**Recommendations for the initial founding group and proccess for regional cooperatives**

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The recommendations here are based on experiences and without any claim to completeness. It is possible that initiatives described here as having less favorable conditions are also successful. Please do not be discouraged to become active and start where you are!

Composition of the initial group/working group/steering committee

Most new ideas arise either from an individual or in a good conversation in a small group of people. It is good to start the project with small initiating group that works out the topics and process and brings it forward to other stakeholders.

We recommend an initial group of no more than 4-8 people. They should be able to meet every 1-2 months, and more often if possible, as well as to work in between meetings to gather information and talk with other people.

It is important to include people from the beginning who are economically connected with the success of the project, and on whom the success of the cooperative depends. In the case of a regional organic value chain cooperative, this could be, for example, 1-2 important direct marketers, 1-2 food artisans (bakers, butchers, etc.), 1-2 regionally oriented traders and possibly even 1-2 consumers. It is helpful to consider the "social competence", the know-how and their networking/importance in the region when selecting the participants.

This working group could report to an "advisory board", which is called in every 3-6 months, and shown the first results, which honestly reflect how the process is working, what is still missing, what fits, and what is less fitting.

A challenge in finding people to participate in either group: the important and right people often already have too much to do, and those with much time are partly less suitable. It is important nevertheless to ask the important and usually busy people. Especially if they are directly affected by the matter and recognize the importance, they may still join in and put another matter on the back burner instead.

A project that is developed by possibly very competent people but not by the regional entrepreneurs concerned has less chance of being implemented. It is better if they also make the project "their" project soon after it begins and are involved in the concept development.

Achieving committment and a suitable timeline
It is helpful when someone agrees to act as a “coordinator” for the group, someone willing to:

* Invite people to the meetings
* Organize the agenda
* Prepare and provide information in advance of the meetings or ask/assign other group members to do so
* Think about the topics and date of the next meeting during the meeting
* Take care of the meeting process, administration, and minutes

When active, busy, people who like to get things done are working together, it is easy for a good idea to get “lost”, because progress is to slow and/or it is not clear who is doing what and by when.

Even if the smaller group succeeds in meeting every 1-2 months, it is challenging to keep the continuity. Everyone gets preoccupied with their everyday things, has 100 things in their head that should be done, and should now get head and heart free for a new idea. Since it take 1-2 hours to get back to the flow of a new project, we recommend:

* Set the meetings a little longer than you normally would, instead of 2 hours in the evening, make it 4 hours, or if possible, even longer during an afternoon.
* As soon as possible some core sentences could be formulated, which are read and worked on again at the beginning of each meeting, in order to re-orient the group to the common purpose of comming together
* Using the minutes, set up a list of projects or things to be done, which is looked at at the beginning to see what has been done and what has not been done.
* A project management tool, such as Asana (with a free basic version) or Basecampe can be very helpful

Support and Organization

It can be important and helpful to assign and pay someone to facilitate the process and perform the tasks in the previous section. Making good progress is crucial to keeping the initial group engaged and on task. Good organization of meetings and facilitation can be very helpful in accomplishing this. This underscores the importance of having the affected "entrepreneurs" on board, because they will be more willing to share costs among themselves if the importance of the project for the region and for the affected companies becomes clear.

Familiarization with examples of success and challenges from the history and experiences of other cooperatives

At the beginning of an initiative to found a cooperative, many hurdles appear very quickly: everyone has little time, the process seems unclear and almost unattainable, you have to and want to work together with people you don’t know very well or have even experienced as competitors etc. Where can the strength and courage come from to start anyway, to trust one's "feeling" that it is "worth it"?

An important point is to read about other projects, how they proceeded and what they achieved. But then also to get to know other projects, to organize a joint excursion, etc..

This is also advisable when stagnations occur. If there are contacts to other initiatives or consultants, it can be helpful to hear how they have navigated similar situations.

Dealing with conflict and possible competition

When people come together, careful and "anxious" not to reveal too much about themselves and their own business, little progress is likely to be made. How can trust develop to really share the important things? In other words, to tell about one's own problems, opportunities, ideas that seem "crazy" at first, etc., even if one might fear that this could be disadvantageous if the project fails?

In our experience, the step-by-step approach we recommend on this website has proven to be very effective. So where do we want to go together, how do we want to proceed, who is responsible for which areas, the good planning of the project ...

If tensions and conflicts develop or are already there, pushing them away does not bring resolution, the faster they are looked at and worked on, the better and the faster we move forward together. On this page you will also find helpful materials, and often the advice to get help from outside quickly enough.