



**Cooperative Business and Innovative Rural Development:
Synergies between Commercial and Academic Partners
C-BIRD**



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Cooperative Business and Innovative Rural Development: Synergies between Commercial and Academic Partners C-BIRD

Study visits report

2014



ТРАКИЙСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ
СТАРА ЗАГОРА



Euricse
European Research Institute on
Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland



АГРОПРОМСИТ

COEXPHAL





Indice

1. Introduction	3
2. Overview of the researchers' study visits per country-partner	4
3. Findings	5
3.1. Cooperatives, consortia and producer organizations	5
3.2. Local action groups (LEADER programme)	12
3.3. Business incubators	14
3.4. Business companies and extension services	15
3.5. Research institutes	16
3.6. Local authorities	17
3.7. Social enterprises	18
3.8. Events and conferences	20



1. Introduction

The purpose of the report is to summarize and exchange the experience and the good practices generated during the study visits organized in the country-partners of the C-BIRD project as planned in WP1 *“RESEARCHER TO COMMERCIAL PARTNER (R2CP)”* and WP2 *“COMMERCIAL PARTNER TO RESEARCH CENTRES (CP2R)”*. Study visits provide the C-Bird Consortium with an understanding of all involved in cooperative and rural development organizations, cooperative trend and particular types of collective action and will act as a showcase for the best practices in the field. The overall aim of study visits is to collect and to share good practices and lessons learned in cooperative business and rural development in order to transfer knowledge and experience.

The study visits organized by Agroconsult Engineering (Bulgaria) in April, Zip Center (Serbia) in April, Trakia University (Bulgaria) in April, UAL (Spain) in May, COEXPHAL (Spain) in June, EURICSE (Italy) in June, UCC (Ireland) in July, and Agroconsult Engineering (Bulgaria) in October have the overall objectives to:

1. Exchange information about cooperative development, cooperative forms and legal framework, best practices in providing support to cooperative business and extension services, interaction between business and research institutions;
2. Visit cooperatives, PO, business incubators, LAGs, research centers, local authorities for the recognition, validation and identification of the competences of each type of organization;
3. Debate some of the problems concerning cooperative action and rural development; and
4. Present the C-BIRD project and activities at events both organized and attended.

For the period from February 2014 to October 2014 16 researchers in total have participated and organized more than 80 study visits, 1 kick-off meeting (18th of March, 2014), 1 partnership meeting (18th of June, 2014), 1 round table (19th of March, 2014), 1 workshop (17th of June, 2014), attended seminars and open lectures (27th of May, 2014 and 6th of October, 2014).

Each of the researchers involved has submitted individual scientific/ activity report and contributed to the present report by sharing his/her views, knowledge, and practices to consolidate these in one comprehensive overview of the rich experience and variety of rural development pathways and cooperative business across Europe.



2. Overview of the researchers' study visits per country-partner

In this section is summarized the information for the country of the study visits, type and number of organizations visited, researchers involved, period of the visit.

Country of the study visits	Type of organizations visited	Researchers involved	Period of the visit
Bulgaria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agroconsult - Engineering EOOD • Trakia University 	Cooperatives and producer organization, agricultural producers, business companies, LAGs, business incubator, municipalities and local authorities, chitalishte, conference and open lecture, national alliance, national federation, youth organization	Academic participants: Darina Zaimova, Yuliana Yarkova, Julia Doitchinova, Cynthia Giagnocavo, Emilio Galdeano Gomez, Giulia Galera Business participants: Milos Colic, Ana Petrovic, Asya Mileva, Anelia Vateva	March, April, October
Italy EURICSE	Foundations, producer organizations, federation of cooperatives, consortium	Business participants: Beatriz Linan,	June
Spain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universidad de Almeria - UAL • Asociacion de Organizaciones de Productores de Frutas y Hortalizas de Almeria - COEXPHAL 	Cooperatives and producer organizations, business incubator, techno parks, association of young entrepreneurs, auction, cooperative bank, sole proprietor (ecological store), LAG, labs on food analysis and safety, university department (OTRI), experimental station, research institute, company (seeds), association (HORTYFRUTA)	Academic participants: Darina Zaimova, Yuliana Yarkova, Julia Doitchinova, Cynthia Giagnocavo, Emilio Galdeano Gomez, Juan Carlos Peres Mesa, Mary O'Shaunessy, Business participants: Asya Mileva, Anelia Vateva, Milos Colic, Ana Petrovic	May, June
Serbia Zip Centar za mlade biznis inkubator DOO Pirot	Local community, dairy school, municipality, business forum, NGO, tourist organization, business company (hotel)	Academic participants: Cynthia Giagnocavo	April
Ireland University College Cork, National University of Ireland, Cork	Local development companies (LDC), research seminars, Cork County Council, business and incubation enterprise center, business company	Business participants: Milos Colic, Ana Petrovic, Asya Mileva, Anelia Vateva	July



3. Findings

This section attempts to briefly summarize the findings of the researchers while seconded in host institutions and visiting the different type of organizations that contribute to cooperative idea and positive effect over rural development.

3.1. Cooperatives, consortia and producer organizations

Cooperative framework in Spain and Italy is supported by the strong presence of cooperatives and cooperative societies, producer organizations and second level cooperative (e.g. consortia), and cooperative federations. These organizations represent a comprehensive system that contributes to local development through tight relationships and well-developed value chain, starting from producers to the final customer; well-organized commercialization of local products and thereby support of the local brand and geographic identification of the

production; sustaining the relationship “producer-land” and support of various stakeholders (e.g. research centers and academic organizations, local authorities). Despite differences in climate and natural resources, cooperative form proves as efficient way of agricultural organization both in Andalusia and Trentino-Alto Adige, and in quite modest but persistent way in South Central and Eastern regions in Bulgaria. Production under cooperative organization varies from various fruits and vegetables, to specific production of roses and lavender.

Andalusia (Spain) and in particular Almeria is famous for its dry climate with high temperatures and average of 200 mm rainfall per year, but also with its close to 29000 hectares of greenhouses producing variety of vegetables – tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and zucchinis; and also watermelon, aubergine, citrus and melon.

This production represents close to 30% of the exported production for the Europe. Cooperatives and cooperative/ producer organizations (SAT) altogether represent majority of agricultural organizations in the region – 69%¹ to contribute to agricultural production, job employment and local development.



Greenhouse in Almeria, Spain

¹ Juan Carlos Peres Mesa “Local Markets, Global Competition and Cooperative Values: The case of Almerian Cooperatives exporting F&V”, presented on a workshop “Exploring sources of support in rural and agricultural areas”, June 2014, Almeria



The law in Spain allows for the producer organizations to be registered also as LLC and SAT, which is a legal entity since 1980s and basically represents a hybrid between cooperative and shareholder companies, where votes are function of shares. Macroeconomic environment, political situation and external pressure are part of the factors, which contribute to the establishment and operationalization under the form of producer organizations in the region. Producer organizations have the capacity to make crucial contribution to the provision and enhancement of extension services, as well as the ability to develop linkages between extension provider and small farmers.



S.A.T. Costa de Nijar, Almeria, Spain

More than 50% of producers prefer cooperatives as way to market their production, which remain more innovative in their activities and manage to establish long-term relationship with the local market. The auctions are usually preferred by the LLC, while cooperatives prefer selling through the producer organizations.

Almost 80% of the production is pre-sold for the next season. The percentage of the growers selling directly to the customer is

S.A.T. Costa de Nijar, Almeria, Spain



Producer organizations, similarly across the rest of the European countries is regulated under the Common Market Organization and defends the interests of the producers – members of the cooperatives, both as clients and members, by offering a wide range of services, including improved access to markets, production resources, information, communications, technologies, and training.

1%, through cooperatives is 60%, and finally through auction is 40%.

Most of the business in the region is dedicated in providing extension services for this cooperative production – seeds, construction of the green houses, pest treatment, food safety, marketing and commercialization of products, storage and auctions. Innovative solutions are part of this process, including water supply (desalted sea water, underwater and rain); construction and ventilation solution for the green houses, seeds and biological pest treatment.



A different perspective of the cooperative form is the case of the S.A.T. Bodega. The owner previously was a member of a cooperative, who decided to establish a family business for wine production with the help of FEDER funding and under the legal form of S.A.T.

Within the family business is organized the entire production, maintaining quality and marketing of production.



[S.A.T. Bodega, Spain](#)



[S.A.T. Bodega, Spain](#)

The production of the small and quality winery represents 3000 bottles of wine per year, helped by the work of 9 sellers operating within the region to commercialize their production. In the company are working 6 people altogether, while during the more intensive months of work they have extra 12 people.

S.C.A. Albentillas was established in 1993 and has gathered 330 producers of grape for fresh consumption and citrus fruits (orange, lemon). Previously production of the grape type was not suitable for direct consumption, while at the same time there was a competitive pressure from the USA and Italy, which basically hampered the improvement of production, introduction of new crops, plants and technology. A way out of this situation was the LEADER funds, which were used to increase profitability through introducing processing in the cooperative. Within the cooperative are established 3 centers – one for processing and two for fresh citrus fruits.

[S.C.A. Albentillas, Spain](#)



There are 15 people working in the center with 1 million euros turnover. Most of the farmers are located in Sierra Nevada and

one of the problems experienced by the cooperative is related to the disconnection between the farmers' tradition to work on



the land and the young heritors, who prefer working in the city, which results in abandoned land in the region.

A decision to deal with this problem, but still to maintain the functions of the cooperative is to rent this land, which was not an easy task to achieve since families did not have incentive to rent their land and

cut their connection with it. The cooperative is processing production of other companies in the region, and the final products – canned fruits, marmalade, etc. – are distributed as unique organic products.

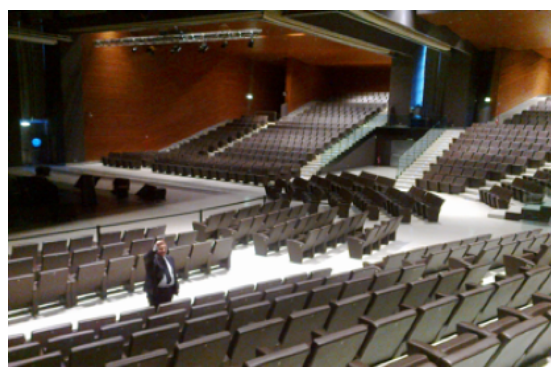
Still one of the important issues to deal with is to build successful local networks and ways for collaboration in order to maintain activity (social and economic) within the region.

One of the main aspects of development of rural areas in Italy is the presence of strong concentration of production and initially well-structured and organized cooperatives and associations. In Trentino-Alto Adige (Italy) cooperatives, producer organizations, consortia signify for a systematic and focused action to contribute to local economy and development, diversification and commercialization of local products, as well as bringing together small producers and promoting geographic resources and richness. Membership in cooperatives and producer organization could be presented as a competitive factor and a sufficient way to improve the supply chain relations – the organizational capacity depends on their ability to adjust to the market criteria (logistics, quality management, financial capacity, price and cost competitiveness). Melinda, San't Orsola and Mezzacorona are ones of these strategic partnerships representing the viability of cooperative action and collective contribution to sustaining local values and capacity-building.

Mezzacorona Società Cooperativa Agricola is the main company of Gruppo Mezzacorona. Founded in 1904, it was one of the first growers associations to be organized in Italy.

San't Orsola is a farmer co-operative specialising in the cultivation and marketing of strawberries, various types of berries (blueberries, blackberries,

Mezzacorona, Trento, Italy



It is comprised of 2,600 hectares of vineyards in Trentino and Alto Adige, with an annual production of 300,000 quintals of quality grapes producing 300,000 hectolitres of wine. The various actions taken by the cooperative organizations are planning of production, ensuring quality of the products and efficient marketing campaigns, risk management and processing. Even more – cooperatives through their daughter companies reveal as an efficient way to cross borders and commercialize local products in various countries in Europe and USA.

raspberries, whitecurrants, redcurrants, wildstrawberries, gooseberries and hardy kiwis) and late-fruiting cherries.



Established in Valle dei Mòcheni (in the Trentino region of northeast Italy) in 1972, over recent years Sant'Orsola has undergone a marked expansion – so much so, that it has become the leading Italian name for the cultivation of berries. Founded in 1972 as a volutanry association, Sant'Orsola became cooperative in 1975 by extending its activities to the entire production.



[Sant'Orsola, Trento, Italy](#)

APOT, Associazione Produttori Ortofrutticoli Trentini (i.e. association of fruit and vegetable producers in Trentino) is a consortium recognised by the European Union as an Association of Producer Organisations A.P.O. This important new reality is meant as a reference point in the fruit and vegetable sector in general, with a particular specialisation in the typical fruit of this province - the apple - and in "complementary" production such as small fruit and vegetables. APOT consists of the following member consortiums: MELINDA, LA TRENTINA and SANT'ORSOLA.

10 thousand hectares cultivated with fruit trees and 450 thousand tons of produce.

[APOT, Trento, Italy](#)



Through these Consortiums, APOT represents around 10 thousand producers,

Cooperative federations fulfill their functions as representative organizations, which sustain, assist, protect and revise cooperative movement operating in the Province of Trento. La Federazione Trentina della Cooperazione brings together 533

companies – 501 cooperatives and 32 other legal entities with the role to promote cooperative development, help with organization of cooperative societies and coordinate activities of these societies.

In Bulgaria, cooperatives visited had the vision and the strategy for their development, yet not clear enough and supported by the relevant structure of the institutional support and engagement, with

a special focus on rural development. Strong cooperative presence is identified not only in the agricultural sectors, but also in the field of trade, industry, forestry, purchasing and tourism.

Nevertheless, participation to cooperative activities is rarely perceived as an efficient

way for struggling the recent problems rural community is undergoing, which more



or less stems from the fact that often the status given to cooperatives is not comparable and competitive with that of other business organizations.

Cooperative Tundzha-94, Panicherevo, Bulgaria



Even more important, this is the moment when the full institutional recognition and support to cooperative level can result in support of existing organizations and their general objectives and goals.

Visited cooperatives produce wheat, roses and lavender; located in the villages close to Stara Zagora. One similar concern expressed by cooperative management was the weak institutional support and gaps in the legal framework, which at the end result in limited options of external financing, realization of production on the market at fair and reasonable prices, as well as insufficient representation of these type of organization at regional and national level. Indeed, this statement is supported by the number of producer organizations registered and functioning within the territories of South Central and Eastern region.

In Bulgaria are registered and function close to 2000 cooperatives with 0,5 million members and 50000 employees. In these organizations are working almost 50 percent of the people with disabilities in Bulgaria. Cooperatives, regional cooperative unions and cooperative companies are organized in four national cooperative unions.

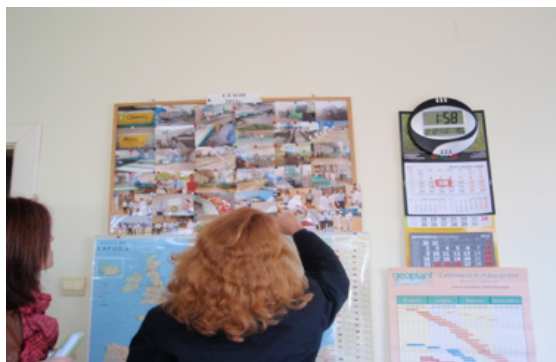
An interesting example of organization legally structured as cooperative entity is cooperative "Kitka", which was established in 1994 with the main activity import and wholesale and retail of spare parts for tractors, combines and their machinery components.

Cooperative "Kitka", Stara Zagora, Bulgaria





**Producer Organization “Bulgarian
peach”, Sliven, Bulgaria**



The organizational rate and characteristics of the fruit and vegetable sector have undergone slow increase with the adoption of the new Regulation 11 from 2007 laying down specific rules on establishment of producer organizations². Six producer organizations have been registered since 2004 and among them only one has adopted cooperative organizational form, while the rest have chosen to register under the Commercial Law as limited liability companies. Every member of these organizations has contract – for delivery, commission or production contract. This contract specifies the quantity and the quality of production in accordance to the annual production and marketing plans.

For 2013 there are nine newly recognized groups of producers, while the number of the functioning producer organizations is quite modest – only one in the fruit and vegetable sector for production of peaches in Sliven.

The number of the agricultural producers in Bulgaria for 2012 is 67 614, which manage to maintain their activity as sole proprietors, mainly family business, which proves also to be an efficient, yet quite difficult way of organizing their activity, considering the limitations of resources and representativeness of their interests at local and regional level. Though the products market through various channels – wholesalers, direct sales, are with a good quality and have their share of regular customers.

Stelimeks EOOD in village Asen, Bulgaria



² Regulation 11 from 15.05.2007 for the terms and order in recognition of organizations of fruit and vegetables producers and their associations and for the terms and order in alteration of approved operational programs, SG 42/ 29.05.2007



3.2. Local action groups (LEADER programme)

As important part of the rural development, LAGs were also part of the visits operationalized during the researchers secondments.

In Bulgaria visited LAGs in Yambol and in Brezovo represent ones of the most successful organizations contributing to local business and sustainability.

The Local Action Group Tundzha located in the village of General Inzovo, distric Yambol has united different type of members – agricultural producers, registered as sole proprietors; chitalishte, cooperatives, business company and municipality of Yambol. Development strategy of the LAG Tundzha includes:

- Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector (modernisation of physical assets and production factors in the agricultural and food processing, support to innovation);
- Improving the environment and the countryside, development of organic farming;
- Improving the quality of life in LAG area and diversification of the rural economy (supporting diversification into non-agricultural activities and support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises).

LAG Tundzha, Bulgaria



The LAG is working on projects financed under Measures: 121 Modernisation of Agricultural Holdings; 123 Adding Value to Agricultural and Forestry Products; 226 Restoring forestry potential and introducing prevention actions; 311 Diversification into Non-Agricultural Activities; 312 Support for the Creation and Development of Micro-Enterprises; 313 Encouragement of Tourism Activities; 321 Basic Services for the Economy and Rural Population; and 322 Village Renewal and Development.



Bratia Daskalovi LAG



In Spain the ADR Alpujarra was created to represent and serve to institutions, associations, institutions and agencies, both public and private, individual or collective, interested in the promotion and development of the territory of action to achieve the following *objectives*:

- 1) Provide a channel for participation of local and rural development
- 2) Serve the associated center of reception and transmission of information
- 3) Awarding and administering final beneficiaries of the fund received

ADR Alpujarra, Spain



- 4) Collaborate with relevant authorities
- 5) Organize, coordinate and enhance the activities of social organizations
- 6) Perform any other activities necessary or are associated with previous and relevant to the purpose of the Association.

It was established in 1992 under first LEADER framework, and in 2001 changed in ADR Alpujarra – Sierra Nevada – Association for economic and social development uniting 62 municipalities. In 2007 the organization split and formed two independent organizations to represent

Granada and Almeria, each with 31 municipalities. Partners of the ADR

Alpujarra-Sierra Nevada Almeriense are financial entities, province authorities, private organizations, municipalities, unions, physical entities and cultural organizations.

ADR Alpujarra, Spain



Projects performed are to encourage rural development, quality of life, economic dynamics. Priorities of the ADR Alpujarra-Sierra Nevada Almeriense are more efficient distribution of funds; close relationship within community; and extra control from the regional government.

Local development companies (LDC) successfully administered the EU LEADER programme in mainly rural communities also in Ireland.



SECAD, LDC, Cork, Ireland



3.3. Business incubators

The business incubator in Nova Zagora, Bulgaria was established to provide firms with useful production space, facilities, cover certain start-up costs and provide advice. The incubator is one of the few left in the country that is operationalizing as a center for development of small enterprises and for support for micro and small start-up enterprises.

With the main objective to secure its tenants with multi-functional premises suitable for production and providing of services, the business incubator serves to provide: office premises; below market rate rents; conference hall and Internet center; promotion of tenants' businesses; and access to the full package of services.



Business incubator in Nova Zagora, Bulgaria

The House of crafts is one of the initiatives of the business incubator aimed at preserving historical heritage, local culture and traditions.

There are several issues, which recently has hampered business incubators in Bulgaria to further continue and sustain they activity, of which the most important are generalized within the fact that:

- The majority of the entrepreneurs did not have any idea about the nature, aims and the functions of

business incubators but consider them to be an important tool for supporting enterprise development, or

- Business incubator is an unknown SME development policy tool to the entrepreneurs. They are not well aware of government policy for the establishment of business incubators, or
- Entrepreneurs are largely ignorant of the existence and potential benefits of business incubators. They know about them, mainly from the business associations, recognized the potential offered by business incubators with respect to start-ups and early stages of business development.

Employment Center and Business Incubator at the UAL and CADE Laujar de Andarax Incubadora productiva, in Spain were visited to discuss the roles and functions performed by these organizations, and impact achieved, as well as to promote entrepreneurship among the local community.

Researchers visited in July the Cork County Council – Office Of Community And Enterprise to better understand and develop their knowledge of the processes of co-operative sustainable rural development in an Irish context.



Cork County Council – Office Of Community And Enterprise



3.4. Business companies and extension services

Important part of the intensive relationships within the value chain is represented by the business, which provides several services and products important for the cooperative success. These include seeds, fertilizers, pest control, construction, packaging, risk management, consulting, etc. An interesting and innovative initiative is the project COEXPLAY, which aims to stimulate consumption of fruits and vegetables in schools. During the secondments in Almeria, Spain, was visited the town of El Ejido and the researchers had the

opportunity to see how the project activities are well accepted by the children in the School Teresa De Jesus.

School Teresa De Jesus, El Ejido – COEXPLAY



Representative companies of these sectors were part of the visits schedule. Consulting company Agrouniverse-2006 in Bulgaria, technological parks PITA and TECNOVA, as well as Enza Zaden in Spain are

representative part of the various ways companies contribute to innovation, efficient project management and business planning, quality and higher production of cooperative business.

Products meet local market demands but they are suitable for the export markets as well.



Enza Zaden, Almeria

Enza Zaden is an independent seed company, which mostly produces seeds for greenhouses (but also for open crops), and covers the specific climate characteristics of the different regions. Commercialization is oriented towards direct clients and warehouses.



Enza Zaden, Almeria

The company has developed resistance technology and deal with small growers – 2/2.5 ha and offer seeds that reflect the quickly changing tendencies towards resistance, continuous selection, in-breeding.



3.5. Research institutes

Strong relationship is established between the business and the academia representatives, signified by the role of the technological parks, research institutes and established R&D departments in the cooperatives and producer organizations.



IFAPA, Almeria, Spain

IFAPA or the Andalusian Institute of agriculture and fishery research and training represents an efficient mechanism to enhance growth and sustainable practices for the Andalusian agricultural, fishing and agri-food community, by promoting research, technological innovation and training for the producers and their cooperatives, producer organizations and other type of business involved in the agricultural sector in Almeria.

Estación Experimental Las Palmerillas is an experimental farm established in 1975 by Cajamar to specialize in greenhouse technology, subtropical crops, biotechnology. The Station is involved in active knowledge transfer, e.g. workshops, seminars organized for famers, cooperatives, and enterprises. They actively work with IFAPA,

The researchers and specialists involved are responsible for design and development of sectorial research plans in collaboration with the sector within the frame of the objectives, programs and instruments of the on-going Plans of the Andalusian Regional Government. The Institute is also involved in organizing and carrying out training programs designed for the agricultural and fishing sector (workers, technicians), as well as technology transfer within the frame of the Andalusian Plan of Vocational Training.



IFAPA, Almeria, Spain

The transferred knowledge is both produced by the IFAPA or external resources. The organization is also involved in evaluation and level of adaptation of the new technologies performed.



**Estación Experimental Las Palmerillas,
Almeria, Spain**



COEXPHAL, which established new lines. The greenhouse technology is to improve biological control, optimize costs and reduce emissions, maintaining at the same time high quality and productivity.

The Subtropical Mediterranean area was established to improve and diversify the

production structure and to produce fruits that best suit to the climate. This implied introduction of new production models, new technologies and innovative strategies and techniques of cultivation. Diversification was prompted by the opportunity to produce fruit species that are not present at the European market.

3.6. Local authorities

At the level of policy-making and decision-making the important perspective, contribution and functionality were represented with the meetings with the majors of rural municipalities, their teams and various stakeholders. A comprehensive institutional recognition and support to cooperative business is important factor that supports existing organizations and their general objectives and goals. As a consequence, this support can contribute to adequate human and financial resources should be allocated to support cooperative action.

Municipalities are part of the LAGs registered and functioning in Bulgaria. Municipality of Gurkovo is the one working closely with cooperatives within the region, since these are recognized as an opportunity to provide for jobs and income to social groups under risk of social exclusion, e.g. Roma population.

Municipality of Tundzha, Bulgaria



Municipality of Tundzha, Yambol stressed on the importance of long-lasting collaborative programmes as a way whereby a long-term partnership for good results could be achieved and also provide for sharing the best practices.

These dependencies confirm the capacity and the crucial role that local policies and local network play and might have in order to enhance the implementation of consolidated cooperative habits within rural areas.



Office Of Community And Enterprise, Cork, Ireland

Cork County Council has developed the Office Of Community And Enterprise with the aim to supporting and servicing the Cork County Development Board, which has 41 members from the following four pillars; local government, local development, state agencies and social partners.



3.7. Social enterprises

“La Rete” in Trento is an A-type cooperative established in 1988 by a group of social workers and parents of disabled people already involved in the world of social work. It provides differentiated services to disabled people and their families. In addition, it promotes campaigns to raise awareness and include disabled people and the family in their community in order to improve their wellness and their quality of living.

“La Rete” has two main objectives:

The Samaritans Association in Stara Zagora has set its priorities to help particular social groups, including children, youths, elderlies and families in risk in Stara Zagora Municipality and to support separate people, groups and communities by realizing of activities and delivering of services, which: are based on real necessities; cooperate and build ability for development of skills for self-help in different situations; assist the process of integration and encourage self-development; increased or restored social functions; and secure help for prevention of different consequences. The social services provided fall within the following categories: Community Support Center, House Crisis Center, Foster care, Mother and baby unit, Sheltered housing, and Early Psychological intervention unit. One of the last activities added into these directions is the social entrepreneurship operationalized in the form of production of honey and selling the products for the cause of Samaritans Association.

- Improve the strength and the resources of the concerned families to help the people in need, but also their relatives to face and manage their condition;
- Raise awareness and spread information within the community towards disabled people and their families, as well as better the relations among them.



Samaritans, Stara Zagora

The National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA) in Plovdiv was established in 2000 as project “Social enterprise” funded by German investors. Seven were the main founders of the NAVA, among which three are the main organizations in Plovdiv, Gabrovo and Varna. While functioning at a national level there were founded 50 Centers for volunteer action, which represent 2000 volunteers altogether. The standard for efficient work of the NAVA aims to bring together the interests of various stakeholders, including big commercial entities, e.g. Nestle Bulgaria, where was established a volunteer center. The main activities of NAVA include training, supervision, different initiatives to promote volunteer action and its potential impact to generate community support and reach people within specific social groups in need. NAVA works in close relationship



with NGOs, hospitals, Community support centers, youth centers, universities, municipalities, chitalishte and libraries. The priorities are to popularize the volunteer work and action, to work actively with local authorities, to help with structuring legal regulations and framework, and to foster support to local communities. Of course as one of the most obvious obstacles towards the NAVA activities is the previous past and the obligatory work deemed to be performed by the young people to help with different state initiatives, e.g. building roads.

NAVA supports volunteer action also through its external organizations – Charles Stuard Mod (USA), OAK (Switzerland). The alliance has 7 employees at full-time contract and 20 experts working part-time.

NAVA, Plovdiv



Between 30-40% of the NAVA finance come from European projects, 20% is from commercial activity (training, summer school, long-term contracts for state delegated activities) and the remainder comes from donors.

Youth Alliance of Entrepreneurship Innovation and Employment (YAEIE) is a youth non-profit organization in public benefit. It was established in 2014, succeeding the Non-formal group (NFG)

Kauzarite (The Causers). The association was set up after the implementation of a project Young and employed under the Youth in action programme by Kauzarite. The aim of the project was to promote the youth entrepreneurship, to increase the financial literacy of the local youth, as well as to discuss different strategies for stimulation of the youth employment in Bulgaria. Another project goal was the NFG to gain enough capacity, knowledge and expertise so that it could evolve in legal entity – Youth NGO, after the project completion. After the successful implementation of the project, the YAEIE was established.

The main of the organization target are the young people. Some of the goals that are envisaged by YAEIE include:

- To represent and defend the interests of young people.
- To carry out youth activities, initiatives and projects.
- To promote social integration and personal development of young people.
- To participate in the development of strategies, analyzes and programmes on youth employment and the promotion of youth entrepreneurship.
- To support the development of formal and informal education and training and to promote their practical applicability.
- To assist the youth with career guidance and to support their career development.
- To consult and to participate in the drafting of legislation related to youth unemployment, youth entrepreneurship and youth policies at local, national and international level.



Meeting with the YAEIE



3.8. Events and conferences

During the secondments in the country-partners, researchers had the opportunity to be part of different events and conferences organized.

The exhibition calendar of International Fair Plovdiv comprises multi-branch fairs and trade exhibitions covering key sectors of Bulgarian economy. International Fair Plovdiv is the organizer of the most important trade forums in the country, opening up prospects for the Bulgarian producers to emerge in the international market.

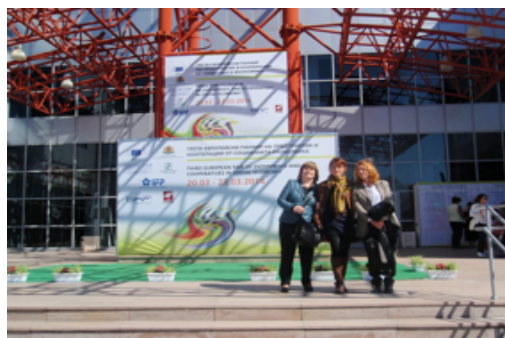


Trade exhibition of organic farming, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

The trade fair and exhibition events outline the performance of Bulgarian economy, as well as the interest of the international business in our country and region.

In March and in April our researchers visited the Trade exhibition of organic farming and were part of the Third European Fair of Enterprises and Cooperatives in Social Economy.

The conference on Enterprises and Cooperatives in Social Economy gathered outstanding speakers and experts in the field, representing the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Confederation of Workers' Cooperatives, Social Cooperatives and Social and Participative Enterprises (CECOP), the European Commission /EC/, DG Enterprises and Industry and others.



Third European Fair of Enterprises and Cooperatives in Social Economy, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Every year Iris Network organises in Riva del Garda the National Workshop on Social Enterprise, probably its most important event. This workshop gathers a large public in order to foster interaction and exchanges of good practices among the scientific community and those working in this sector such as social workers, social enterprises', NGOs' and private sectors managers, but also public servants/authorities.



National Workshop on Social Enterprise, Riva del Garda, Italy



**Cooperative Business and Innovative Rural Development:
Synergies between Commercial and Academic Partners
C-BIRD**



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