



# YOUTH FOR #COOP

COOPERATING  
BEYOND BORDERS





The force of the cooperative movement resides in its capacity to meet the evolving needs of its members. Supporting initiatives of the new generation contributes to build towards a better cooperative future.

*Agnès Mathis, Director of Cooperatives Europe*

We are thrilled to support the emergence of young cooperators' networks and to build bridges between the cooperative movement, mutuals, and the entire social economy environment. A great (r)evolution is on, let's give more space to our generations, let's youth express its contribution!

*Anne Pfersdorff, President of CJDES*

# FOREWORD

A “network generation” is asserting itself across the European continent, questioning traditional ways to interact, create and think. This generation, in search of meaning, actively contributes to a rising global dynamic pursuing social justice and sustainable economy. It thus finds an echo with the values of the cooperative movement.

This is the ground into the European network of young cooperators was set up in April 2015, during the General assembly of Cooperatives Europe. By organizing the workshop Youth for #Coop during the International Summit of Cooperatives, CJDES

and Cooperative Europe took the opportunity of a beacon event to enable this recently-created network to discover similar initiatives and benefit from their experiences.

The present document aims to aggregate the exchanges carried out among the 70 young cooperators from the four regions of the International Cooperative Alliance, who reflected and cooperated during this workshop. It also presents some leaders of youth networks, providing insight into different activities carried out across the world.

# WORKSHOP

The workshop “Youth for #Coop: cooperating beyond borders” aimed to create a youth-led framework to foster cooperation among networks of young co-operators.

Over the last years, a diversity of youth initiatives has been carried around the world within the cooperative movement. Networks of young co-operators have emerged, developing tools and implementing projects aiming to address emerging needs and aspirations expressed by new generations. CJDES and Cooperatives Europe used the opportunity of a beacon event, the International Summit of Cooperatives, to organise with young cooperative leaders a workshop enabling an exchange of experiences and tools amongst youth networks.



# WHY SETTING UP YOUTH COOPERATIVE NETWORKS ?



Sharing of best practices and tools among young cooperators



Increasing credibility and empowering the youth



Fostering youth participation in the cooperative movement

# WHAT ARE THE MAIN OBSTACLES OR CHALLENGES ?



Difficulty to organise communities of young cooperators at high levels (national and international)



Lack of time, resources and training to stabilize networks



Lack of representation in decision-making bodies of cooperative movements

# WHAT RESOURCES DO WE NEED TO DEVELOP YOUTH NETWORKS?



Study and mapping of young cooperators' activities



Mobilization of financial and human resources



Quotas of young representatives in decision-making bodies and meetings



## **SETTING UP.**

Cooperative movement to invest in structural needs : networking, training, human and financial resources, adaptation of internal rules



## **DEVELOP.**

Governments and institutions to fund and support projects



## **EXPAND.**

Partner organisations (e.g. youth movements) to mobilize young people at large

# WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED ?



# EMPOWERING THE YOUTH

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# GLOBAL

Gabriela Buffa, youth committee chairperson of the ICA, presents the highest level of coordination between young cooperators: the Alliance Youth Network.



## Tell us about your network!

The Alliance Youth Network was established in 2003, formed by people committed to the co-operative youth movement. We aim to help young co-operators from different countries to connect, share experiences and ideas, as well as to provide an environment where young co-operators can learn more about the wider co-operative movement.

Involving young people from outside the movement in cooperation through education and support is a key focus of our work. We also want to empower young co-operators inside the cooperative movement, in order to raise awareness about youth-related issues and to bring a youth perspective during wider discussions at the international level.



Our structure is organised through an Executive Committee that gathers young co-operators nominated by ICA members from every region. It is chaired by a President, who is the Youth Representative on the Alliance board, and Vice chairpersons elected by each Regional Youth Committee or Network.

### What are the top current priorities / concerns of your network?

We want to promote real opportunities and channels of participation, to be able to better address youth needs and problems (form new co-ops, participation in co-ops decision making process, access to credit among others), and improve access to information.

While we do find ways to work together, a continuing concern of our network is funding the participation of youth in the network - however, we know that this is not only an issue for youth, but for other low-income organizations, as well.

### According to you, what is the main challenge to be tackled by the cooperative movement during the 21st century?

One challenge is to increase our influence: this requires to enlarge the market shares held by cooperatives in the economy of each country, and to be further involved in decision-making processes at all levels.

Another challenge is to ground our

movement in its grassroots, i.e. communities. It requires to be even more active in places, frameworks and political levels which are considered by people to have a direct impact in their daily lives.

That said, we need to further explore this question collectively as people from different cultures, geographies, and identities. The Youth Network seeks to bring youth from around the world together to assess what our shared challenges and possible solutions are, and to do so continually because the needs and aspirations of youth will change through time.

### According to you, how is the cooperative movement perceived by the youth?

The youth is too diverse and complex to

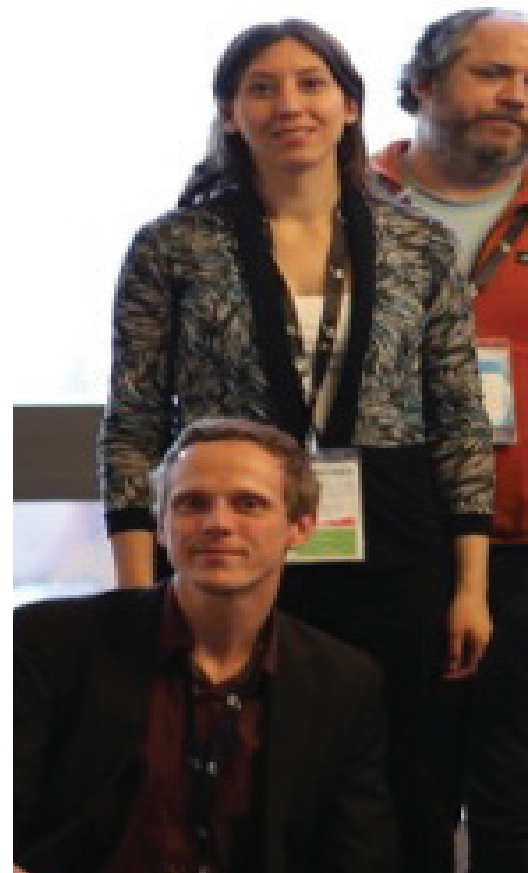
be able to claim that all young people agree on one homogeneous vision towards the cooperative movement.

However, we identify two main trends among younger generations - some consider the cooperative movement as out-dated, conservative, formal, and unable to breathe change at the global level. On the other hand, some consider cooperatives as an alternative to the conventional economic system, a solution to address their own problems, and to create a space for social, economic and political participation.

There is much work to be done in order to collectively build a movement that all youth will perceive as a path to transform our societies.

**Would you change the world, what would you start with?**

We would work on creating grassroots cultural change based in values of solidarity and justice, in order to build a strong and inclusive alternative to the neoliberal model.





# AMERICAS

“Promoting the participation and integration of youth in the cooperative movement.” Lauren Naranjo presents an ambitious action plan for her Regional Youth Committee.



## Tell us about your network!

The Regional Youth Committee is the advisory body to the Board of Directors of Co-operatives of the Americas on topics regarding youth. It is established to promote the participation and integration of youth in cooperative organizations in the Americas. It has an Executive Committee composed of 7 young representatives from different countries. The participation on the committee is open to youth representatives, under 35 years old, from any organization affiliated with the International Cooperative Alliance in America.

### What are the top current priorities / concerns of your network?

The Regional Youth Committee focuses its action plan on the following priorities:

1. Using technology for youth, making accessible communications, distribution of documents and contact information of youth organizations.
2. Development of presence and virtual meetings: as Assemblies, seminars, regular meetings, where all youths can share experiences and best practices, generating progress in all countries as they relate.
3. External Incidence: promoting the relationship of young co-operators to: groups, projects and related causes to our principles, values and ideals of cooperative movement.

4. Education of Youth: we work to develop training spaces related to: doctrine, practice and training for young people related to the cooperative movement, expecting that young people trained, later train other young people in their countries and organizations as a multiplier effect.

5. Structures of Youth: We promote the creation of spaces where young people can, in an organized way, develop work plans, make decisions, and strengthen their cooperatives and communities through committees established in the affiliated cooperatives, participation on national, regional and worldwide structures.

6. Dissemination, Communication and Image: The Regional Youth Committee

developed a communication plan to spread through social networks: the activities of the youth in the region and the projects of Cooperatives of the Americas involving youth.

### According to you, how is the cooperative movement perceived by the youth?

From the inside, we can say it's a responsible model but for those who are outside many times it is considered corrupt when speaking of high levels.

Those who are part of the model, we know the benefits and the good that cooperative movement brings to the society, in economic and social terms. However, at the administration level, it may be perceived as bureaucratic and elitist.

# NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS



12 active members



12 cooperatives

## MAIN ACTIVITIES



Networking and meeting



Sharing of tools

## TOP PRIORITY



Improve youth participation

According to the research in some countries, we have known that young people who are not necessarily related to the cooperative movement perceive it as unattractive and do not identify viable employment opportunities in actual established structures. They perceive that to be a member they must create their own structures. They also note that they do not feel engaged, and they say that the publication of the benefits of the cooperative movement is poor; and also said that organizational and participation processes in cooperatives are long, limiting and tedious.

### Would you change the world, what would you start with?

First, with myself, taking a more humanitarian thought recognizing that success is not about money. Second, with the transformation of the educational system. We must ensure that education systems of all countries recognize that we must be trained to learn and unlearn, to question and to generate change. Not just receive information. In many of the countries represented, although there is access to education, critical thinking is not promoted nor is entrepreneurship. Actually, people is educated to follow rules, to maintain the status quo. And what we learn is what we inevitably take to our organizations.

This limits the opportunities of the cooperative sector to generate transformation in communities. We foster a more caring, more transformative, most popular and innovative education. Systematic education, less repetitive, and continuously providing tools to generate solutions to the needs of our people.

According with the second point, we consider important and valuable the creation of participation spaces and meeting points among young people, where they can discuss, problematize their situations and identify solutions collectively. Youth spaces created and lead by young people, to attend the problems of young people.

# ASIA PACIFIC

“Our priority is to educate young people about the cooperative model.” Ashan Ali Thakur shares an inspiring experience about the creation of the ICA Asia-Pacific Committee on Youth Cooperation.

## Tell us about your network!

ICA AP Committee on Youth Co-operation which is popularly known as ICYC is a committee of International Co-op. Alliance - Asia and the Pacific (ICA - AP). This committee has its origins established from 2000 – 2004. In this time a factual and working model for the committee was formed and recognized. During this period, rules, regulation and guide lines were developed, in order to have a structure of this committee. The pioneers of this committee that allowed for others to

stand their ground are as follows : Yoshimitsu Nakamura, Tao Say Hong, Juan Carlos Mejia, Jacklyn Lam, Ilham Nasai, Ahsan Ali Thakur, Noor Azlinn.

In 2006 the Committee came into existence with its first physical meeting. Back then it was mentioned as ICA Committee on Youth in Asia Pacific currently it has been termed as “ICA Committee on Youth Cooperation for Asia and Pacific” or in short version “ICA Regional Youth Committee” as mentioned in the Con-

stitution of the ICA Committee on Youth Cooperation for Asia and Pacific (19 July 2013).

We work on the Self help basis. Each member uses its own resources to promote an idea proposed to the board and we make that Idea happen if it is feasible by utilizing democratic consensus.

These ideas are then funded with the help of member organizations to implement them. All the Members are representative of any Co-operative Institute





in Asia & Pacific and they are assigned by the Cooperative Institute directly or indirectly as a representative.

**What are the top current priorities / concerns of your network?**

Our current priority is to educate young people about the cooperative model

and how it works in general. Our action targets both our committee members, and our region at wide. Educating the Committee members about cooperation can increase the understanding of cooperation in different fields which we are currently working on. This is necessary to align all the Members who belong to

different cooperative sectors in order to understand each other better.

Financial Literacy is a program in Nepal promoting training for kids and how saving is achieved and where they can invest their money in. In Pakistan, I am promoting education amongst youth

# NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS



10 active members



27 cooperatives

## MAIN ACTIVITY



Networking and meeting

## TOP PRIORITIES



Addressing new topics



Fostering youth participation

about the cooperative model and how it can change the economy of the country. In Bhutan, Co-ops are developing when they know what it can do and how it is useful for their mutual interest.

The point is Youth are unaware of the potential of the Co-operative Model and how it can achieve mutual benefits for lives and their communities. So education and training programs are necessary to convey the Message of Cooperative Principles and values.

**According to you, what is the main challenge to be tackled by the cooperative movement during the 21st century?**

It seems to me that the cooperative movement should improve its internal coordination: there is still diversion and confusion with different interests. We would gain to be unified and aligned under a unique and strong platform.

**According to you, how is the cooperative movement perceived by the youth?**

I understand that younger generations do not yet fully understand what a cooperative is, nor do they perceive what role the model can play for the future of their countries, especially in terms of economic and social development.

**Would you change the world, what would you start with?**

I would start by reinforcing and widening our educational activities towards the youth, to improve their understanding about the co-operative model, and raise their awareness about the potential of cooperatives to pursue their own aspirations. Secondly, I would work further with governmental institutions to cater to the needs of the youth.

# EUROPE

“Engagement and recognition are part of the challenge”. The one-year old Young European Cooperators Network is still developing. Sébastien Chaillou presents the dynamics which led to this initiative.

## Tell us about your network!

The Young European Cooperators Network (YECN) is the regional network covering the “Europe” region as defined by ICA and is intersectional. It is open to all coop members regardless of status or job. It is also a composite network, including representatives of established or emerging national networks as well as single cooperators bringing their ideas and their work. It is open to all members of cooperatives without the distinction of status or employment. It is also a

“double-network” – on one side it is comprised of national networks (emerging or established) and on the other, it explores ideas, topics and concrete projects that cooperators are invested in. Our objective is to support building of youth capacity in cooperatives. We achieve this by promoting a regular exchange of cooperative best practices with local youth, but also by promoting better recognition of youth voice inside the cooperative movement.

## What are the top current priorities / concerns of your network?

Our priority is to establish common priorities and make them accessible, in order to facilitate participation by all. It is a real challenge – the majority of our members are youth leaders, freelancers or entrepreneurs, and although everyone recognizes the immense value of the network, finding the time to invest in the network becomes a challenge. This encourages us to reflect carefully our objectives, but also ensuring openness

A photograph of three people in a meeting room, with an orange graphic overlay and the text "COOPERATING TODAY TO SHAPE OUR FUTURE". The background shows a man in a suit, a woman in a blue shirt, and another person in a blue shirt. The text is white and underlined, set against a large orange graphic element.

COOPERATING  
TODAY TO SHAPE  
OUR FUTURE

# NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS



180 active members

## MAIN ACTIVITIES



Networking and meeting



Sharing of best practices

## TOP PRIORITIES



Financial stability



Lack of tools

in order to enable each young cooperator to fully mobilize his/her skills inside our network.

After our latest meeting in Mondragon (October 5-6), we began to concentrate on the creation of a working group to support national initiatives (emerging networks of young co-operators), projects for the promotion of cooperative education and research, and the lack of space for more efficient collaboration (skill map, market place...). We also contribute to frameworks involving ICA members at large, for instance through working groups facilitated by Cooperatives Europe, on topics such as the collaborative economy or cooperative governance in the production of renewable energy.

**According to you, what is the main challenge to be tackled by the cooperative movement during the 21st century?**

In the context of the economic crisis and in the view of the social and political issues, cooperatives should clearly demonstrate that they are the viable alternative. Engagement and recognition are part of the challenge – many do not recognize cooperatives in other forms such as unions and parties. This is the case with the youth, and it is becoming more and more evident among European citizens. Therefore, the solution lies in communication, education and practice.

**According to you, how is the cooperative movement perceived by the youth?**

I am not sure that the youth are very familiar with the cooperative model, but

when it is the case, they are of a more favorable opinion. There is often, however, a difficulty in understanding the force of the cooperative model versus other forms of community-based economy (e.g. collaborative economy) or not-for-profit organizations (e.g. charities and NGOs). The issue in promoting the principles and democratic values of cooperatives is the fact that the form in itself is revolutionary and not only a temporary solution nor an epiphenomenon.

**Would you change the world, what would you start with?**

Teaching to all young people the cooperative model and organizing the establishment of a “democracy of economy”. Providing them concrete opportunities of implementation and participation.

# ITALY

“Supporting cooperative start-up projects and addressing the rise the sharing economy”. Lorenzo Novaro and Mattia Affini introduce us to two merging networks, Generazioni and OOP!.

## Tell us about your networks!

LN: Generazioni and OOP! are the national networks of young (under 40 years old) co-operators and young people involved in their respective national cooperative associations, i.e. Legacoop and Confcooperative. Both youth networks don't have their own legal structures, as they are part of national cooperative associations. Generazioni is composed of 15 regional networks, whose coordinators are members of the national board. Several working groups focus on a set

of subjects, meeting online or on local basis.

MA: Generazioni and OOP! will merge into a new national network at the end of this year. In this perspective, the networks are already conducting joined activities: for instance, they agreed on coordinating their participation at regional and international levels.

**What are the top current priorities / concerns of your network?**

LN: Our networks' top priority is to merge into one single network, aiming to represent all Italian young co-operators. We also focus on education, by providing training to young co-operators, especially cooperative leaders and board members.

MA: We also aim to actively promote the cooperative model among young generations, and to address the generational transition inside the cooperative movement. We especially believe that younger generations have a potential to





# ENGAGING COMMUNITIES INTO SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION

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# NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS



350 active members



39.000 cooperatives

## MAIN ACTIVITIES



Networking and meeting



Reflecting about the cooperative future

## TOP PRIORITY



Fostering youth participation



foster innovation inside the cooperative movement.

According to you, what is the main challenge to be tackled by the cooperative movement during the 21st century?

MA: The cooperative movement should aim to improve the very perception of the cooperative model from the general public. It should especially focus on developing mechanisms ensuring better stability of cooperative businesses, in order to involve more young people through cooperative start-up projects.

LN: The cooperative movement will also have to address the rise of new forms

of business and economy, such as the sharing economy. According to me, this issue should be addressed through an in-depth work based on our 7 cooperative principles which should be the basis upon which building coordinated innovative dynamics (e.g. platform cooperativism).

According to you, how is the cooperative movement perceived by the youth?

LN: It seems that cooperatives are not well-known by younger generations: many Italian youngsters associate the cooperative model with supermarkets, without being aware of the wide diversity of possible models. However, when young people get to know better the cooperative model and

its principles, they get easily involved.

MA: I have the feeling that young people may consider that there is a gap between the cooperative movement's priorities and their own needs.

Would you change the world, what would you start with?

MA: Improve the sharing of knowledge and best practices among young cooperators, in order to create a more sustainable economy.

LN: Reduce working hours and improve work-life-balance for everyone.

# UNITED KINGDOM

“We need to take the cooperative values, principles and culture of solidarity and care to the mainstream.” Ieva presents the Young Cooperators Network, established by a team of enthusiastic entrepreneurs.

## Can you present us your networks?

The Young Co-operators Network in the UK is a new, accessible community of co-operators sharing support, resources and empowerment, whilst working towards a more co-operative society. The Young Co-operators Network formation began during a Worker Co-op Weekend 8-10th May 2015 where Altgen ran a Young Co-operators Prize programme with 6 newly formed co-operatives. After a weekend of peer to peer sharing, support and inspiration we were keen

to continue this community and set up regular gatherings with a vision to form a network that can be resource for our personal and professional co-operative development as well as unifying voice that represents us.

Today we have 20 co-operators working in or researching co-ops. The main activities of the network take place during our quarterly physical gatherings that include peer-to-peer advice, inspirational talks and workshops, skill sharing, network de-

velopment and this continues informally beyond the weekend with our members sharing opportunities and resources as they arise.

## What are the top current priorities / concerns of your network?

Our main challenge is to find the time, physical and financial resources to organize regular physical meetings. Our network is non-hierarchical and loosely structured, depending on the members initiative to keep going. More often than

not, young people starting co-operative enterprise lack time and financial resources to invest in these activities even when enthusiasm is high. We often depend on occasional substitutes from more established co-operatives to be able to be inclusive and keep the momentum going.

According to you, what is the main challenge to be tackled by the cooperative movement during the 21st century?

The cooperative movement should focus on building a strong and widely recognized solidarity economy and providing meaningful employment responding to the current changing nature of work. I believe there is a critical mass of co-operators out there in the world who



# LEADING AWAY FROM COMPETITION TOWARDS COOPERATION

# NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS



10 active members



20 cooperatives

## MAIN ACTIVITIES



Networking and meeting



Sharing of best practices

## TOP PRIORITY



Financial stability

don't yet know they are co-operators. I was certainly one of them. We need to share stories, ideas and opportunities for people to recognize that building alternatives to our current economic reality is not only possible, but necessary and exciting.

At the time of rising inequality, environmental destruction and our jobs being automatised and replaced - we need to take the cooperative values, principles and culture of solidarity and care to the mainstream. We need to counteract the narratives of fear, division and consumption with those inspiring curiosity, compassion and courage. We need to create a vision of what co-operative future looks like and do that rejecting the current language of capitalism and neoliberalism that acerbates

individualism and competition.

### According to you, how is the cooperative movement perceived by the youth?

From my experience cooperatives are mostly associated with supermarkets and funeral care providers and the movement is known only to those already engaged.

In other words, our movement seems to lack relevance and courage with regards to their expectations. It has a huge potential to address the needs and aspirations of young people, but it doesn't speak their language and it appears to have grown too corporate and conservative to be able to offer an alternative to status quo that has failed us.

### Would you change the world, what would you start with?

I would establish a Universal Basic Income.

# USA

“We need to reach and empower more people to utilize cooperative tools.” Emily M Lippold Cheney sees an opportunity in building bridges between the USA Cooperative Youth Council and adjacent youth movements.



## Can you present us your network?

USA Cooperative Youth Council is a common-equity cooperative with a membership comprised of individual youth and their allies in the cooperative movement.

USACYC provides educational programming to empower youth to engage in the philosophy and practices of cooperation -- specifically, participate directly in democratic group process; take on meaningful leadership roles thereby allowing them a voice in national strategy conversations; and have experiential opportunities such that they can apply the cooperative skills and insight gained in other aspects of their work and civic life.



USACYC also works with adjacent struggles in order to build an intersectional movement for economic liberation. This results in general political education taking place within USACYC - i.e. we don't just talk about #coops, a truly liberated universe will be #notjustcoops.

USACYC runs campaigns within the cooperative movement to move it more towards a transformational framework (e.g. anti-racism within the US cooperative movement, low-income rates at coop events), as our national cooperative movement is very capitalistic.

**What are the top current priorities / concerns of your network?**

We want to build bridges between us and youth in adjacent movements/struggles (e.g. racial justice, climate justice) who share our beliefs and values - networking and working in solidarity with them, sharing our cooperative tools, etc. We want to improve our capacity of influencing the broader cooperative movement to be more transformative in their work and visions.

Another top priority is to running our biggest membership drive to date. Our local membership engagement programs - study groups and/or social clubs in towns with several USACYC members - need to be more instituted and managed to perform our network efficiently.

**According to you, what is the main challenge to be tackled by the cooperative movement during the 21st century?**

The transformative sector of the cooperative movement - as opposed to the capitalistic-cooperative sector - needs to develop strategy for its own aims, distinct but not necessarily in conflict with those of the capitalistic-cooperative sector. We can work with our cooperative colleagues who embody neoliberal values, but we can't wait around for them to change their value systems before organizing ourselves to take action globally, nationally, and locally.

We need to demonstrate relevancy to adjacent struggles and movements like climate justice or indigenous rights, in

# NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS



1000+ active members

## MAIN ACTIVITIES



Networking and meeting



Reflecting about the cooperative future

## TOP PRIORITIES



Financial stability



Reaching better recognition from institutions

order to get cooperative tools where they are most needed as well as to scale the development of a networked cooperative movement. The cooperative movement only scales effectively and resiliently from “abajo” or the “grassroots” - so we need to reach and empower more people to utilize cooperative tools, rather than focusing on growing “Bigger Coops” which borrows values of growth from neoliberalism.

### According to you, how is the cooperative movement perceived by the youth?

In the US, many young people are unaware of the existence of a cooperative “Movement” with social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions. Further, many young people perceive the coop-

erative movement in more urban areas as white, liberal but not transformative, and wealthy, while - in more rural areas - it is often perceived as white, conservative, and wealthy.

Broadly, those youth in the US more familiar with the movement perceive two distinct movements -- one that frames cooperativism as a “kinder, gentler form of capitalism” and the other that frames cooperativism as a distinct alternative and/or a path towards an even better form of economic liberation. In the US, the capitalistic-cooperative movement is the one that holds most of the power, but is incredibly unattractive to young people.

### Would you change the world, what would you start with?

Community healing of trauma. Even if we had cooperatives everywhere, that would be resolve or heal the trauma that we have collectively and individually experienced. As a result, we will just recreate the cycle of hurt within our cooperatives. Racism and sexism are forms of trauma, abuse by loved ones is trauma, not having sufficient income is trauma - it is absurd to think about building a movement on top of this trauma without finding healing.

USACYC is slowly beginning to work on this after our members asked for healing circles to take place as part of our local member engagement initiatives.

MADE BY



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