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## COPE Project

Promoting innovation through a cooperative model  
in entrepreneurship education for adults

### Data Analysis (IO2)

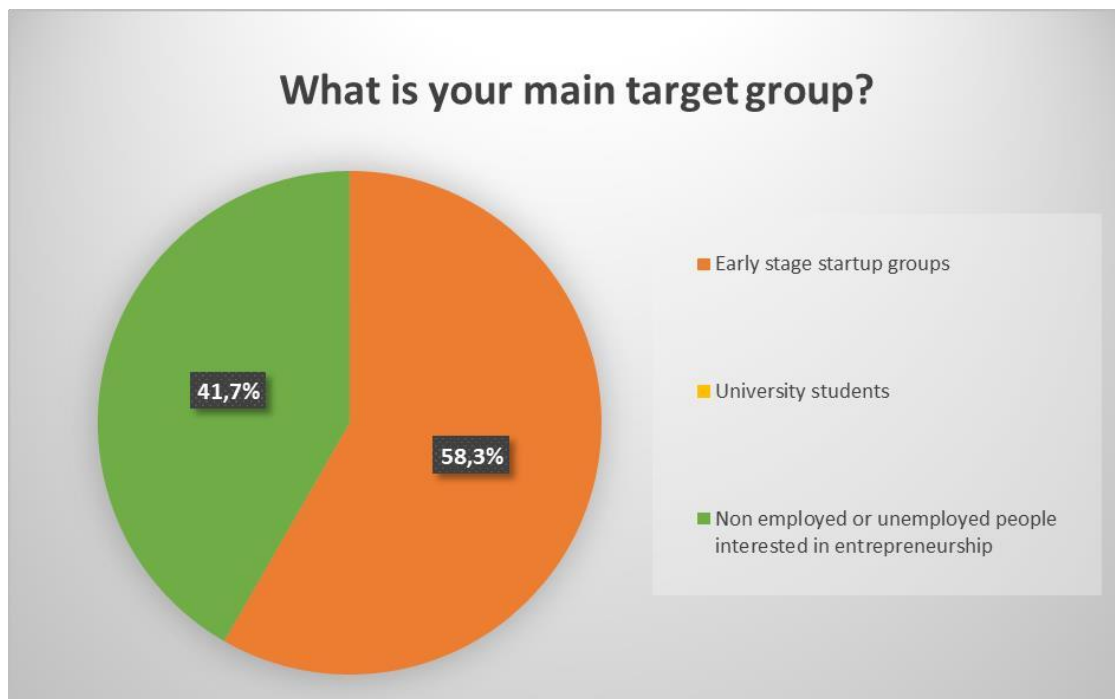


## Analysis of quantitative data

Number of administered questionnaires: 24



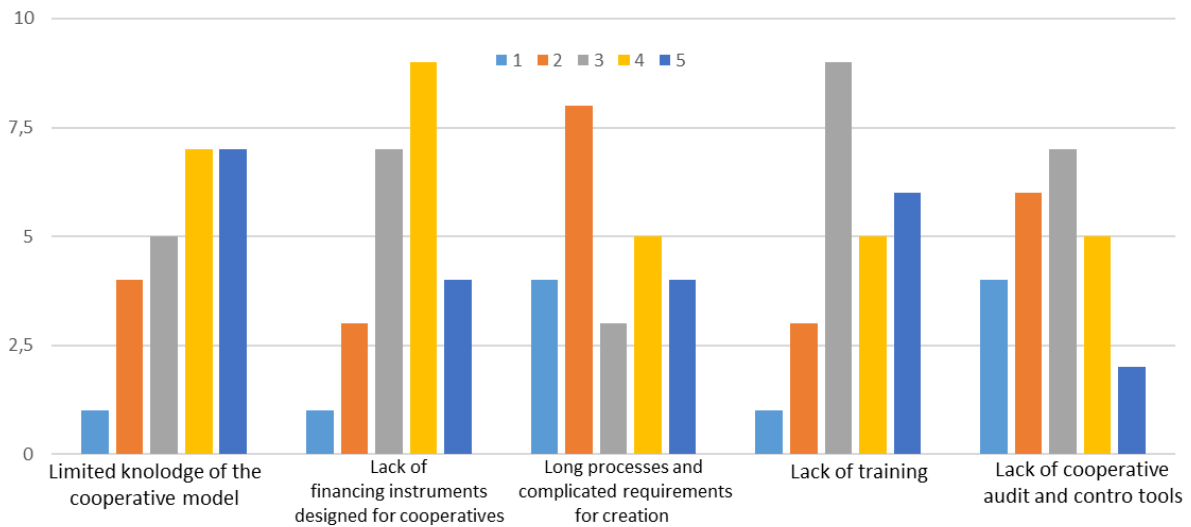
**54.2% of trainers have been promoting entrepreneurship education for more than five years**, so the background of the skills and knowledge of the trainers interviewed is solid.



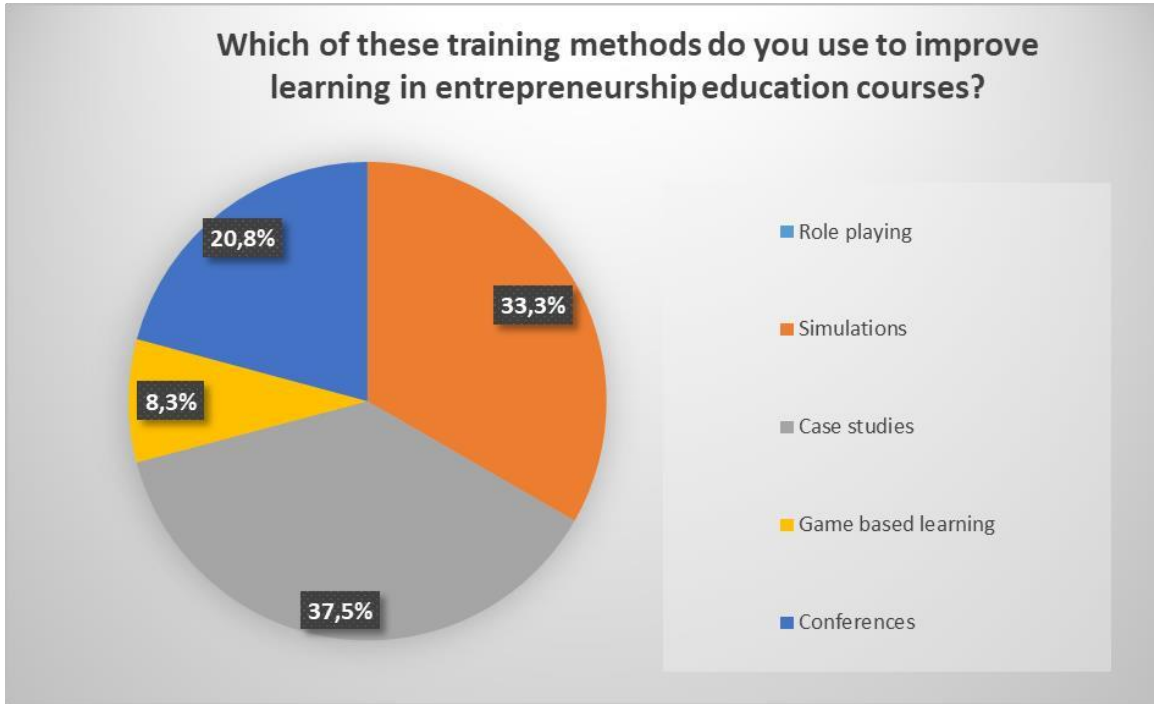
**58.3% of trainers have early stage startup groups as their target group.** This figure highlights the need for adequate training in order to run start-ups, i.e. enterprises that are in the early state of their life cycle and are looking for resources and funding for development.



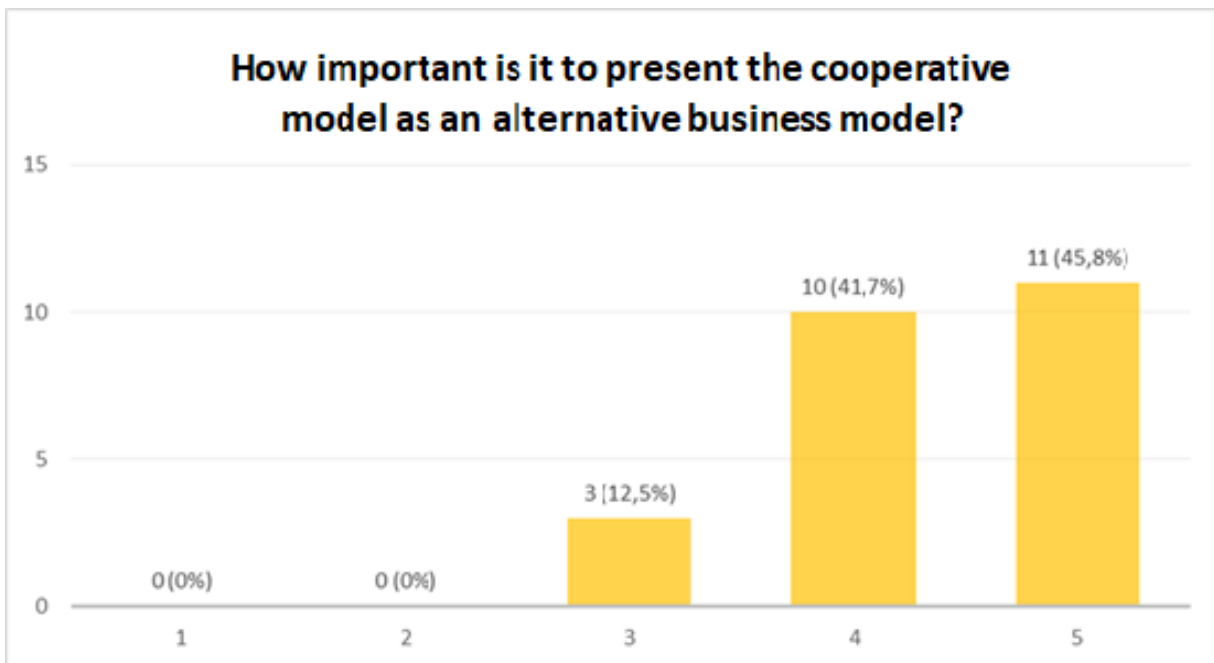
Evaluate the importance of the following obstacles encountered during the creation of new cooperatives: (1 less relevant, 5 more relevant)



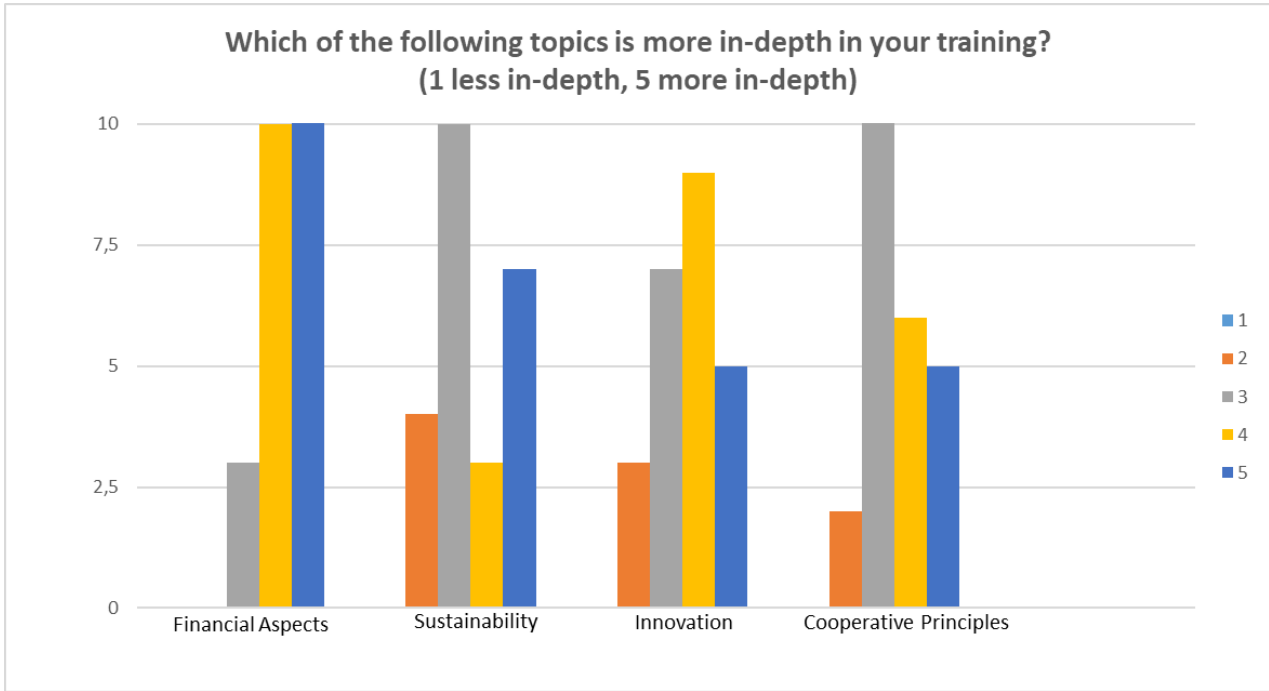
- **Limited knowledge of the cooperative model:**
  - 29.2% replied 5/5, 29.2% replied 4/5.
  - The answers indicate the need to spread knowledge of the cooperative model.
- **Lack of financing instruments designed for cooperatives:**
  - 37.5% replied 4/5, 29.2% replied 3/5.
  - The answers indicate 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.



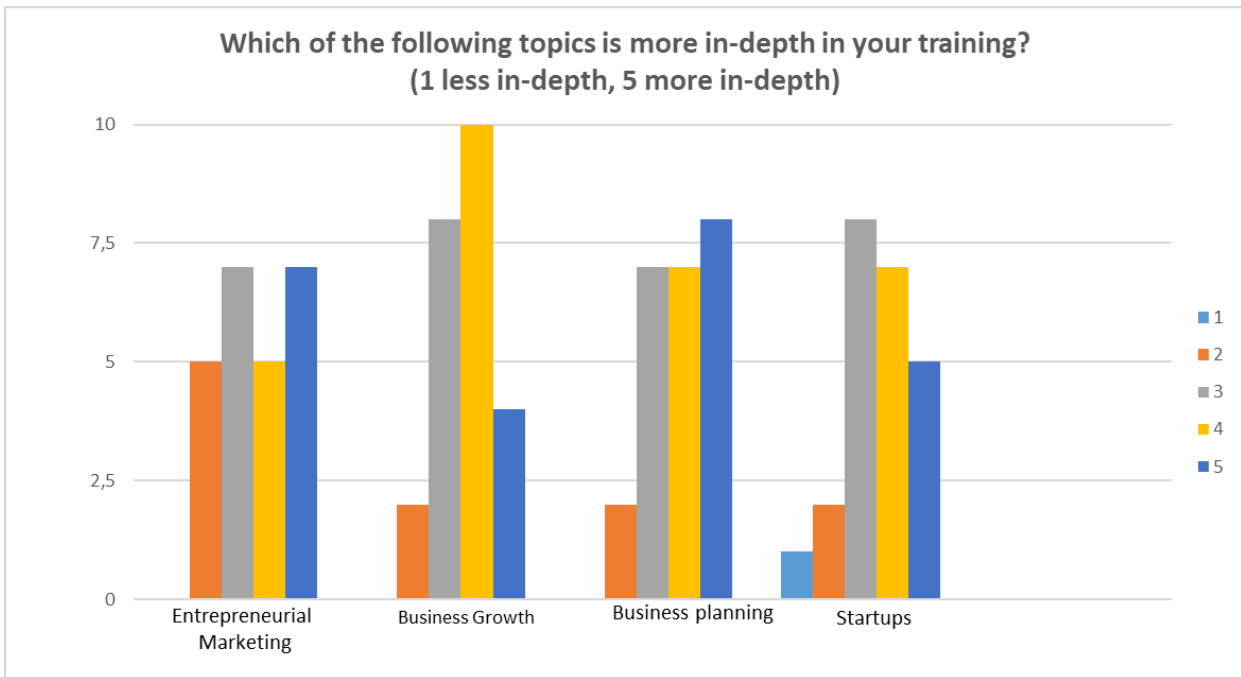
**37.5 % of respondents said they use case studies as a method to improve learning in entrepreneurship education courses. On the other hand, 33% of respondents use simulations.** These data suggest the importance of using teaching methodologies that have a strong link with the practical reality of entrepreneurship.



**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%).

#### References:

- <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/occupazione/Pagine/Studi-e-statistiche.aspx>
- <https://www.prontopro.it/sondaggio/2019/regioni#dati-indagine>
- <https://www.agci.it/comunicazione/la-natalita%C3%A0-cooperative-2020-register-cooperatives>



## 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.

**Participation 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.