



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



FP7-PEOPLE-2013-IAPP Marie Curie  
Industry-Academia Partnerships and Pathways (IAPP)

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

## **Study visits report**

**2017**



ТРАКИЙСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ  
СТАРА ЗАГОРА



Euricse  
European Research Institute on  
Cooperative and Social Enterprises



UCC  
University College Cork, Ireland  
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



COEXPHAL





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## 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)”* during the last year of the project.

Secondments organized by Agroconsult Engineering (Bulgaria), Zip Center (Serbia), Trakia University (Bulgaria), UAL (Spain), COEXPHAL (Spain), UCC (Ireland) contribute to:

- Produce research results and publications;
- Establish a viable network thanks to study visits and meetings with various representatives of the rural society in the country partners;
- Participate and be active in events to enhance visibility and transparency of results, as well as to promote for accountability and quality among local communities.

**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. Activities

This section attempts to briefly summarize the activities organized during the last year of the C-Bird project, including: participation and organization of scientific forums – conferences, workshops; participation in trainings; study visits.

### March, 2017

On 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2017 during the International Fair Plovdiv and within the framework of the **Sixth European Forum for Social Entrepreneurship**, a scientific and practical conference was held on the topic *"Social Entrepreneurship - Prospects and Priorities"*.

The European Social Entrepreneurship Forum is the only one of its kind in Europe. It presents companies and organizations of people with disabilities, measures to promote them and opportunities for partnership within the EU. The event enjoys growing interest from business partners, the media and the general public.

The organizers were the European Commission, the European Confederation of Production Cooperatives and Social Enterprises (CECOP), the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Agency for People with Disabilities.



*Sixth European Forum for Social Entrepreneurship, 2017*



The conference program included:

Moderator: Prof. dr. Mr. Nikola Andreev,  
National Technical Chamber of Commerce

- "Opportunities and Approaches for Stimulating Social Entrepreneurship", Prof. Ph.D. Prof.

Yulia Doychinova and Prof. Dr. Ik. Mr. Ivan Kanchev;

- "Social Economy and Local Development", Prof. dr. Nachko Radev - "Some Aspects of Strategic Management in the Social Economy". Prof. Dr. Velislava Nikolaeva;
- "Approaches to Measuring Social Impact in the Field of Social Entrepreneurship. International Experience", Dr. Teodora Todorova
- "Skills for Business Consultants in the Field of Social Entrepreneurship / Project SESBA", Prof. Nelly Bencheva







- "The Cooperative Concept through the Social Aspects of the Transition", Assoc. Prof. Darina Zaimova;

- "Forms for organization of social enterprises in the conditions of the Republic of Bulgaria", Assoc. Prof. Georgi Zabunov.

The **Third Meeting of Balkan Universities Association** was hosted by Sofia St.Kliment Ohridski University on March 24th-25th 2017. The meeting brought together 67 participants and representatives of 34 different Universities from 8 different Balkan countries.

BUA reached 61 members after the participation of the new members (Varna Free University, Alexander Technological University of Thessaloniki and UBT-University of Business and Technology) to the Association in 2017. Furthermore, BUA Members unanimously approved Trakya

University's being the permanent member of Executive Committee of BUA.



*Third Meeting of Balkan Universities Association, 2017*

The primary aim of Balkan Universities Association (BUA) is to determine a leading vision for the future through the universities, the libraries, the research centers in Balkan region on the base of common global values by considering the necessities of the time.



*Third Meeting of Balkan Universities Association, 2017*

Besides, forming up a scientific network in the areas of the language, the culture, the art, the history, the economy, the education and sports and caring out collaborative scientific works in these areas are aims of

BUA. Thus, following objectives are determined:

- To improve an intercultural dialogue considering the importance of the region;
- To form lasting and solid scientific cooperation from the past to the future;
- To establish an association with universities that are active, acknowledged, followed and preferred in science and academic world on a global scale;
- To make joint scientific studies, researches and innovation works.
- To provide opportunities in methods, techniques and cooperation for increasing the efficiency of research and development activities;
- To organize common cultural, artistic and sportive activities;
- To organize exchange programs for academic staff (such as Erasmus and Mevlana Exchange Programs);





- To organize exchange programs for students (such as Erasmus and Mevlana Exchange Programs);
- To conduct mutual accreditation process;
- To organize joint diploma programs
- To organize education in Balkan Languages;

- To form a communication network which will enable to exchange of knowledge among academicians;
- To form virtual specialization reserves;
- To prepare and conduct joint scientific research projects and to conduct their applications.

We attended the ***International Conference on Innovations in Science and Education*** in March 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in Prague, Czech Republic. A paper titled “*Transition and agricultural cooperatives in Bulgaria*” was presented to identify, analyse and evaluate the causes of economic and social changes in the development of agricultural cooperatives in Bulgaria in the past two decades. One general characteristic of Eastern European countries (EEC) countries is that at the early stage of transition from a central-planned to a

market economy the majority of land was returned to the rural population, which resulted in large numbers of relatively small and dispersed land plots. Geographical proximity and the similar institutional model of these countries identify common development constraints: generally small farm sizes, unclear cooperative legislation or inappropriate taxation policies, individualism and general unwillingness by the farmers to collaborate, absence of value chain activities and entrepreneurial spirit.

## April, 2017

Giulia Galera (EURICSE) presented “*Social enterprises welcoming asylum seekers and refugees*” to the Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants on 7<sup>th</sup> of April. She tackles the role of migrants in social regeneration in some remote and marginal areas in Italy, which recently face the problem of depopulation, social and economic marginalisation.

On 9<sup>th</sup> of April she presented the “*Italian social enterprises*” to Anti-poverty Network in Sofia, Bulgaria. During the meeting were discussed the organisation aim,

contribution, main projects and achievements on the topic.

*C-BIRD scientific meeting* took place on 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> of April to initiate discussion on the contents of the final scientific report and the organisation of the final conference. Colleagues from TrU, Agroconsult, Euricse, and Zip center were present, while UAL and UCC were involved by proxy.

*C-Bird consortium meeting* was scheduled for 13<sup>th</sup> of April to provide overview and plan the ongoing secondments, financial and administrative issues.

Researchers from EURICSE, Zip center and Agroconsult Engineering attended the scientific seminar “*Development of research and science - local conditions*” organised on 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> of April. The seminar was dedicated to the common advantages and perspectives, which operational programmes and institutional strategies at decision-making level hold for development

of excellent science and cutting-edge research.

Zlatina Karova (Ministry of education and science), Valery Kotzovski (Ministry of finance), Deans and the Vice-Deans of the Agricultural University (Plovdiv) and the University of food technology (Plovdiv) were invited as guest lecturers to talk about the synergies between the policy of the





Ministry of education and science and the way it contributes and improves research, education in diverse areas, with focus on rural achievements and intervention results.

Meeting with the Vice Minister of the Ministry of agriculture and the experts at the *Ministry of agriculture*, Sofia was

## May, 2017

In May, 2017 our researchers took part in series of scientific events, as well as shared experience and discussed topics on rural development with various representatives of the institutional support at local and international level.

At the beginning of the month was organised meeting with the UN local representatives about their mission in Pirot, Serbia and the collaboration they have with the NGOs in the region.

Two consequent meetings were organised - with Marjan Ciric, Director of the Economic school to present the goals, tasks, activities and expected results under the Project and to conduct questionnaire with the representative of economic school; and with the Office for Local development in the Municipality of Pirot.

On 11<sup>th</sup> of May, C-BIRD project was part of the traditional "*Day of Science*". During the seminar we presented our achievements and main results, as well as the impact and the new projects, developed as a continuum of our work.

*Seminar "Day of Science", 2017*



attended by researchers from Zip Center, EURICSE, and Trakia University and allowed for discussions on rural development policy, measures to enhance supply chain, role of the agricultural producers and efficient mechanisms to increase the organisational rate in the agricultural sector.

Our researchers attended the 26<sup>th</sup> *International conference for young researchers "Management and quality"*, 12<sup>th</sup> of May, 2017. The ESR from the business partners in the project had the opportunity to discuss and present their experience in academia.

*International conference for young researchers "Management and quality", 2017*



The same month we also participated in the scientific conference "*Agricultural science, ecology and business for smart growth*" on 24<sup>th</sup> of May, 2017, which conference was also a fruitful exchange with colleagues from INRA- France.

*Scientific conference "Agricultural science, ecology and business for smart growth", 2017*







C-Bird was presented at the regional forum *"European investment plan and opportunities for development of the South Eastern region in Bulgaria"*. This forum received significant support and visibility in the face of the

## June, 2017

At the beginning of the month we contributed to the XXVII International Scientific Conference of the Union of Scientists - Stara Zagora.

During the same month, Centre for Cooperative Studies – UCC organized a series of training on the following topics:

1. *Presentation on "Cooperative Grocers in Ireland"*, focused on:

- Literature review: potential and value of the cooperatives in Ireland, history of consumer cooperation of other counties;
- Growing cooperative grocery in Ireland: who are the coop grocers, what categories they are,
- Methodology: review of the literature, mapping the cooperative grocers in Ireland,

## July 2017

C-Bird was part of the initiative Europe in my region, organized on 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2017.

*Europe in my region, 2017*



The Open day hosted by Trakia University initiated talks, presentations and discussions on topics ranging from historical paths of cooperativism in the given regions, diversity of organizational forms and nature of cooperative action, issues of rural development, education and

Municipality of Stara Zagora, the Representation of the European Commission in Bulgaria, and the District Administration of Stara Zagora.

individual narrative semi-structural interviews

- Limitations and conflicts: small sample, literature, time frame, geographical dispersion, personal bias.

2. *Presentation on "Financial remuneration of directors of Irish Credit Unions"*, focused on:

- Why do some credit unions financially compensate the directors?
- What is the financial compensation impact on the business?
- What is the concept of volunteerism, motivation, support?
- Methodology used, including: quantitative, semi-structural interviews, focus group interviews;
- Limitations: taxation, employment status.

research, networking, to debates around democratic processes and future perspectives.

The event brought together faculty members, researchers, practitioners and authority representatives to showcase the latest rural development practices.

July 2017 was month of intensive secondments organized by COEXPHAL, UAL, UCC and Zip Center.

Colleagues from Trakia University, Agroconsult Engineering and Zip Center had the opportunity to learn the scenario of how LAGs affects the livelihood of the communities in Almeria; get some insights into ways whereby the national strategy and regional programmes stimulate and contribute towards cooperative business in Almeria; and to generalize the role of local authorities and the government plans,





regional policies and programmes and operationalized projects.



Dcoop, 2017

During the meetings with the DCoop and the Cuevas de Sorbas we managed to discuss and investigate the mechanisms towards the pathways and mechanisms of the local initiatives and rural policies to complement and enhance rural development.

Dcoop S.Coop. is a second degree cooperative, whose members are mostly cooperatives. Other members such as commercial companies are also welcomed according to their legal and statutory guidelines. These Dcoop partners, in turn,

are held by thousands of families of farmers and livestock, the true owners and the raison of this cooperative venture.

As Dcoop covers several activities, they are organized into sections with independent assets and accounting. The members of each division bear both income and expenses. Currently there are six sections: Oil Section; Table Olives Section, Services and Supplies Section; Livestock Section; Cereals Section; and Credit Section, while the latter is not intended to farmers and livestock breeders, but to the partners themselves (cooperatives) of Dcoop.



Cuevas de Sorbas, 2017

## August 2017



*Agriculture in Almeria – Social, economic and environmental contributions”, 2017*

In the context of the current agri-food market, several factors have made it increasingly difficult to balance the components of sustainability in agricultural-based development. These factors include increasing internationalization, tighter control of

distribution and frequent changes in agricultural policies.

On 7<sup>th</sup> of August our researchers attended open lecture on the topic “*Agriculture in Almeria – Social, economic and environmental contributions*”, presented by Juan Carlos Peres Mesa (UAL).

The lecture tackled the debate in the recent years concerning the role of the agricultural sector and how it should face the following challenges: productivity-competitiveness, environmental protection and socio-economic development. There is, therefore, a growing need for practical analyses that adopt a holistic approach.

The analyses showed how this sector in the province of Almería (Spain), based on horticultural family farms, has risen to the above issues over recent decades. The study provided some insights into the different





trade-offs and synergies between sustainability dimensions. In particular, the integration of ecological, social and economic components may prove useful in

## September 2017

C-Bird traditionally was part of the Researchers night, funded by the European Commission under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions.

The event was organized in the at the Zahariy Knyazheski Regional Library in Stara Zagora, as part of the series of participations and media events to promote scientific careers aimed in particular at young people.

Main Researchers night activities included presentations for engaging the public across the country with science, quizzes, science

## October 2017

On 4<sup>th</sup> of October Trakia University and the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science organized workshop on research potential in rural areas, policy mechanisms to support collaboration between academia and business sector, and to outline as well the critical areas and types of multidisciplinary research needed to support rural development.



*Ministry of education and science, workshop, 2017*

Prof. DSc Yosif Iliev presented an open lecture on topic *"Rural development – descriptive statistics, analysis and policy mechanisms"*.

helping other regions to adapt their agricultural systems, especially where these are characterized by small-scale farming.

cafes, experiments, science shows, simulations, games and competitions.



*Researchers' night, 2017*



*"Rural development – descriptive statistics, analysis and policy mechanisms", 2017*

C-Bird final conference *"Cooperative and innovative rural development – impact and practical implementation of academia-business collaborative approach"* took place in Pirot, Serbia on 27<sup>th</sup> of October.



*Final C-Bird conference, 2017*







During the conference, partners presented and shared experiences on the project, as well as invited guests were involved: Goran Popovic-Department of Agriculture of the Municipality of Pirot, Prof. DSc Ivan Kunchev (UNWE), Miroljub Vidanović, Mimica Kostić- Agricultural Advisory and

On 22<sup>nd</sup> of November was organized training *"Applied research solutions"* targeted at diverse aspects of rural development, incl. society, different disciplines (academia), communities, civil society, and government.



*Applied research solutions, 2017*

During the same month Centre for Cooperative Studies – UCC organized series of training seminars on the following topics:

## December, 2017

In December the Centre for Cooperative Studies – UCC continued with the series of trainings focused on:

- "European Union LIFE Programme - Explaining the LIFE Programme – the Irish approach", Irish Rural Link

Expert Service Pirot, Slavica Ćirić-Cooperative Lady's heart, Miljan Jonić-National employment service. Future objectives, target areas and strengthening synergies between academia and business were also topics in the discussion panel.

## November 2017

- "European Regional and Environmental Policies - implications for rural development", UCC: Delivered by UCC visiting Lecturers Professor Ivan Sotkovsky and Magdalena Drastichova, Department of Regional and Environmental Economics / Faculty of Economics, VŠB - Technical University of Ostrava;
- "Where to publish in a Business context", College of Business and Law
- "Challenges and strategies of sustainable rural development", Dr. Mary O' Shaughnessy, UCC

- "Mapping Community Based Social Enterprises", National Steering Group Meeting
- PhD Research Seminar (focus on social entrepreneurship and rural innovation), UCC







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