



# CONVENTUS

Learning system for cooperatives

*Conventus learning system as a supplement to the existing cooperative education and training model and a contribution to solving some of the cooperative movement's problems*

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## Cooperative Movement in Poland

- **First cooperatives**
  - First pre-cooperative society – 1816 (multipurpose farmers' society)
  - First cooperative bank – 1861
  - First consumers' cooperative – 1869
  - First cooperative saving and credit society – 1890
- **Brilliant development in the time of Poland's partition (before WW1)**
  - 3,745 cooperative societies with 1.5 million members
  - Important economic, social and patriotic role in the struggle against Russian, German and Austrian oppression
- **Further growth in independent 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic of Poland (1918-1939)**
  - excellent legislation (law of 1920)
  - 22.6 thousand coops, 2.1 million members (1930)
  - well established education/training system (own cooperative schools)



## **Cooperative Movement in Poland after WW2 in the communist system (1945-1989)**

- **Cooperative movement in the central planning system:**
  - subordinated to the state/communist party
  - centralized
  - bureaucratized
  - monopolizing some sectors of economy
  - used as a tool of the collectivization in agriculture
- **Huge economic growth** of the movement (15 thousand coops, 15 million members, 12% GDP)
- **Large education/training system** (cooperative schools, training centres, cooperative faculties/institutes at the universities)
- **Weak democratic structures**, disappearance of cooperative identity



## Cooperative Movement in Poland after 1990

- **Bad image of the cooperative movement** among politicians/journalists/society  
– co-ops treated as the remnants of the old system
- **Lack of confidence** into cooperatives
- **Liquidation** of the centralized structure, but also of the educational/training system
- **Lack of knowledge** how to operate in the free market economy, lack of young generation of modern cooperative managers
- **Bankruptcies & liquidations** of many cooperatives, transformations into limited companies
- **Decrease:** No of coops on 50%, No of employees on 60% , share in GDP to 1%



## Cooperative Movement in Poland after 2000 and joining EU (1/05/2004)

- **Consolidation & modernization** of some sectors (dairy, banking)
- **Success of a new co-op sector** – credit unions (90-ies)
- **Emergence of new sectors** – co-op farmers' groups, social co-ops (2006)
- **Stabilization of cooperative organizations:** National Cooperative Council, sectoral unions, training activities
- **Growing interest** in coops among some groups of young people
- **Multinational projects**

### **BUT still:**

- ***Bad image*** among mainstream politicians and mass media
- ***Lack of appropriate, supportive legislation*** (cooperative law of 1982!)
- ***Absence of information on cooperative system*** in school/university programmes
- ***Insufficient education/training***



## **Cooperative Movement in Poland at present**

- **15 cooperative sectors**
- **8,500 cooperative societies**
- **8 million individual members**
- **300 thousand jobs**
- **1% share in GDP**
- **important social role**



## Cooperative Education in Poland

### Training courses conducted by NCC and sectoral unions

- **long-term courses** addressed to concrete groups (auditors, liquidators, members of supervisory councils...)  
=> *some general knowledge on coop system*
- **short-term trainings** addressed to coop employees/managers  
=> *mainly new legal provisions regarding coops, fiscal, bookkeeping issues, marketing, quality management, European funds...*
- ***Trainings usually paid by participants/coops, conducted by own experts or contracted external trainers***
- ***Very traditional (lectures, workshops in organizers' premises) => modern trainings hardly used (active workshops, e-learning...)***



## Cooperative Education in Poland

### Other training/educational activities

- **Universities** (agricultural, economics, faculties of law, social policy...) – cooperative issues hardly present in curricula of general studies
  - *resulting not from university's teaching policies but from individual involvement/interest of the student, lecturers, tutors...*
  - *if so, usually as facultative subject, sometimes taken up by students in their BA/MA/PhD thesis*
  - *few attempts to organize postgraduate studies for coop managers (private economics universities)*
- **Various educational activities** in the frameworks of European/national projects conducted by coop organizations, associations, foundations...
  - *mainly social coops, cooperative farmers' groups...*
  - *mainly concerning establishing, sometimes also conducting, managing...*





## Cooperative Education in Poland

- **Resolution of the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of Polish Cooperative Movement (2012)**
  - *calls on **government** for reintroducing cooperative issues into educational programs/systems of all levels and restoring secondary schools with cooperative profile*
  - *calls on **cooperatives** to intensify training processes for cooperators, in particular for managerial staff => obligatory , certified training for members of supervisory councils*
  - *calls on **NCC** to prepare a modern, interactive , complex training system and to develop cooperation with universities and research institutes*



## Cooperative Education in Poland

- **Expert's Statement and Recommendations prepared for the Working Group for Education on Social Economy/Ministry of Labour and Social Policy concerning cooperative education (2013)**
  - *most of existing educational activities have practical /technical character, helping coop managers/employees to solve their everyday problems, but there is a need for more issues concerning cooperative history, tradition, values that contribute to built cooperative identity and ethos among them*
  - *need for trainings on establishing new coop societies (beside social coops and coop farmers' groups sectors)*
  - *need for searching financing sources (from EU, national funds) – some training courses too expensive for the potential participants*
  - *need for modern handbooks and training tools (most of handbooks outdated, lack of interactive tools, of e-learning system)*
  - *need to involve more educational staff at the universities ( researchers, lecturers...)*  
*interested in coop movement*
  - *need for more intensive transnational cooperation in the field of cooperative education*



## Cooperative Education in Poland

- **Expert's Statement and Recommendations prepared for the Working Group for Education on Social Economy/Ministry of Labour and Social Policy concerning cooperative education (2013) – general statement:**

**Educational/training system for Polish cooperative movement should be:**

- ***systematic**, included into state's educational policies*
- ***complex**, conducted on all levels, concerning not only technical issues, but also general knowledge on cooperative movement*
- ***integrated**, conducted in large partnerships (also on multinational plan), of cooperative organizations, universities, civic associations, local governments...*



## CONVENTUS POLSKI

- **New approach to cooperative education when compared with existing learning systems:**
  - ***innovative tools: on-line training, self-learning, self-evaluation***
  - ***stress on history, ideology, status of cooperative movement as well as meaning of „cooperative membership” hardly present in Polish training programmes (Modules 1 &2)***
  - ***approach based on „group process” (module 5) almost inexistent in Polish traditional training system***
  - ***flexibility & adaptability to various needs (countries, sectors, levels of knowledge)***



## CONVENTUS POLSKI

**„BONUS”**

**CONVENTUS as a platform of building knowledge on cooperative systems in other countries (status, history, legislation, organizational structure ...) and exchange of best practices**

**=> Important also for students, people from universities , research institutes, politicians, journalists...**



## CONVENTUS POLSKI

- **Possible stakeholders in Poland:**
  - *cooperative unions, organizations, associations, private companies involved in cooperative education*
  - *universities interested in enlarging cooperative issues in their curricula (e.g. Institute of Social Policy of the University of Warsaw)*
  - *governmental institutions (e.g. Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development)*
  - *local governments interested in developing cooperatives in their communities*



## CONVENTUS POLSKI

- **Possible obstacles:**
  - ***lack of confidence and lack of skills in using modern learning tools (on-line training) – cooperators, mainly from the countryside and small towns „conservative”***
  - ***weak knowledge of foreign languages (even if the material of Conventus Polski is translated, the full potential of its exploitation requires knowledge at least of English***
  - ***lack of formal certification at the ends of course – very important for some persons***



## CONVENTUS POLSKI

- **To sum up:**
  - ***CONVENTUS learning system may be a valuable supplement to the existing educational/training system for cooperatives in Poland ,and may contribute to overcome several problems and weaknesses of Polish cooperatives; it has a big potential to interest several stakeholders from inside and outside cooperative movement***
  - ***However, it must be very well adapted to the reality of Poland, to new problems that are emerging, to the needs of potential users***
  - ***It must be user-friendly as much as possible!***





**CONVENTUS**

Learning system for cooperatives

*Thank you*

*for your*

*attention!*

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