

Kick-off meeting of the European Project “Saving Jobs!”

Improving the legal, political and financial environment for transferring enterprises to their workers

On 8-9 September 2016, Cooperatives UK hosted, in Manchester, the first meeting of the EU funded “Saving Jobs!” project, launched in March 2016.

The project aims to improve the environment for transferring enterprises to their workers/employees by organizing them in a cooperative way, and to raise awareness about the benefits of the cooperative model.

During the project, that will last until mid-2017, the idea is to transfer the Spanish knowledge and experience of transferring businesses to the partners countries having less experience in this field – namely the United Kingdom, Poland and Denmark -, as well as to local and regional authorities in Europe, thanks to the contribution of the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social economy (REVES aisbl), which is a partner in the consortium.

Over the last 30 years, Spain has experienced numerous cases of business transfer to employees. Reasons for this change of ownership were either crisis and bankruptcies or owners’ retirement without a perspective of succession.

The first meeting

The Manchester meeting was the starting point for the project partners to discuss, under the lead of the coordinator of the project, the Spanish Confederation of Worker Cooperatives (COCETA), a number of tools and activities.

Delegates from the other European partner organizations - Co-operatives UK, the Danish platform Kooperationen and the Polish NAUWC - had the opportunity to report about their respective local contexts as far as the transfer of enterprises to employees is concerned, as well as about the situation of worker cooperatives in general.



It emerged that, in countries like Poland, the word “Cooperative” continues to be associated with its communist past, to corruption and bureaucracy. The added value of worker cooperatives seems to be not sufficiently known also in countries like UK and Denmark, although both have a strong

“Saving Jobs!” project

culture of cooperation and collective work. In Spain, even if there is a lot of experience and the worker cooperative movement is strong, there are still obstacles to tackle: an example is the lack, in Spanish legislation, of provisions related to specific aspects of enterprise transfer to the workers (e.g. in the field of information, preferential access to enterprise buy-out etc.).

An analysis of the reported situations will be conducted by REVES. The Network will also integrate the report with a series of additional experiences and practices, in virtue of its broader, European, approach.

Other meetings, workshops and seminars will be organized in the upcoming months, in each of the partner countries. In Spain, partners will also visit some concrete examples of worker buy-outs in Spain. A final seminar and closure event will also take place at the end of the project activities, in Brussels.



Worker cooperatives and their added value

The model of worker cooperatives – maintaining and creating jobs through collective entrepreneurship and worker

ownership -, is a model that helps improving lives of workers/employees and communities.

“Worker cooperatives are enterprises subject to the same restrictions of competition, management and profitability as other companies. Their originality lies in the fact that their workers hold the majority of the shares, at least 51%. In doing so, the workers decide jointly on the major guidelines of their enterprises and appoint their leaders (managers, boards of directors, etc.).

They also decide on how to share the profit with a two-fold aim: to give the preference to the workers of the enterprises, in the form of refunds based on the work done and to consolidate the enterprises with a view to handing it over onto the future generations, e.g. by creating reserves to reinforce the long-term sustainability of their enterprises.

In all cooperatives, the internal democratic control is based on the principle of “one person, one vote” whatever the capital share held by the individual members; in the case of worker cooperatives, these members are the workers. Finally, the cooperative spirit promotes its employees information and training, a prerequisite to develop the autonomy, the motivation and responsibility, accountability required in an economic world which has become insecure.” (ICA)

Worker cooperatives have also demonstrated to be more resilient to the recent crises than conventional businesses, on average.



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