trainings

As mentioned, according on the analysis of the National Reports, produced by the partners, this topic is the most dealt with in Italy.

The most identified themes are:

- Identifying and distinguishing the cooperative model from other enterprise model (social function, meeting individual and collective needs through the pursuit of its mutualistic purpose);
- Drafting of articles of association in the statute;
- Presentation of how the boards of directors are structured, through Simulations, trip simulations on boat (Confcooperative) and open discussion;
- Establishment of a work team;
- Opening bank account.

### Sustainability and Innovation in trainings

Sustainability is present in all activities and trainings for all interviewees, in all countries involved in COPE project, but particular insight emerges among the advisors' working in Sweden.

For example from the data collected by Coompanion appears that 6 out of 10 interviewees specifically mentioned sustainability as a basic prerequisite that permeates all counselling and training. The theme develops above all by presenting and discussing the Sustainable Development Goals and through Social Business Model Canvas.

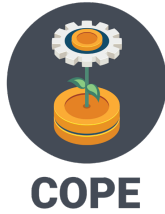
Innovation is also a topic addressed, even if it depends a lot on ideas and on the sector in which entrepreneurship is promoted. There are of course contexts in which being innovative is more essential than others.

As example of innovation, brought by two advisors interviewed in Italy (SERN and Confcooperative Romagna) is the workers buyout cooperatives. The workers buyout cooperatives, which occur when workers acquire ownership and control of a company, are an innovative way through which employees can try to save companies facing closure, keeping their jobs and ensuring that the know-



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how acquired over years of employment is not wasted. The transformation of ordinary companies into cooperatives is increasingly relevant today, and monitoring this trend was the aim of this project<sup>4</sup>.

## Financial Aspects

In in three out of four countries where interviews were conducted result that financial aspects are a great focus in trainings, since they are both in specific training on the cooperative model and in any other training based on entrepreneurship education and business models.

In all 4 countries the Business Model Canvas BMC seems the essential element when it comes to financial aspects. In Italy the business plan is taught engaging students of the training in a simulation as the plan is considered the basis for the development of a cooperative.

## Training methods

The Advisors interviewed use several methods:

- Lectures
- e-learning platforms or APPs;
- simulation and practical assignments
- role play,
- storytelling
- testimony
- workshops,

Some of the interviewees, collected by Consorzio Icaro, showed that advisors, in order to promote the development of entrepreneurial skills (in particular creativity, imagination, strategic thinking, problem solving and critical and constructive reflection), adopt the teaching methodology of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) , a learner-centered teaching method, in which a problem is the starting point of the learning process. Learners search for the resources they need to understand and resolve the issue, summarizing the recovered information and returning to the group to return the captures each has arrived to.

What emerges absolutely from a need is that the training must be adapted to the target group:

*Advisors needs to read the group and adapting methods based on the specific needs of the specific group (Mikrofonden)*

*The main concern of all is to understand the background and the expectations of the participants (Confcooperative)*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.euricse.eu/projects/new-production-and-worker-cooperatives-and-the-employee-buyout-phenomenon/>





## Conclusions: Challenges and Gaps

From the analysis of the data collected, what are the greatest needs in promoting cooperation:

1. In all countries, regardless of the type of training carried out (specific on cooperative entrepreneurship or on entrepreneurship education more generally) advisors expressed a general lack of knowledge about cooperation in entrepreneurial education at large.
2. The cooperative principles and values also need to be better understood. Training should instil in the conscience of learners the mutual purpose of the cooperative and aim at the enhancement of human capital over financial capital. The cooperative model needs to have the same dignity than other business models - restore a more positive image to the cooperatives.
3. To harmonize counseling with the academia's methods for gaining acceptance and collaboration, as well as maintaining a scientific approach to the work
4. More practical trainings, to engage more who is attending (Bifrost). There is a need for trainings in which you can test yourself more with games and simulations (SERN)
5. Different approaches to counseling - fixed templates and structures are not suitable in cooperative counseling
6. The training must be "long life" and not end with a single course. There is a need to provide continuous training, which can be used even after the cooperative is formed. This is essential for the cooperative's values and principles to remain the founding pillar of the company.
7. More concrete collaborations between old / established cooperative and new cooperatives (Coompanion) also to develop cooperation among cooperatives (SERN) and create new synergies and business opportunities
8. Exchange good practices at European level to be inspire in improving the work done

The elements collected and discussed within the project partnership will be of great use in developing the learning model envisaged in the framework of the Intellectual Output 1 of the COPE project, on the basis of the needs that emerged in the various countries involved.



COPE Project

GAP ANALYSIS IN SWEDEN  
– COOMPANION ÖSTERGÖTLAND



## CONTEXT

The history of co-operation in Sweden goes far back in time and largely follows the history of co-operation in the rest of Europe. As early as 1801, the first mutual insurance company was established and during the first half of the century, above all, producer cooperation grew. At the end of the 19th century and around the turn of the last century, there was an increase in consumer cooperation, with a clear influence from, among others, British grocery stores. In 1923 Sweden's first tenant cooperative, HSB, was formed and extensive housing cooperation emerged in Sweden. Today, all the large, Swedish cooperatives have their roots from this time

During the 80s and 90s, the co-operation went through a revival of sorts and a "new co-operation" emerged. Parental cooperative preschools, rural schools as staff cooperatives and various forms of artists' and craft cooperatives gradually became more common. So-called work-integrated social enterprises / work cooperatives were also started, mainly to create meaningful jobs for people far from the regular labour market.

Compared to many other countries, the cooperative model is less in demand in Sweden. One explanation for this, can be found in the extensive welfare construction that the country underwent after the Second World War and until approx. mid 70s. The cooperative model as a solution to the challenges of society was not in demand, mainly due to the fact that a strong public sector provided for basic needs and income disparities were the lowest in the Western world.

In Sweden, co-operation is not a form of association of its own, if you want to start and run a co-operative, the form of choice is usually Ekonomisk Förening (Economic Association) and this company form is relatively unknown and surrounded by a lot of prejudices. The norm for entrepreneurship in Sweden is Aktiebolag (Private Limited company).

There is also a form of company called Ömsesidiga Bolag (Mutual Companies). This form only occurs in insurance operations and some of Sweden's largest insurance companies are Ömsesidiga Bolag.

The turnover for the 100 largest cooperative companies in Sweden in 2019 was € 44,2 billion. To this sum another € 21,4 billion can be added as turnover of the largest mutual companies that same year.

Within this total, there is a significant range, the largest (ARLA) had a turnover of € 12,2 billion (but in this context it should be mentioned that Arla is not entirely Swedish). Of the all-Swedish companies, Lantmännen Ekonomisk Förening with 21 member associations is the largest with a turnover almost half of Arlas. As a further comparison, that the company with the lowest turnover of the 100, had a turnover of € 4,3 million. In total, the co-operation accounts for about 10% of GDP in Sweden.

Another measure of size is the number of employees. Seven of the 100 largest companies had 1,000 or more full-time employees and just over a quarter had fewer than 20 full-time employees. Five of the 100 largest companies had no employees at all. For comparison, it can be mentioned that only 0,4 per mille of all Swedish companies have 1,000 employees or more.

The number of full-time jobs in total, with the 100 largest Economic Associations and the Mutual Companies together was approx. 77,500 in 2019. However, it should be added that many employees were part-time and / or short-term employees and this means that cooperative and mutual companies together have an estimated close to 100,000 employees in total.



Regarding the number of members in the associations, KF-Coop and the Consumer Associations are in a class of their own with about 3,5 million members.

This is followed by OK associations with 1 million and HSB associations with 650,000.

The members representation on the boards was 747 members, of which 30% women.

The largest and most well-known cooperative companies in Sweden represent a few industries, such as agriculture, food, food processing, wholesale, energy production and transport. At the level below, we find education including preschools, housing, healthcare & care as well as building & construction.

The overall picture is that those who provides consumer services for daily needs are run by individual consumers. For production goods, business services and rare purchase services, it is mostly producing companies that run the business and among energy companies it is common for both households and companies to be included as members.

In the cultural sector, individual cultural practitioners are involved as producers, and in care, school, care, it is common for both user-driven (clients themselves or their relatives) as well as employee-driven companies.

It is also not uncommon for both users and employees to be members of one and the same Economic Association.

Source: Svensk Kooperation and SCB, Statistics Sweden.

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Reporting the quantitative part of the on-line survey from the Swedish partners Coompanion and Mikrofonden

We have in total 56 responses. We openly invited business advisers and financiers to complete the survey. The majority of those who responded have a background in cooperation, but some have less knowledge about cooperation.

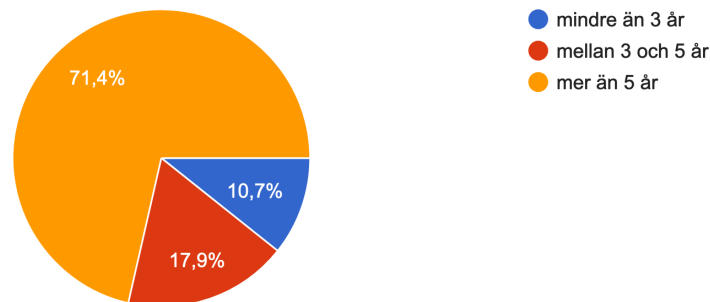
1. *Have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education for how long?*
  - *Less than 3 years (blue)*
  - *Between 3 and 5 years (red)*
  - *More than 5 years (yellow)*





## Hur länge har du varit rådgivare/utbildare inom främjarsystemet?

56 svar



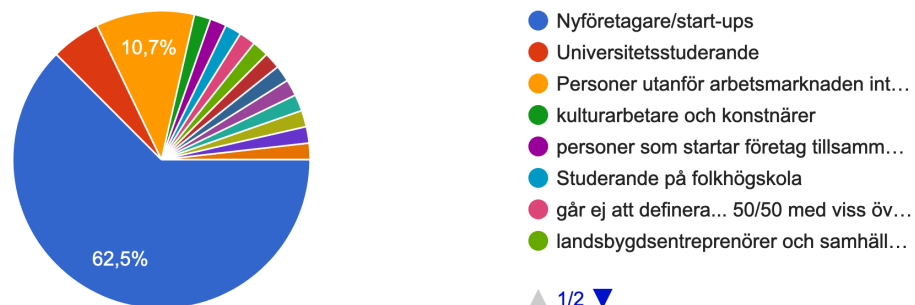
We can state that we have many experienced advisers! Is it the case that we who enter the cooperation movement become so in love with it that we do not want to leave? It takes a lot of experience and large networks to do the work we do. It is also the case that we build up our team of advisers and develop the skills we have based on the experiences we have with us. We must constantly evolve and be flexible.

### 1. Who is your main target group?

- Groups in pre-start-ups phase (blue but also sometimes part of others hence +62,5%)
- Students at University (red 5,4%)
- Unemployed people interested in entrepreneurship (10,7%)
- Other

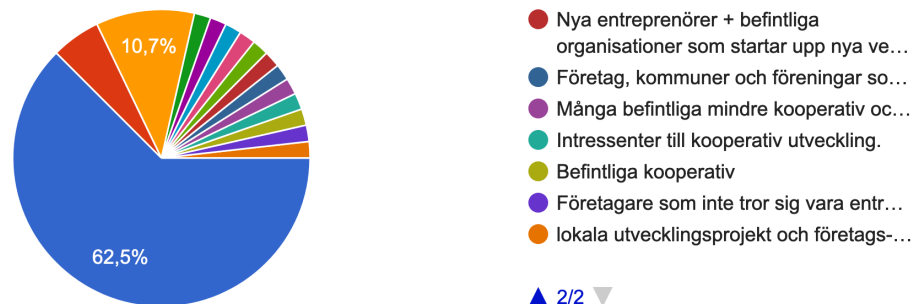
## Vilken är din främsta målgrupp?

56 svar



## Vilken är din främsta målgrupp?

56 svar



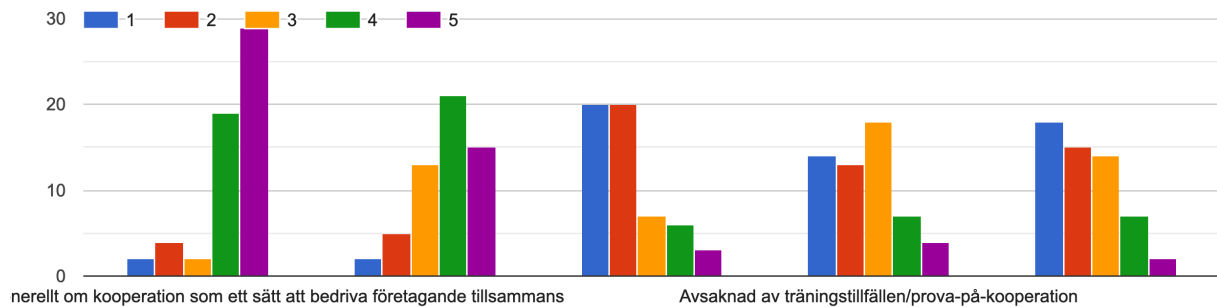
About 60% of new entrepreneurs/startups constitute our main target group. But at a closer look there may be more in that category, because persons answering the survey have chosen to describe it in a different, broader way. It has felt important to include words such as cooperatives or social entrepreneurs. One respondent has written "entrepreneurs who do not think they are entrepreneurs". A large group (6 responses) specifically concerns people outside the labor market who are interested in entrepreneurship. I think it is largely about the type of tool/entrepreneurship called ASF in Sweden (work-integrating social enterprises) which is an important tool for several companion offices.

What does this say about the image of what Coompanion stands for? How do we communicate externally and internally what we stand for? Do we risk becoming unclear and difficult to grasp or is the width a strength? I see it as an obvious strength in our work that we are so broad and inclusive. That we work with societal development, but I think about clarity. For example, in comparison with other organizations that are advisors for other types of businesses which only have the goal to earn money?

1. Please rate the importance of the following aspects pertaining to obstacles encountered when creating new cooperatives: (1 less relevant (blue), 5 more relevant (purple))

- limited knowledge of the cooperative model (most important)
- lack of financing tools designed for cooperatives (second)
- long and complicated process and requirements for creation (least important)
- lack of trainings (third)
- lack of cooperative audit and control tools (forth)

Vilka är de största hindren för att få till fler kooperativa företag som du ser det? (1 mindre relevant, 5 mer relevant)



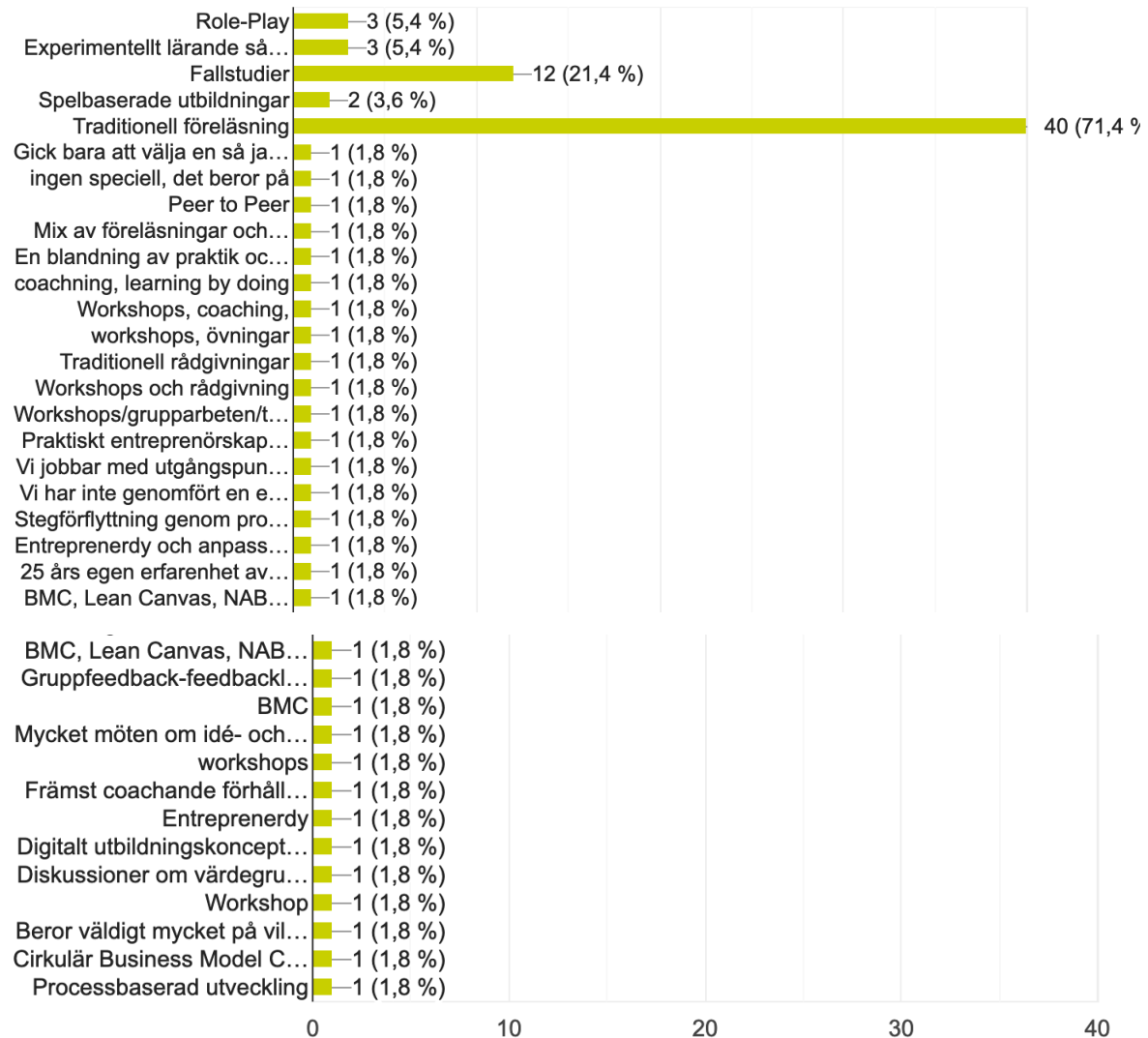
The single biggest obstacle identified is "The general lack of knowledge about cooperation as a way to conduct business together"! It feels tough to take on that challenge because we cannot sit alone on the solution. We need efforts at everything from local, municipal, regional, national and international level. "Lack of financial instruments for cooperatives" comes in a clear second place. Good then that we are the partners we are in Empowerment+ Coompanion and Mikrofonden. Or is that why we get these answers...?

1. Which of these learning methods do you use to improve learning development?
  - Role-Play
  - Simulation
  - Case study (second place)
  - Games- based training
  - Lecture (first place)
  - Other (well....we like to add our own methods 😊 most described are not methods but mor tools to combine into methods)

Vilka av dessa metoder använder du inom entreprenörsutbildning?



56 svar



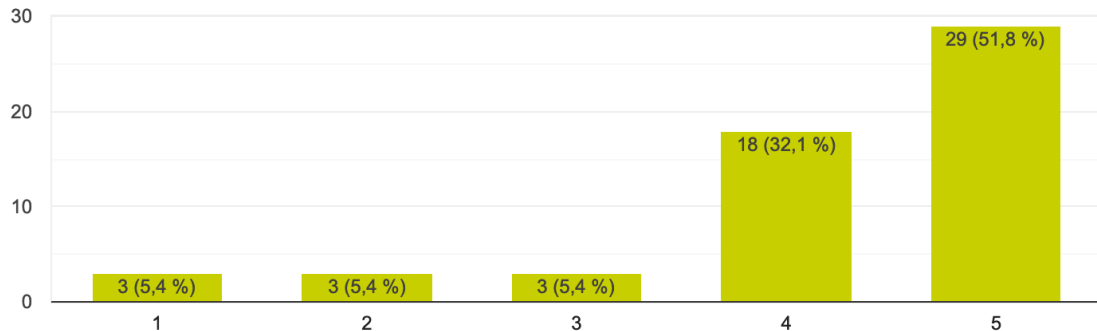
Many respond to traditional lectures as at least one of the ways they work (At least 40 responds or 71.4% but then there are some who have combined it together with other tools). Then it is of course the case that most people want to add their own twist so there are a lot of different kinds of answers to this question. Then there are several who describe that they use different types of digital tools / models / templates. Wondering what falls under that heading. Case studies comes second with a bit more than 20% and Interactive theater and role play have unexpectedly been used as many as 10%).

Many people use case studies. Several also mention workshops. But then you can think about what method it is...? It's more of a form than a method, isn't it?

1. How important is it to present the cooperative model as an alternative business model? (Linear scale 1 to 5, 1 not relevant – 5 very relevant)

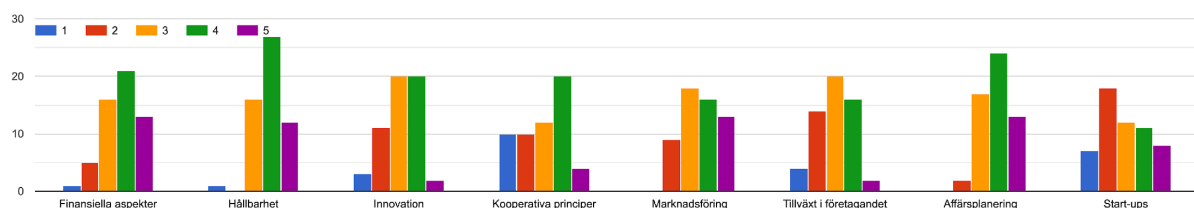
Hur viktigt är det för dig att presentera kooperation som affärsmodell?

56 svar



The most surprising thing here is that there are 9 people who do not think it is particularly important to present cooperation as a business model? What does it say if you are employed as an advisor at Coompanion or Mikrofonden? But sometimes maybe we do not use the terminology “cooperative model”? Some advisors use the term “starting/doing business together” even though they are actually talking about the cooperative model.

Vilket av följande ämnen utforskas mest vid dina utbildnings/rådgivningstillfällen? (1 mindre utforskad -5 mer utforskad)



Financial aspects and sustainability are what you work with most in education and counseling. The cooperative principles not so much. Why? Does it feel outdated? But sustainability is one of them, right? How is the question interpreted? You carry with you the essence of the cooperative principles, but you do not express it with those words? Same as question 5 regarding this.

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS



The analysis is based on 10 individual interviews and two focus groups consisting of a total of 6 people employed at Coompanion – all asked the same questions. This qualitative approach was complemented with a quantitative questionnaire sent both to Coompanion advisors as well as officials within the overall Swedish support system for entrepreneurship. All are situated in various parts of Sweden. The empirical data is available at Coompanion Östergötland.

## INTERVIEWS AND FOCUSGROUPS

### 1. For how long have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education? How did you accumulate the knowledge you currently have?

Coompanion is a highly variable advisory platform, with a unique positioning regarding cooperation and social entrepreneurship. The advisors experience goes from 1 year to 34 years in the business advisor sector. All advisors have some form of academic background, most of which are not within the entrepreneurial or business sector. There are exams in architecture, school teacher, tourism science, biologist etcetera but all have experience from entrepreneurship and/or cooperative business development through practice. Of course, there are also advisers with examine from higher education within entrepreneurship development and similar.

### 2. How do you and your organization work in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship with adults? (i.e., working individually or with groups)

The counselling is provided free of charge for start-ups and each office also work with projects to support the sector. They also work with systemic development in collaboration with the rest of the public promotion system for entrepreneurship.

### 3. How do you reach your target group?

The target group is reached to a large extent through collaboration with other parts of the public support structure. Often through officials / employees who have the task of referring to Coompanion or with whom Coompanion is on good footing. Furthermore, start-up groups are found through references to a large extent. Outreach activities that can take place through information initiatives or networking with the structure that can then create references are also important activities. Several advisors also rely to a large or clear degree on personal networks to reach the target group.

Social media and newsletters are used to a lesser extent - several interviewees experience Coompanion as weak in this area. An office has benefited from an email list with over 2000 contacts (before the GDPR came out). Recently, Coompanion Sweden has taken greater responsibility for marketing via social media, to which several advisers refer.

Quotes:

*"They are coming to us. We have a good reputation here in the Region. Our Region has had the most cooperative start-ups in relation to population size in recent years. Some project support has helped, including integration measures. We are oftentimes chosen above other parts of the support structure today."*

*"You have to keep in mind when choosing which information initiatives to implement and against which target group. If you inform, for example, unemployed young people, you get counselling sessions, but no registered start-ups. Teachers send some young entrepreneurship-students for advice, but the same thing there - it rarely creates start-ups. "If you inform together with the structure to reach entrepreneurs in a start-up context, then there will often be more start-ups for real."*

**4. Which groups or sectors have reached out to you as an instructor? Where is the strongest demand for the cooperative model?**

Coompanions advisers are contacted by groups / individuals within a wide range of industries, ethnic groups, ages, etc. You can notice a difference between different offices / counties and according to the interviewees, it changes between times which industries are more popular. Traditionally, work integration has been a strong part of Coompanion, which means that all actors working with unemployment issues may have reason to make contact. Historically, it has mostly been about work-integrating social enterprises. Other common sectors are CCI and rural development where green industries (cooperative farming) are growing right now but also to some extent cooperative building associations and local development initiatives, like rural service development. In one county, one of the interviewees has advised several families with a foreign background who have created "family cooperatives", within various industries. These have been contacted via references created from integration projects. The cooperative model seems to suit foreign-born people from countries with more collectivist cultures, where the family (clan / extended family) is important.

It is also common for civil society to seek advice when associations want to develop different social business concepts.

Quotes:

*"Foreign-born is one such group that contacts us more and more. At first that group was a bit scared and insecure... but then when we showed that we could help them form family cooperatives it became easier. Most of the start-ups were family cooperatives - mother, father, children owned an economic association together. Popular with foreign-born. It is an affordable way to start a company in Sweden which was an important thing and suited very well among former refugees. Sometimes they had debts to refugee smugglers and so on, but could easily start despite this because an economic association is cheap to register at the authorities."*

**5. Did you organise mentoring activities for groups in pre-start-up phase?**





None of the interviewees work with mentorship in regular activities. Mentoring programs are sometimes offered through projects.

## 6. How do you plan and implement trainings on cooperative entrepreneurship? Are you following training modules?

The advisors use a number of different methods and models. The most common answer is that you tailor based on the target group and situation. You often plan together in the office and you start from both national templates, such as Coompanions manual "Ready Set Go", and in some cases self-developed templates. Workshops are often used as a method and homework is also used when deemed appropriate. Some advisors avoid the word cooperation as the main point but "bake" the subject into a wider range of corporate forms in their activities. An alternative term used by several offices is "Entrepreneurship Together". One office uses Coompanions method book social innovation; as a basic template in counseling. The SDG's are regularly used to link entrepreneurship to sustainability.

More information about templates under question 13 where the topic came into a more structural context during the interviews.

## 7. Which are the training topics?

The advisors collectively cover a comprehensive range of topics. When you do not master an area yourself, you take in help from other offices. One of the interviewees expressed the training topics as everything connected to Coompanions mission - collaboration and entrepreneurship.

Important topics are social entrepreneurship, social innovation and community entrepreneurship in the broadest sense. These areas include, for example, business development, board training, budget, financing, LEAN Startup, democratic methods, work integration, cooperative history, marketing and fundamental values.

Examples of the mentioned specialist training / advice in special sectors are digital shop, cultivation projects, health entrepreneurship and cooperative building associations and co-housing.

## 8. How did you present the financial aspects and the business planning?

This question was treated differently between the interviewees. Several expressed scepticisms towards the business plan, which was considered "fuzzy", as it is based more on guesswork than facts. If the bank requires a business plan, the ALMI <sup>1</sup>template was used, and their budget template was also used. The most mentioned ways to introduce a business plan are to use some form of business model canvas - BMC, lean BMC or social BMC - and create a BUSINESS MODEL. The advisors who used the

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<sup>1</sup> Almi Företagspartner AB is owned by the Swedish state and is the parent company of a group consisting of 16 regional subsidiaries and the Almi Invest AB subgroup. The regional subsidiaries, which provide loans and business development, are 51 percent owned by the parent company and 49 percent owned by regional owners. Almi Invest is wholly-owned by the parent company and conducts venture capital activities.

business plan could, for example, break down the advice process based on the different parts of the business plan and often different templates were used, including Coompanions own.

One office had made a decision to always use Coompanions method book for social innovations as basis for all counselling sessions - there are methods such as SBMC, business matrix and NABC. Other mentioned tools for business plan advice / training were the software Entrepreneurerdy and Jamboard.

The more mentioned model for introducing financial aspects was the backwards budget - to start from what the contractor must earn per month / year to survive and then adjust the rest of the budget to achieve this goal. The next step will be to adapt the marketing to be able to achieve the goals in the backwards budget.

Interesting comments on this issue are that the advisor should focus on business benefits, not societal benefits, primarily in this area. The entrepreneur often has a good grasp of the societal benefits, but is not usually that good at creating sustainability in the budget.

Quotes:

*“The economy is presented at a level that is very basic. Backward budget is important where you calculate what you have to get into your account each month. Can you live on the company's revenue? How much do you have to withdraw? What does the market research say you can do? Can tasks be assigned to others so that you free up time for revenue making activities?”*

*“Business modeling needs more attention. My experience says there is a lot of fuzziness there today. We are already working a lot on the soft values and it does not need to be strengthened right now. The hard values is what we must strengthen within Coompanion. One way is to provide more real world examples of how long-term profitable and sustainable cooperatives like Arla, Södra skogsägarna etcetera are operating and how they are organised.”*

## 9. How do you present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model?

The cooperative principles are mentioned by the advisers on various occasions but often quite “ad hoc”, as one of the interviewees put it. Some advisers did not mention them at all. One adviser only mentioned them on returning visits after a couple of months. This is because the hard values in entrepreneurship are so important to get started with to build economic sustainability for expansion and survival. The soft values can be built on later when the new cooperative's budget is in order.

When it comes to governance models, these are also not so common in the advice process. One adviser said that often these questions come in to place when there is a problem in the group, “he who goes in with the most money wants to decide more... how do we solve it” and so on. Another advisor discussed management models in counselling, but not on the basis of any particular template, but on the basis of experience and on the basis of the issues that arise. What do different roles do - CEO, chairman and so on. One adviser had a checklist where the start up group could fill in who does what in the business - open in the morning, take care of bookkeeping and so on.

Quotes:

*“99% do not come to learn about cooperative principles but because they have a business idea.”*

## 10. How do you present the topics of sustainability and innovation?

6 out of 10 interviewees specifically mentioned that sustainability is a basic prerequisite that permeates all counseling and training. 6 out of 10 also mentioned that the global sustainability goals (Agenda 2030) were tools for presenting sustainability and innovation issues. The discussions in the focus groups reflected this well. Workshops on sustainability issues were mentioned where, among other things, the Ready Set Go templates could be used, as well as the Social Business Model Canvas. One counsellor gave homework to the startup groups to select 1-3 goals to target with the business.

One adviser never spoke about the global sustainability goals during the advisory process, but instead about economic sustainability, with the Lean Startup model as a guide.

Several advisers mentioned that social sustainability can be forgotten in the corporate sector where economic sustainability and increasingly ecological sustainability are established. Do not forget to ask questions about social sustainability was specifically mentioned by one of the interviewees. Coompanions "Business development social innovation - method book for social Entrepreneurship" was always used as a basis for innovation counselling and training by an office.

A notable aspect was several advisors skepticism of the term innovation. Quotes like "there is inflation in the word innovation" and "development is more important than innovation, exemplifies this. Summing up that line of thought is that not everything can be innovative, usually you just have to establish business models that work and create development.

Quotes:

*"Cooperation is a bit of a mind image of SDG 17 in agenda 2030, but we are showing it poorly. Cooperative companies are more sustainable than others. Healthy collaboration is what we need more of. Almost all small businesses know this. You do not compete but you work together with industry colleagues. Coompanion Sweden should work harder to develop tools in healthy collaboration and sustainability (eg goal 17) that benefit the regional offices. Better models for entrepreneurship in healthcare, for example, through cooperation."*

## 11. How did you introduce the topics of entrepreneurial marketing and scaling in business?

In general, scalability was not considered particularly important for Coompanion's target groups. Most people are either out so early that growth in addition to creating basic economic sustainability is not relevant or they are only interested in basic breadwinning business. Several advisers mentioned that they ask questions such as "How do you see yourselves in 5 years" or other questions related to scalability based on the groups own wishes. An adviser mentioned that downsizing can sometimes give better results, such as getting rid of costly resources that weigh down the business.

All advisors initiated general marketing dialogues and tailored based on the groups contextual needs.

One advisor mentioned that the Lean Start Up book clearly addresses both scalability and marketing and is easy to follow in the advice process.

**12. Which training methods do you use to improve learning development? (Case study, Games-based training, lecture, Role-Play, simulation,...) which methods do you think are more suitable?**

The counsellors pick method based on the situation and their own experience in all situations and mix common methods such as learning by doing, workshops, lectures, case studies and role play. In digital education, it is important to try to keep a ratio of 70%interaction / 30% receptiveness, according to one of the interviewees. The same relationship may apply to physical education as well, according to the same person. Other methods mentioned were creating a vision for the future, dialogue seminars, group dynamics “different personality types coded as colors” and Lean StartUp.

The interviewee who consistently promoted Lean Start-Up said it was important to use to harmonize with the rest of the structure, not least entrepreneurship consulting and education at universities.

Quotes:

*“Setting good examples is always important. Without good examples, it will not be credible. Bad examples are also important (as good examples). In trainings, feasibility visits are very important for people to see live what it can look like in reality.”*

*“You have to practice presenting (pitching) in the start-up groups, here there are often needs, we have noticed. We encourage taking notes and finding structure in the work ahead. Many people learn better by writing down things. You can give a template on, for example, protocols that can then be filled in, which can provide good knowledge from learning by doing.”*

*“An important basis is to tackle problems as they come, not to educate/train too much but instead learning by doing in reality. That is best way forward. Entrepreneurs should socialize with customers so you should really not advise them to go to training and network meetings.”*

**13. According to your experience, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?**

Each office has its own culture on how to counsel, provide training and collaboration where certain factors unite, others contradict. There is, of course, a common basis and through adapted continuous improvement work, increased quality should be provided in counselling and education based on the answers given in this feasibility study.

Both interviews and focus groups point in the same direction and vary extremely little, although there may be some differences in examples of methods used or views on challenges. An important conclusion is the different approaches to counseling where several senior counsellors are clear that fixed templates and structures are not suitable in cooperative counseling. Another school of thought” is that one should harmonize counseling with the academia’s methods for gaining acceptance and collaboration, as well as maintaining a scientific approach to the work.

The third “school of thought” requires a clearer line of advice with templates, checklists and possibly also software that directs the business development process. The last school of “thought” consists primarily of counsellors who have not been active for so long. This division is of course very generally presented, and nuances are of course present. One office has, for example, developed its own

checklists and strategies with good results that can be seen as something in between an open advisory structure and fixed strategies.

A clear demand is an advisor forum to share this type of experience with each other. One conclusion is also that younger advisers may need more structured support in order to eventually be able to grow into a more flexible role.

The demand for more training in leadership and innovative models such as TEAL, U-lab, Golden Circle and sociocracy as well as a greater focus on the hard values (sustainable business modelling) within Coompanion was given, distributed among different participants. A better joint packaging of the offer to the outside world was also requested by one of the interviewees.

Regarding cooperative education in a general perspective, it was mentioned that cooperation is not at all anchored in the school system in Sweden - education in cooperative entrepreneurship is lacking and knowledge about cooperation is generally low.

Quotes:

*“Never templates in counselling. It kind of doesn't work you know, and it gets boring for oneself. You must be able to answer questions. One-way communication does not work well. You should listen to what the group wants and then tailor counselling based on this.”*

*“Cooperative entrepreneurship is lacking in higher education in Sweden - universities completely lack courses in this. There is no anchoring in the school system / education system in general. The basic understanding is lacking in society at large. A broad educational effort towards the general public is needed - high school, colleges, universities etcetera.”*

#### **14. According to your experience, what makes a training successful? Present a good practice from your experience.**

Most interviewees saw the adviser's personal treatment of the start up group as decisive. A professional and committed approach and a well-executed counselling service is extremely important. It also creates a good reputation. The material used must be adapted to the group's context. Active listening and a broad approach are often appreciated. Honesty and to be trustworthy is extremely important. Sometimes you have to be honest enough to dissuade from the start up. Always give good examples and a lot of knowledge and give tips about contacts / networks, or where more knowledge can be obtained. Keep the right pace based on the groups need.

Participation in the process is important, the groups experience, goals and dreams must be in focus. The most basic thing is that it should be a pleasant visit (offer coffee / tea).

Checklists can facilitate counseling / training but must not be too guiding.

Quotes:

*“Honesty is important, sometimes you have to dare to advise to change models and maybe even advise against start-ups. The driving force must not be just passion about a subject, but passion about being an entrepreneur. Another important piece of the puzzle is the lack of templates and*

*structure... which means that we listen well and are empathetic, flexible. Not the same structure for everyone, but we adapt to the group context."*

*"Through our own developed tool social innovation camp, we have understood our position in the market - the gray zone between academia, business sector, civil society and the public sector. We know the language of all these sectors. It is important to keep the mission - societal benefit through entrepreneurship."*

**15. what are the biggest challenges in your work? and how do you try to overcome these challenges?**

The most mentioned challenge was general financing of the Coompanion offices closely followed by the need for continuous improvement work in the networking and collaboration with the structure. A general challenge is to reach those who want to run cooperative business, increase the number of consultations and to become better at finding the unique selling point that create activity. The marketing of Coompanion in social media is lagging behind.

The "projectification" of the activities makes it sprawling and short-term - where do the project results end up?

Three participants mentioned that it is difficult for economic associations to get a bank account and that it sometimes happens that players do not want to sign an agreement with an economic association. This is because you are unfamiliar with the company form.

For younger generations in Sweden, the cooperative business form is unknown and is not taught at all in the school system, other than in individual initiatives, for example through projects (often via Coompanion).

The challenges are tackled in different ways. Honesty in the advising process and taking part in various collaborations is important.

The fact that national office, Coompanion Sweden, has taken a clearer responsibility for marketing in social media was perceived as positive by some interview participants and can be seen as a way of tackling the challenges of reaching the target groups.

Quotes:

*"Basic financing is always a challenge for Coompanion. Being able to work with the free hours is a challenge. Everything is so tied up in projects, which controls the activities to a great extent. Trying to weave in business development and training etc. within a project. That's the way "you have to do it" today. "*

*"Ignorance of cooperation is great in Swedish society. Training in cooperative entrepreneurship is completely lacking from a structural point of view. In the long term, education must take place in primary schools, perhaps already in upper secondary school, but at universities this is needed above all. Otherwise we will not have a fundamental reach in society. "*

*"In Sweden, you must first work with the feeling, attitude and thinking about cooperation. Young people have no preconceived notions about cooperation, which is good because then they can have a more objective entrance / open vision... because they do not know about it. "*

*"No connection to the old cooperative sector is a major shortcoming. A collaboration there could have provided real leverage. Otherwise, it's just "little Coompanion" on itself."*



## QUESTIONNAIRE SUMMARY ANALYSIS

### **How long have you been working as advisor/trainer within the support system?**

71,4% of the advisors/trainers have more than 5 years experience in Coompanion. We can state that we have many experienced advisers! Is it the case that we who enter the cooperative movement become so in love with it that we do not want to leave? It takes a lot of experience and large networks to do the work we do. It is also the case that we build up our team of advisers and develop the skills we have based on the experiences we have with us. We must constantly evolve and be flexible.

### **Which is your main target group?**

62,5% Start-ups. About 60% of new entrepreneurs/startups constitute our main target group. But at a closer look there may be more in that category, but persons answering the questionnaire have chosen to describe it in a different, broader way. It has felt important to include words such as cooperatives or social entrepreneurs. One respondent has written "entrepreneurs who do not think they are entrepreneurs". A large group (6 responses) specifically concerns people outside the labor market who are interested in entrepreneurship. This is largely about the type of tool/entrepreneurship called ASF in Sweden (work-integrating social enterprises) which is an important tool for several Coompanion offices.

What does this say about the image of what Coompanion stands for? How do we communicate externally and internally what we stand for? Do we risk becoming unclear and difficult to grasp or is the width a strength? I see it as an obvious strength in our work that we are so broad and inclusive. That we work with societal development, but I think about clarity. For example, in comparison with other organisations that are advisors for other types of businesses which only have the goal to earn money?

### **What are the largest obstacles for more cooperatives?**

The single biggest obstacle identified is "The general lack of knowledge about cooperation as a way to conduct business together"! It feels tough to take on that challenge because we cannot sit alone on the solution. We need efforts at everything from local, municipal, regional, national and international level. "Lack of financial instruments for cooperatives" comes in a clear second place.

### **Which of these methods are used in the entrepreneurial training?**

Many respond to traditional lectures as at least one of the ways they work (At least 40 or 71.4% but then there are some who have combined it together with other tools). Then it is of course the case that most people want to add their own twist so there are a lot of different kinds of answers to this question. Then there are several who describe that they use different types of digital tools / models / templates. Wondering what falls under that heading. Case studies comes second with a bit more than 20% and Interactive theatre and role play have unexpectedly been used as many as 10%). Many people use case studies. Several also mentioned workshops.

### **How important is it for you to present cooperation as a business model?**

The most surprising thing here is that there are 9 people who do not think it is particularly important to present cooperation as a business model. What does it say if you are employed as a consultant at Coompanion?





### **Which of these subjects are explored in your trainings/councillings?**

Financial aspects and sustainability are what you work with most in education and counseling. The cooperative principles not so much. Why? Does it feel outdated? But sustainability is one of them, right? How is the question interpreted? You carry with you the essence of the cooperative principles, but you do not express it with those words?

### **By your experience, what is missing or needs to be further developed in trainings/counseling sessions on cooperative business development?**

An overview of the data gives a broad picture. Financing tools, sustainable business models, business management, democratic organisation management, legal and more good cooperative examples are important parts to mention. Working to make the cooperative business model more known in Sweden is also very important.

### **According to your experience, what are the successfactors in trainings/counseling on cooperative business development?**

Many good examples describing the sustainability of the cooperative model and to meet the group in their own context, are important aspects. Getting the group going at small scale quick. The trainer/counsellor needs to listen well to the group's needs, be knowledgeable and provide counselling out of facts and best practice.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### *Thoughts on possible ways forward for Coompanion*

- Investigate the possibility of establishing an Advisory Forum with mentorship. Here, good examples can be spread in a structured way and experienced senior advisers can support new advisers. The outcome should be continuous improvement work in the national cooperative counselling service.
- Investigate the possibility of creating a more adapted advisor training that matches the daily activities in a clearer way and that promotes financial sustainability.
  - o Investigate new clearer strategies, checklists and templates (or repackaging the existing ones) for new advisors that create comfort in the daily operation - Lean Start Up, Entrepreneurship and local checklists that have been developed and tested in the field; can be starting points. Likewise for "Methodbook social innovation" which is highly appreciated in one of the offices.
  - o Flexibility in consulting and training initiatives will always be an important prerequisite for mastering by Coompanion's employees. Find methods to help the new advisors grow in their role so that in the long run they become less dependent on templates and checklists and instead rely on their experience. Here, mentoring / advisory forums can be an important support, but also new well adapted material.
  - o The Lean Start Up method may be a way for Coompanion to improve its relationships with academia. Consider incorporating it into counselor training.
  - o Develop new advisory material on sustainable cooperative governance models and business models that have been proven over time, such as old Swedish cooperatives like Arla, Södra

Skogsägarna, Fonus, Sparbankerna, COOP and similar cooperatives that have really proven their robustness and economic growth capacity.

o Innovative methodology and models such as U-lab, Golden Circle, TEAL and more can be a good complement to the basic training of new councilers.

o Analyze the possibility of producing support material for “family cooperatives”, aimed primarily at people from new incoming cultures.

o Teach the advisors how to use a backwards budget (describe costs first, then analyse how much you must make in order to make ends meet)

- Analyze the possibility of creating a clearer packaged offer to the market. Clarity makes it easier for other organizations within the structure to recommend Coompanion. Find inspiration in other organisations with better track record than Coompanion, in this regard.
- Analyze tools in healthy collaboration and sustainability (SDG 17). Develop support methodology based on best practice around. How is Coompanion pitched in the right way within the public support system for entrepreneurship” to establish continuous improvement work in networking and collaboration.

COPE Project  
GAP ANALYSIS IN SWEDEN  
(Mikrofonden Väst)

**CONTEXT**



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The history of co-operation in Sweden goes far back in time and largely follows the history of co-operation in the rest of Europe. As early as 1801, the first mutual insurance company was established and during the first half of the century, above all, producer cooperation grew. At the end of the 19th century and around the turn of the last century, there was an increase in consumer cooperation, with a clear influence from, among others, British grocery stores. In 1923 Sweden's first tenant cooperative, HSB, was formed and extensive housing cooperation emerged in Sweden. Today, all the large, Swedish cooperatives have their roots from this time

During the 80s and 90s, the co-operation went through a revival of sorts and a "new co-operation" emerged. Parental cooperative preschools, rural schools as staff cooperatives and various forms of artists' and craft cooperatives gradually became more common. So-called work-integrated social enterprises / work cooperatives were also started, mainly to create meaningful jobs for people far from the regular labour market.

Compared to many other countries, the cooperative model is less in demand in Sweden. One explanation for this, can be found in the extensive welfare construction that the country underwent after the Second World War and until approx. mid 70s. The cooperative model as a solution to the challenges of society was not in demand, mainly due to the fact that a strong public sector provided for basic needs and income disparities were the lowest in the Western world.

In Sweden, co-operation is not a form of association of its own, if you want to start and run a co-operative, the form of choice is usually Ekonomisk Förening (Economic Association) and this company form is relatively unknown and surrounded by a lot of prejudices. The norm for entrepreneurship in Sweden is Aktiebolag (Private Limited company).

There is also a form of company called Ömsesidiga Bolag (Mutual Companies). This form only occurs in insurance operations and some of Sweden's largest insurance companies are Ömsesidiga Bolag.

The turnover for the 100 largest cooperative companies in Sweden in 2019 was € 44,2 billion. To this sum another € 21,4 billion can be added as turnover of the largest mutual companies that same year.

Within this total, there is a significant range, the largest (ARLA) had a turnover of € 12,2 billion (but in this context it should be mentioned that Arla is not entirely Swedish). Of the all-Swedish companies, Lantmännen Ekonomisk Förening with 21 member associations is the largest with a turnover almost half of Arlas. As a further comparison, that the company with the lowest turnover of the 100, had a turnover of € 4,3 million. In total, the co-operation accounts for about 10% of GDP in Sweden.

Another measure of size is the number of employees. Seven of the 100 largest companies had 1,000 or more full-time employees and just over a quarter had fewer than 20 full-time employees. Five of the 100 largest companies had no employees at all. For comparison, it can be mentioned that only 0,4 per mille of all Swedish companies have 1,000 employees or more.

The number of full-time jobs in total, with the 100 largest Economic Associations and the Mutual Companies together was approx. 77,500 in 2019. However, it should be added that many employees were part-time and / or short-term employees and this means that cooperative and mutual companies together have an estimated close to 100,000 employees in total.

Regarding the number of members in the associations, KF-Coop and the Consumer Associations are in a class of their own with about 3,5 million members.

This is followed by OK associations with 1 million and HSB associations with 650,000.

The members representation on the boards was 747 members, of which 30% women.

The largest and most well-known cooperative companies in Sweden represent a few industries, such as agriculture, food, food processing, wholesale, energy production and transport. At the level below, we find education including preschools, housing, healthcare & care as well as building & construction.

The overall picture is that those who provides consumer services for daily needs are run by individual consumers. For production goods, business services and rare purchase services, it is mostly producing companies that run the business and among energy companies it is common for both households and companies to be included as members.

In the cultural sector, individual cultural practitioners are involved as producers, and in care, school, care, it is common for both user-driven (clients themselves or their relatives) as well as employee-driven companies.

It is also not uncommon for both users and employees to be members of one and the same Economic Association.

Source: Svensk Kooperation and SCB, Statistics Sweden.

## **PRODUCTION PROCESS**

All the interviewees work as advisors / counsellors at various, relevant organizations in Västra Götaland (west of Sweden). Approximately 60% of the respondents in the in-depth interviews work as advisors / counsellors within the cooperative sphere, the rest represent other organizations with some sort of relevance to entrepreneurship and innovation. The people who participated have long experience of providing support to groups, but not all have experience of cooperation. The advisors / counsellors work within organizations that receive some sort of state or municipal grants in order to be able to offer a certain number of hours of free advice.

We e-mailed requests, asking for participants and then we made appointments for the interviews. All interviews were conducted digitally via zoom and the average time for each interview was about 1 hour. Some questions needed more time than others due to the need to reason our way towards answers to arrive at what distinguishes the cooperative way of working compared to more traditional forms of entrepreneurship.

All interviews, both in-depth interviews and in the focus groups were documented in Swedish and then compiled and analysed by the Mikrofondens COPE-team before translated into English.

## **QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

### **INTERVIEWS**



**1. For how long have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education? How did you accumulate the knowledge you currently have?**

The persons in our 10 individual interviews had an average of 13 years of experience in training / business counselling. Their knowhow has been gathered in a number of different ways, mainly through own experience and further training within the organizations where they worked with business consulting and financing solutions. Most have an academic education, but not necessarily an education that includes business consulting and / or financing.

Among those interviewed were also a number of persons who have financial education and/or law studies.

We can see that a number of persons have a related background as business advisors or as financing and/or business developers.

One of the trainers have previously been a board member of Coompanion, both on regional and national level, but is today part of the working the team as a trainer/ advisor and project manager.

In summary we see that there is a long and broad experience among those who were interviewed, which all represents various organisations within the Mikrofonden Väst network of collaborators.

**2. How do you and your organization work in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship with adults? (i.e., working individually or with groups)**

The people that we have interviewed are from various networks, including established cooperation but also from other advisory organizations. We have also interviewed various key persons who are engaged in Mikrofonden Väst's advisory activities.

The majority of those interviewed and who had no connection to Mikrofonden Väst, expressed that they had a lack of knowledge about cooperative entrepreneurship and that they most often refers the clients to their nearest Coompanion.

When asked about the difference between corporate collaboration and cooperation, it became clear to us that they were familiar with the cooperative model but they had not identified it as cooperation.

**3. How do you reach your target group?**

The target group is, to a large extent, reached through the website, via newsletters, social media and via networks. Some stated that they had good, regular contacts between various other business advisory organizations and the prospective entrepreneurs were referred to each other within these networks.

Some mentioned that they got in touch with people within the target group through workshops, lectures and/or information meetings arranged by themselves or others. Several advisors also rely on their personal networks to a large degree in their efforts to reach the target group.

**4. Which groups or sectors have reached out to you as an instructor? Where is the strongest demand for the cooperative model?**

The advisors/counsellors stated that they are being contacted by entrepreneurs, non-profit associations, business networks and other similar organizations that are in need support in the form of advice, business development and financing solutions. It can also be organizations and companies that work in various relevant projects. We did notice a

difference between the advisors /counsellors that work regularly with the cooperative model and those who expressed a lack of knowledge about cooperation. We did also notice that specific words and expressions recur among the cooperative advisors/counsellors, for example; “value-driven companies”, “social entrepreneurship”, “sustainability” and “circular economy”.

Mikrofonden Väst works specifically towards its target group which organizations and associations with in the social economy.

**5. Did you organise mentoring activities for groups in pre-start-up phase?**

The majority of those interviewed state that they don't have an organized mentorship for groups. Within certain target groups, for example, *work-integrating social enterprises*, there is often a need for more continuous support and when that is provided, it can be likened to a mentorship of sorts.

**6. How do you plan and implement trainings on cooperative entrepreneurship? Are you following training modules?**

The established cooperation in Sweden use mostly templates and materials developed on a national level. Advisors/counsellors within Mikrofonden Väst and Coompanion usually start out with their own templates and material together with modules and material from their respective national federations. The reason for these methods is, according to the advisors/counsellors, that each group is unique and that they adapt the training modules and material based on the group's level of knowledge and needs.

Advisors/ counsellors that work within specific project activities do not use the same advice and training approach as those aimed at cooperative entrepreneurship. Although they do mention in the interviews that their work methods probably are based on a cooperative model, when they give it some thought.

**7. Which are the training topics?**

One individual mention that his/her organization have an online education where the cooperative principles and values are taught. Within the established cooperative businesses, advisors /counsellors tells us that they put emphasis on teaching values and structural development within their own organization. It is obvious that the established cooperatives mainly focus on managing one's own business and organizations, they do not focus on promoting new cooperatives. The advisors / counsellors who work directly with the target group, i.e. prospective or start-up cooperatives/companies tells us that they mainly teaches explains about business development, finance, marketing, law and knowledge regarding forms of associations.

**8. How did you present the financial aspects and the business planning?**

Advisors / counsellors working within the established cooperative business focus mainly on supporting management and providing support to the board. Advisors / counsellors who mainly work with start-up groups and advice on financing, use various methods and



teaching modules, for example, Business Model Canvas -BMC. They also give support and advice regarding how and what a budget must contain to be presented to banks and other financiers. Advisors / counsellors also tells us that when they meet with Individual Companies (non-cooperative enterprises) use individual budget templates, but they rarely use various business plans.

**9. How do you present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model?**

Some of those interviewed mentions that basic training in board work with emphasis on the cooperative principles are one example.

Those advisors / counsellors who do not focus mainly on cooperative entrepreneurship tells us that they do not mention the cooperative principles but those who do work with cooperative entrepreneurship explains that the principles are the base of which they work from and a natural part of their advice and training efforts.

**10. How do you present the topics of sustainability and innovation?**

Among the established cooperation, the issue of sustainability is present in all their activities and training. They all have information on how their organization works with sustainability issues and they also have it on printed information and in newsletters and the like that is sent to their members.

One individual from Mikrofonden describes that the issue of sustainability is integrated in all their training / counselling and that they link sustainability issues to the UN's global goals. Many other advisors / counsellors explain that it is naturally included in all advice, and they mention, among other things, circular economy, financial and ecological sustainability.

**11. How did you introduce the topics of entrepreneurial marketing and scaling in business?**

The interviewees told us that they include talks about scalability and PR/marketing in all their consultations and they also provide good and inspirational examples. They also put emphasis on the connection between PR/marketing and sales to create sustainable companies.

All advisors initiated general marketing dialogues and tailored training based on the group's needs and location.

**12. Which training methods do you use to improve learning development? (Case study, Games-based training, lecture, Role-Play, simulation,...) which methods do you think are more suitable?**

The majority of the advisors / counsellors that were interviewed state that they use lectures, workshops and learning by doing. One advisor mentioned showing relevant films as a good method, and group work was also mentioned.

In our opinion the majority of the advisers use more than one method and not only the ones which are listed in the question, but since the question stated specific methods, the answers is based on these.

Many of the advisors / counsellors that we have interviewed have a lot of experience and they explained that they, above everything else, rely on their ability to read the group and adapting methods based on the specific needs of the specific group.

**13. According to your experience, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?**

The majority of advisers / counsellors that usually work more towards traditional entrepreneurship express a general lack of knowledge about cooperation in entrepreneurial education at large. There is not enough teaching materials and methods about cooperation to lean on. Some also express a desire that the big, established cooperatives should support the new co-operation to a much greater extent, they are large organizations and they have enough resources to produce, finance and provide teaching materials and training methods specifically for co-operation.

The established cooperatives on the other hand, mentioned that they calls for more concrete collaborations between old and new co-operation. It could lead to an increased knowledge about the cooperative values among members and within society at large. The importance of headlighting cooperative leadership and cooperative control systems was also mentioned in the interviews.

**14. According to your experience, what makes a training successful? Present a good practice from your experience.**

The persons interviewed by us express a general feeling of being good at adapting their advice and teaching to each individual / group they meet.

The established cooperative organizations conducts only training internally for their members and boards and they have recurring educations all year around. This mean they can reuse concepts and methods throughout their organization.

Advisors / counsellors who mainly work towards new cooperation and potential cooperative groups develop different methods and concepts that they adapted to each group. The majority feel that they are professional and committed in their effort to give good advice / teaching.

This is reflected in the fact that many groups express, when asked, that they are satisfied and return for more advice when needed.

One of the advisor that was interviewed, describes that the most important method is to create a sense of participation and inclusion among the group, both in the process and in discussions.

**15. what are the biggest challenges in your work? and how do you try to overcome these challenges?**

Some of the advisors / counsellors that we have interviewed also occasionally work with counselling and support to groups /associations within specific projects. Their experience tells us that it can be difficult to establish good collaborations between the

groups/associations even though they have a joint goal within the project. Some persons / groups are stronger than others and to create a democratic process is a challenge. Advisors/counsellors from the established cooperatives businesses mention future education as a potential challenge. The level of education, design and the digital format will be the challenges of the future. A generational change is taking place that will affect their methods and educations.

A major concern that several interviewees, regardless from which organization, mention is the general ignorance and lack of knowledge regarding cooperation, the cooperative model and Ekonomisk Förening as a business association.

Some advisers mention a lack of resources and time which poses a challenge and potential limit to their opportunities to reach out to groups or to do dissemination efforts.

The fact that there is a great deal of ignorance means that advisors / counsellors within the social economics and co-operation have to spend time explaining about co-operation at the same time as they need to have more cases and groups to advice in order to maintain public funding. This affect both financial advice / counselling as well as start-ups.

To be able to overcome these challenges, our interviewees highlights the importance of good PR/marketing work, advocacy and networking. It is all about making co-operation and all of us who advocate cooperation well known to erase old notions about the co-

Ang mikrofonden tankar om möjliga vägar framåt:

Mikrofonden behöver utveckla samverkan mellan Coompanion och Mikrofonden, men även andra rådgivarorganisationer. Behöver utveckla de kooperativa principerna och integrerar dessa i lite mer moderna verktyg, bla gentemot hållbarhet, och affärsutvecklingmetoder, i dagsläget svävar de kooperativa principerna lite väl fritt.

## FOCUS GROUP

This is a conclusion of two focus groups where a total of eight people who work as advisors and educators have worked with questions related to cooperative business and have been part in discussions lead by a process leader.

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

### **1. For how long have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education? How did you accumulate the knowledge you currently have?**

Many advisors have many years and a great amount of experience. Many advisors have dedicated their knowledge through their work and internal educations within the organisation of which they work.

## **2. How do you and your organization work in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship with adults? (i.e., working individually or with groups)**

To promote cooperative entrepreneurship the focus groups considers it important to manage advocacy work, marketing and to be active in networks that connect our advisors. Few in Sweden have knowledge of cooperative entrepreneurship and to be able to advise people we need to network. We help them from having only a business concept to having a complete business, amongst other things we help with education and board work.

## **3. How do you reach your target group?**

First and foremost, we reach our target group through networking and strategic collaborations as well as social media. The focus groups see that our business partners want for us to also market our services, as a crucial step to spread our message and yet again reach our target group.

## **4. Which groups or sectors have reached out to you as an instructor? Where is the strongest demand for the cooperative model?**

This focus group deem the biggest demand come from those who are driven by a ground set of values that correspond and finds liking in the cooperative model. We have experienced that those who contact us are those who want to start something together and have a common need, for example childcare, housing, food/cultivation.

## **5. Did you organise mentoring activities for groups in pre-start-up phase?**

The focus groups were united in the reasoning that mentorship in cooperative associations is worked with far too less and that is has a great potential for development.

## **6. How do you plan and implement trainings on cooperative entrepreneurship? Are you following training modules?**

The focus groups uses existing material such as Business model Canvas and Blue Ocean among others, and the focus group means to say that both in advisory work and educating work it is important to use coaching approach and to lead through the process. They make sure to always give the groups a possibility to develop sustainability in different aspects, economically, socially and ecologically. They help these different aspects become part of the process and use democracy as an important part of it all.

## **7. Which are the training topics?**

The focus groups mean that they advise in many different areas and have a great amount of knowledge and a big network to take help from. The counselling happens in these areas; law, financing, business development within an organisation and leadership. They mean that all counselling and advisory work is customised and is based on the individuals and the business.

#### **8. How did you present the financial aspects and the business planning?**

The focus groups believe that the business plans should be adapted, based on the company's needs and the individuals' prior knowledge and what it is meant to be used for. They use their organizations' templates and partners depending on the company and industry.

#### **9. How do you present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model?**

The focus group believes that it is very clear both when you go through, and shape the association's statutes, but that it is also part of the regular counselling.

#### **10. How do you present the topics of sustainability and innovation?**

The focus groups are usually based on the sustainability of the companies based on economic, social and ecological sustainability and they now use the UN's global sustainability goals to help shed light on this particular cause. When it comes to innovation, it is more service innovation than product innovation in the cooperative companies.

#### **11. How did you introduce the topics of entrepreneurial marketing and scaling in business?**

The focus group believes that marketing has become more accessible and easier to do yourself: many today have good knowledge about it, it has become easier to talk about and it is easier for everyone today to do marketing themselves and they can also understand the benefits of it.

The focus group believes that scalability is most often used when counselling established companies more than for start-ups.

#### **12. Which training methods do you use to improve learning development? (Case study, Games-based training, lecture, Role-Play, simulation,...) which methods do you think are more suitable?**

The focus group believes that they often use *participation between people* or similar companies as the one to be started. They also say that they use all the good examples that are available on social media, youtube, etc.

#### **13. According to your experience, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?**

The focus group believes that the cooperative business model is not addressed in education, that most of the education at universities and colleges is about limited companies. The group thinks that the cooperative leadership within the board work should be raised and that all cooperative organizations do not have to be, or perhaps should not be, “flat” organizations but need leadership that is clear; but one that lives by the cooperative principles.

**14. According to your experience, what makes a training successful? Present a good practice from your experience.**

The focus group believes that a success is to adapt to the group's needs and not decide on a completed training program or counselling process immediately, but that it is essential to analyse the needs of the group at the first counselling. The focus group believes that the great competence the advisors possess in collaboration with digitalisation today has made it more accessible to both share and provide good examples for inspiration.

**15. What are the biggest challenges in your work? and how do you try to overcome these challenges?**

Analysis: The focus group believes that financing is a problem and that many banks see challenges with, the legal form and the knowledge of cooperation with banks and auditors is not large enough. The group believes that companies' time to work with development work is one of the biggest challenges. They further believe that the cooperation has always worked to help people realize ideas, and solve societal challenges, and that the focus group believes that it is difficult to know which solutions to prioritize for a change to take place.



COPE Project  
GAP ANALYSIS IN ITALY (SERN)



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## CONTEXT

It was at the end of the Sixties and throughout the Eighties that the cooperation in Emilia Romagna region had its most significant development, favored by the political and social climate particularly attentive to the cooperative form and by the legislative interventions of those years.

The cooperatives were structured in such a way as to better respond to the needs of the market, and in particular to those of industry and local authorities, supporting their development over the decades. In this perspective of service to the community, cleaning, collective catering, transport and design companies were set up, thus increasing the service sector, practically non-existent a few years earlier. Cultural cooperation also managed to play an important role.

These are years in which the Cooperative Movement assumes a mature configuration: the companies acquire more and more their own personality, and at the same time the consortia, while maintaining the role of structures at the service of the cooperatives, are also beginning to be characterized by their entrepreneurial autonomy.

The Eighties represent a further moment of transformation: unifications, the ability of cooperatives to operate increasingly outside the territorial boundaries, the development of cooperation in new and important sectors (such as services to businesses and people, tourism) they increase the need for a new business culture, a managerial approach to development, great attention to financial aspects as an indispensable support for the development of cooperatives.

In the mid-1980s, a good number of cooperatives were set up, responding to objective needs and a widespread sense of solidarity, aimed above all at socio-health assistance, education and employment for disadvantaged people. Strong impetus in this sector, occurred at the beginning of the nineties, when the Public Administrations began to outsource many social services.

The last two decades, despite the recent crisis in some sectors and the global economic-financial situation of recent years, testify to a constant development of cooperation, which manages to link the challenge of business modernization and globalization with the recovery of the founding principles cooperation such as solidarity and the centrality of the member.

The peculiar aspects of cooperation, starting with the ability to guarantee real employment and social cohesion, taking care of the needs of local communities, always represent a response to the crises of an economic system based mainly on finance. The Cooperation, in fact, guarantees the constant



reinvestment of profits, the maintenance on the territory of the wealth produced, the impossibility of selling the company and subjecting it to purely financial logic.<sup>1</sup>

Today in Emilia (part of the region Emilia-Romagna) the cooperatives operate in numerous markets, including in a leadership position in their respective sectors, such as large-scale commercial distribution, construction, plant engineering, agriculture and agro-industry, transport, catering, services to businesses and individuals, financial, housing, tourism.

## **PRODUCTION PROCESS**

The interviews were all addressed to trainers working within LEGACOOP Emilia Ovest, with the three province of Piacenza, Parma and Reggio Emilia.

Founded in 1886, Legacoop, the National League of Cooperatives, is the oldest of the Italian cooperative organizations. Legacoop is an association of cooperative enterprises which works to promote the development of the associated companies and to favor the diffusion of cooperative principles and values.

In order to be close to its companies every day, Legacoop has equipped itself with a branched territorial organization that leads it today to be present in all regions of our country both with regional offices and with territorial offices in all areas (like in the case of Legacoop Emilia Ovest) characterized by a strong cooperative presence.

We decided to interview Legacoop trainers because they immediately showed great interest in the project because they have a lot of experience in promoting the cooperative model, since they offer courses on education for cooperative entrepreneurship in local high schools, in the Universities of Parma and Piacenza and they offer advice to those who are interested in starting new cooperatives (groups or individuals). It is included in the statute of Legacoop that training on the cooperative model is offered free of charge to anyone interested in order to allow the growth of cooperatives in Italy.

The interviews took place individually, online via the Teams platform. Interviews lasting approximately one hour each and were recorded.

## **QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

### **INTERVIEWS**

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.legacoopemiliaovest.it/app/storia-valori/storia-valori.jsp?url?ldC=4106&ldS=4107&tipo\\_padre=0&tipo\\_clickato=0&id\\_prodotto=748323&tipo=0&css=legacoop.css](https://www.legacoopemiliaovest.it/app/storia-valori/storia-valori.jsp?url?ldC=4106&ldS=4107&tipo_padre=0&tipo_clickato=0&id_prodotto=748323&tipo=0&css=legacoop.css)



**1. For how long have you been an instructor promoting entrepreneurship education?  
How did you accumulate the knowledge you currently have?**

All interviewed replied that they have been trainers or consultants for more than 2 years. 4 out of 8 trainers said they had been consultants for more than 10 years.

All the interviewees replied that as far as training is concerned, they were internally trained by the colleagues they supported in the first training sessions.

On specific topics such as auditing, labor regulations, there are annual compulsory courses that they must attend. But no one has received any particular training on how to be a trainer and how to promote the cooperative model, they just learned it in the field with colleagues and through the training organized by Legacoop at a regional level periodically.

Only one among the interviewed completed the Master on Management for the Cooperative Enterprise (MIC), a higher education course for managers and executives of cooperative enterprises organized by the Quadir cooperative higher education school. It is divided into academic lectures, seminars, workshops and laboratories held by teachers from the main Italian universities. The duration is 168 hours. The trainer that completed the mentioned master said it was very useful to better understand what those entering the world of cooperatives need to know.

**2. How do you and your organization work in the promotion of the cooperative entrepreneurship with adults? (i.e., working individually or with groups)**

The interviewees stated that Legacoop has the aim of creating new cooperatives in its statute. For this reason they invest heavily in training to promote entrepreneurship education and to present the cooperative business model.

The people that have been interviewed work in several ways in the promotion of the cooperative model both in groups and individually. This occurs in the Emilia Romagna region but is also valid for other regions and other territorial offices.

In groups

- trainings in high school (BELLA COPIA project) with students 17-18 years old, with groups of 20-25 students
- trainings in Universities (BELLA COPIA University) with the University of Parma, Piacenza and UNIMORE Modena and Reggio Emilia. The training reaches students who are in 5 departments at University (Engineering, Life Science, Economy, Communication and Education Sciences), about 100 per year
- trainings on cooperative model to civil service volunteers (young adults among 18-27 years)

Individually:

- Small groups or single people can reach the office of Legacoop and ask for information to evaluate the possibility of opening a cooperative. In a first phase, the people are followed by a single consultant, then if the project of setting up the cooperative goes ahead, other experts and colleagues are also involved in consulting.

All consultancy activities include a reference trainer and other trainers/experts that will join the course dealing only with the more technical aspects of training such as the business plan, the legislation on employment contracts.

### **3. How do you reach your target group?**

The target group is reached with structured courses (with a defined number of hours according to the different target groups) that are defined by agreements between LEGACOOOP and the schools or LEGACOOOP and the universities or through the agreements for the civil service volunteers training concluded with the department for youth policies.

In addition, many adults (employed but also unemployed) they go directly to meet consultants / trainers in Legacoop offices to request advice on how to create a cooperative.

### **4. Which groups or sectors have reached out to you as an instructor? Where is the strongest demand for the cooperative model?**

Depending on the roles of the interviewees, it emerged that the groups requesting training were different (students in high school, young people at University, ...).

Apart from structured courses in schools and universities, it emerged that the greatest demand and the greatest in-depth study of entrepreneurship education is done for those who are in the pre-start-up phase, or for those not in pre start-up phase but who already have a company project that directly address the association LEGACOOOP.

### **5. Did you organise mentoring activities for groups in pre-start-up phase?**

The interviewed presented COOP START UP a training course, planned and designed inside Legacoop, aimed at setting up new cooperative enterprises. It is based on a call that is opened in October and closed in January of the following year, in which anyone with a minimally structured idea of a business cooperative can apply for. 20 project ideas are chosen among all those who apply to be part of the training. The groups will follow a group training course, with a program built for them. A part of the training is in group and a part is individual, as topics as the business plan should be done individually. For those interested, after the training, there is a consultancy offered for the establishment of a business. Sometimes there is also an economic contribution for those who have developed the best idea.

Apart from COOP START UP, which has already had two editions, some interviewed declares that they have been involved in consultancy to groups in the pre-start-up phase made on the basis of the request, for groups that arrive directly at the Legacoop office, at any time of the year (also outside the call opening period).

### **6. How do you plan and implement trainings on cooperative entrepreneurship? Are you following training modules?**

For each training course there is a schedule based on who will attend it and the hours available. In school there are specific training modules, different from the one at University. For the training

offered to universities there are specific modules to follow, calibrated on the basis of the hours available and also of the university course. For Economy students, the business plan and financial aspects are certainly more elaborated than for other students. From the interviews it emerges how essential it is that the trainer adapts the modules to the target group, and that the language is also modulated according to the group.

### **7. Which are the training topics?**

The training topics depend on the target groups but for the trainings offered to adults there is a prevalence of corporate, governance, financial aspects.

Main topics:

- cooperative principles and values
- Governance,
- Financial sustainability,
- business plan,
- market analysis
- Knowledge of the cooperative enterprise from a legal point of view
- employment contracts and social security aspects

### **8. How did you present the financial aspects and the business planning?**

The Business plan is presented in all trainings with a different in-depth analysis, depending on the target group. In the trainings offered at University, the students develop a business plan in groups, simulating the creation of a cooperative enterprise from the beginning. The business plan is taught to develop a plan that is as real as possible and can be used as a basis for the development of a cooperative.

This very technical part is usually presented by a trainer with expertise on financial aspects.

### **9. How do you present the cooperative principles and the cooperative governance model?**

For all trainers, cooperative principles and cooperative governance are defined as the essential elements of all training because it is necessary to make clear that the difference between enterprises and cooperative enterprises lies in their governance, in the democratic principles and in the fact that in a cooperative enterprise all members count equally.

On this specific aspect, the training will present:

- Drafting of articles of association in the statute
- presentation of how the boards of directors are structured
- establishment of a work team,
- opening bank account,
- opening VAT number

### **10. How do you present the topics of sustainability and innovation?**

The topics of sustainability and innovation are linked to the 2030 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The sustainability is presented firstly with a general framework for those who already know it, and then testimonies of cooperatives that are working and developing services that approach these issues, present the topic of sustainability through examples.

One of the interviewed who has been working in the world of entrepreneurship education for the longest time said that the issue of sustainability should be tackled more deeply to keep up with modern times and to prove that the cooperative model can also be applied to sustainable businesses.

**11. How did you introduce the topics of entrepreneurial marketing and scaling in business?**

The explanation of the different and main aspects of business marketing, are presented through a theoretical lesson. Besides, the trainers reflect and discuss with the group that is attending the training with a view to future development of an enterprise to understand what could be done and what should be considered when thinking about growing a business.

In the trainings are presented the main elements about marketing strategies, communication and social media.

**12. Which training methods do you use to improve learning development? (Case study, Games-based training, lecture, Role-Play, simulation,...) which methods do you think are more suitable?**

The most popular training methods are:

Lecture, power point presentation, case study, simulations and video testimonials. The most suitable methods, according to the interviewed are the case study, story telling inviting representatives from cooperatives telling the story of the cooperative and their experience in creating a new enterprises.

**13. According to your experience, what is missing or what should be more developed in a training on cooperative entrepreneurship?**

Among the trainers emerged the fact that some method should be more considered during the trainings, as simulations and gamifications. Simulations allow people to enter the complex reality of the company and games -based training are very useful when you work with young people, it is a way to keep the attention high and also to get involved.

Some of the interviewed noticed a lack of engaging testimonials, not just telling what is being done but trying to involve the audience.

For others interviewed, it is missing the use of interesting, animated videos that are also graphically more interesting.

For half of the interviewees, it is necessary to leverage more on why to choose the cooperative model rather than other business models, reinforcing the added value that the cooperative model presents.

Among other things that have emerged, there is the concept of cooperation between cooperatives that should be further developed. More space should be given to the fact that when you want to start a new cooperative a good idea is to start responding to the need of another cooperative, compensating its needs. Because this networking between cooperatives works very well and ensures success.

There are also those who suggest that trainers to become such (they consider themselves more like consultants) should receive specific training. Some of the trainers mentioned the fact that Legacoop's work is more as consultant than trainer and perhaps there is a lack of teaching methodologies as no one in the association is a professional trainer. For being a trainer, you need to have innovative methodologies and specific training for it.

For another trainer, what is missing is improving the ability to intercept innovative ideas since the trainings, and have more relations with the researcher centers and universities in order to promote more and more the innovation.

An interesting element that emerged from one of the interviewees is that the trainings should work more on an emotional level, involving people from an emotional point of view, when speaking of equality as a fundamental principle of the cooperative enterprise, of members' participation in decisions making processes. This is what is essential to give to the cooperative enterprise the same dignity that all the other enterprises have and to restore a more positive image to the cooperatives. This is also due to the fact that the media often represent cooperatives in a very negative way, speaking little about successful cases and giving much emphasis to failure cases.

#### **14. According to your experience, what makes a training successful? Present a good practice from your experience.**

The main elements that make a training successful are:

- Being able to establish an empathic relationship. In every situation, think together, simplifying the language to put yourself at the right level of the person listening. Understanding the person in front of you, be patient when doubts arise.
- Extreme availability of the consultant, not only encouraging but also to foresee the difficulties in the project presented.
- A direct referent for each group but having different professional skills behind them that are activated if necessary
- Key role of the consultant: Those who present the project are in love with the idea of creating its own cooperative and find it hard to see the weaknesses. The trainer must be able to look further ahead in understanding whether the business is sustainable. The key is to accompany in the establishment of a sustainable company that can last. The trainer / consultant must have a lot of experience and must follow the enterprise for a long period.
- a training course is carried out well when what is learned in the classroom is applied in reality. There is a need of courses more based on the reality and less on the theoretical part.
- A training is successful when it is continuous training, in the pre start up phase and in the subsequent phase in which the cooperative is already created, for at least 1 year after the creation of the new enterprise.





**GOOD PRACTICE:**



SMARTWEAR Cooperative created in 2019 have devised a series of tools including a "glove" that processes biomechanical data and measures the movements of the wearer at work. Through this analysis, solutions are sought to reduce the risk of incurring musculoskeletal injuries.

You tube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwKV80Oej1w&t=1s>

The 4 founders of the cooperative initially followed the training offered by Legacoop at the University (BELLA COPIA University). During this phase they had simulated the creation of a business and understood that they wanted to develop their entrepreneurial spirit. For this reason, with an already partially structured idea, they apply for COOP start up, the path offered by the Legacoop association for those who are in the pre-start up phase. They were part of the 20 start-up projects that had access to training called COOP start up, aimed at the end, to the creation of the cooperative.

They successfully completed the second training course, (first BELLA COPIA University and after COOP START UP. In the COOP START UP path it is also envisaged that a small fund can be won by the participant who have a brilliant idea to be used to start the cooperative. The 4 founders won a contribution of 15 thousand euros and soon it was born SMARTWEAR. After few years the cooperative continues to operate and is having a good success.

**15. what are the biggest challenges in your work? and how do you try to overcome these challenges?**

The interviewed trainers underlined some points that are considered the main challenges:

**FEWER CREATION OF COOPERATIVES IN THE LAST YEARS:** the problem arises because times have changed and it is difficult to combine the role that the cooperative model has played in history with modernity. The cooperative mode must not ignore innovation and not remain in rigid positions, look at sustainability, new welfare issues, new services, supporting new companies that are unable to restart after the COVID crisis, these can be a way to adapt the model to modern times.

**NEGATIVE IMAGE OF THE COOPERATIVES:** A challenge is to make the cooperative model not perceived as a minus compared to the non-cooperative enterprise. They are two different things, with different strengths. Most of the rapidly growing businesses whose entrepreneurs get rich quick are never cooperatives and this suggests that the cooperative is worth less than other business models. Let be a series model b.

Moreover, a negative image of the world of cooperatives also derives from the presentation made of it by the media, in the last years in Italy. There was a particular focus on cooperatives, especially social cooperatives that actually had an unclear management of their finances.

**COMMUNICATION:** the trainer has to put himself more in other shoes. This means that in order to be effective it is important to ensure that the trainer is an effective communicator, that he is chosen for his ability to teach and for his interpersonal skills. Specific training for trainers are important.

**LACK OF LONG-TERM FINANCIAL PLANNING OF THE COOPERATIVE ENTREPRISE:** There is little awareness of the cooperative enterprise in the future, in planning the future steps after the creation. Little planning for the future is because many companies believe that investing in this sense can be a waste. A solution is in initial training offered to make people understand the importance of planning and financial planning even after the cooperative has started as a good economic and financial awareness can avoid many problems along the years.



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## **CONCLUSIONS**

What emerges most at the end of the 8 interviews with the trainers is that specific training is needed for trainers. Training should not be based so much on content as on how to be a trainer.

Surely the other aspect that most emerged is the need to better understand the value that the cooperative model carries within itself. Value understood as strengths, which can then motivate the creation of new cooperatives.