

Competence Centre for the Management of Cooperatives

Progress Report 2023 – 2025



Kompetenzzentrum für das Management von Genossenschaften
Centro di Competenza per il Management delle Cooperative
Competence Centre for the Management of Cooperatives

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— Centro di Competenza per il Management delle Cooperative
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Preface



Prof. Richard Lang, Director Competence Centre
Photo: unibz | Alexander Erlacher

Since its formal establishment in early 2023, the Competence Centre for the Management of Cooperatives has continued to grow and develop, with significant progress made in 2024 and beyond into 2025. A strong core team has been built through the recruitment of highly qualified personnel, and several strategic objectives have been pursued, including fostering collaboration with both internal and external researchers at the University, enhancing the Centre's visibility in relevant international scientific networks, and securing additional third-party funding for impactful research and knowledge transfer.

Since late 2024, the Competence Centre has been actively engaged in the three-year ASSETS research project, which explores the evolving role and transformative potential of cooperatives in today's economies and societies. In collaboration with a network of European partners, the project aims to enhance evaluation tools for the social economy sector and to develop a digital platform that sup-

ports collaboration and improves working conditions in social economy organisations, including cooperatives.

We recently published findings from a key study on how established and emerging cooperative housing models can help address the growing housing affordability crisis. Carried out within the "Housing Needs and Cooperative Housing" project, led by Euricse and supported by the Autonomous Province of Trento, the study provides valuable insights for the cooperatives' sector in South Tyrol. Other ongoing research at the Centre currently explores generational transitions and succession planning in cooperatives, responding to pressing challenges in South Tyrol's business landscape.

Amid rapid global change, there is growing interest in alternative business models that offer stability and address community needs. In this context, the Competence Centre has positioned itself as a vital link between academic research and practical application. This is exemplified in our organization of events that have brought together researchers, policymakers, business leaders, and the public to explore key future topics such as co-design of public services, sustainability reporting and impact measurement, and the rise of community cooperatives.

With 2025 designated as the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives, the Centre is intensifying its efforts to contribute to global reflections on the role of cooperatives in fostering inclusive, sustainable development.

Centre members have regularly presented their work at key scientific conferences and ensured a consistent publication output, including in prestigious international journals, which demonstrate the Centre's ability to deliver both practical relevance and scientific excellence.

In 2024, the Competence Centre significantly strengthened its external communications by establishing a presence across key channels including social media and newsletters. These efforts not only expanded its reach but also actively engaged the scientific community, the public, and local stakeholders — and will continue to be a priority in 2025 as well. The ongoing support from the Office for Cooperatives of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, the Cooperative Federations in South Tyrol, and the University — combined with our Centre's location in one of Europe's most dynamic cooperative regions — creates an ideal foundation for continuing our work in the years ahead.



About Us

Goals of the Centre

The Competence Centre is an independent research entity of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano which aims to conduct internationally competitive research and knowledge transfer on the management of cooperatives across disciplinary boundaries. Its research and dissemination activities are intended to strengthen the competitiveness and capacity of the cooperative sector in South Tyrol to address necessary transformations considering the ongoing social, ecological and economic sustainability challenges.

In particular, the Centre aims to conduct research projects, develop scientific collaboration with universities and research institutions, both domestic and international, provide consultancy and research services for entities and institutions, and promote the dissemination of the research carried out by the Centre through publications, conferences, and seminars.

Collaboration with the Autonomous Province of Bozen-Bolzano

Cooperatives have always been a cornerstone and engine of economic and social development in South Tyrol. The Competence Centre actively cooperates with regional stakeholders that are concerned with the development of the cooperative system in South Tyrol, in particular, the Office for Cooperatives of the Autonomous Province of Bozen-Bolzano and the South Tyrolean cooperative associations AGCI Alto Adige, Coopbund Alto Adige Südtirol, Cooperazione Autonoma Dolomiti, Raiffeisenverband Südtirol.



Photo: unibz | Matteo Vegetti

Regional stakeholder collaborations are intended to help develop viable and forward-looking solutions for the different cooperative sectors in the province as well as in the context of the European region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino. These efforts are closely linked to the Centre's broader mission of fostering the creation and circulation of management knowledge and managerial skills related to cooperatives to create value for society, in tune with the specificities of the economic and social context of South Tyrol.

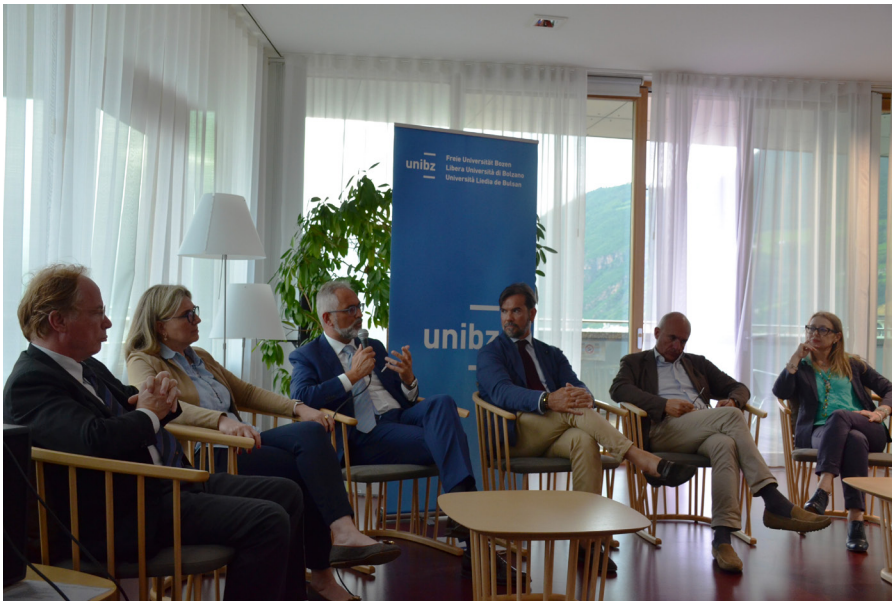
In this spirit, the Centre aims to pool expertise, build research networks, promote interdisciplinary collaboration, and contribute to tailored training and education offerings — building on existing knowledge to strengthen both research excellence and practical impact.

Director and Steering Body

The Competence Centre is led by Professor Richard Lang, who has served as Director since January 1, 2024. As Director, he represents the Centre both internally and externally, oversees its day-to-day operations, and holds a professorship at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. Prior to his appointment, the Centre was led by Professor Alessandro Narduzzo throughout 2023.

The Steering Body plays a central role in shaping the Centre's activities, managing resources, and ensuring its strategic goals are met.

As of January 1, 2024, the Steering Body is composed of Professor Richard Lang (Director), Professor Alessandro Narduzzo, and Professor Peter Agstner — bringing together extensive experience in co-



From left to right: Enrico Bramerini (Cooperdolomiti), Monica Devilli (Coopbund), Robert Zampieri (Raiffeisenverband), Nicola Grosso (AGCI), Gianluca Salvadori (EURICSE), Manuela Paulmichl (Autonomous Province of Bolzano – South Tyrol), at the Opening Event (June 11, 2024). Photo: unibz

operative research, academic leadership, and institutional development. Professor Michael Nippa served as a member of the Steering Body until December 31, 2023.

Scientific Committee

The Scientific Committee plays a key advisory and evaluative role, supporting the Centre's work across international, regional, and local levels. Reflecting this broad scope, the committee brings together both academic and local expertise.

Since January 1, 2023, its full members include Professor Johanna Mair (Hertie School Berlin), who chairs the committee, Professor Dietmar Rößl (WU Vienna University of Economics and Business), and Professor Francesco Rullani (Ca' Foscari University of Venice).

The Committee is complemented by three advisory members representing key regional institutions: Dr. Manuela Paulmichl (Autonomous Province of Bolzano), Dr. Christian Tanner (Raiffeisenverband Südtirol), and Dr. Alex Baldo (Coopbund Alto Adige Südtirol).

Centre Team

The Competence Centre is supported by a team of qualified researchers and administrative staff.

Dr. Michela Giovannini joined on July 1, 2024, as Assistant Professor in Sociology of Economic Processes and Labour. Dr. Alessandra Piccoli joined the Centre on March 15, 2025, as Postdoctoral Research Fellow within the framework of the ASSETS project (Advancements in

Social Economy through Technological Solutions). Dr. Giacomo Buzzao will begin on June 15, 2025, as Assistant Professor in Economics and Business Management. The Centre is further supported by Michelle Notari, who joined in September 2024, overseeing key administrative tasks. Previous administrative support was provided by Claudia Lucchetta. Additionally, the Centre benefits from temporary support by student assistants.

External Collaborators

Fostering collaboration with external academic experts remains a core strategic priority of the Centre. In 2024, several visiting researchers from international institutions enriched the Centre's work by contributing to joint research projects and academic events.

These included Dr. Matthias Pendl (Max-Planck-Institut Hamburg) on social enterprise law, Prof. Richard Pfeilstetter (University of Seville) on cooperative entrepreneurship, Dr. Maciej Szulc (Warsaw School of Economics) on housing cooperatives, Ludger Voigt, M.A. (TU Braunschweig) on employer branding, and Prof. Daniela Maresch (Grenoble Ecole de Management) on innovation in regional cooperative enterprises. These collaborations will continue in 2025, alongside new partnerships with scholars such as Prof. Marcelo Vieta (University of Toronto).



Research Areas

The core mission of the Competence Centre is to conduct and disseminate research on the management of cooperative enterprises, advancing knowledge and driving innovation in the field. It seeks to address current challenges in collaboration with academia, enterprises, and institutional partners, making a meaningful impact both in scientific progress and real-world applications.

The Centre's research efforts are focused on the following three main areas:

Research Area 1: Institutional Role and Regional Significance of Cooperatives

The research focuses on both the historical and contemporary roles of cooperatives in regional socio-economic development, examining, for instance, how these organizations contribute to community growth and sustainability. It explores innovations of cooperative models, such as the emergence of community cooperatives or the role of cooperatives in the co-design of public services. Additionally, the research area includes comparative studies of cooperative sectors and aims to deepen understanding of the transformative potential of cooperatives in modern economies and societies.



Members and stakeholders of the Competence Centre participating in the workshop, Social Business Model Clinic'. Photo: unibz | Eleonora Lunardonì

Research Area 2: Leadership, Management, and Corporate Governance

The research in this area examines effective leadership and management approaches for cooperative enterprises as well as participation of members in cooperative governance structures, and the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes. It also investigates social business strategies that support the sustainable growth of cooperatives. This research aims to identify good practices and effective strategies that enable cooperatives to thrive while remaining true to their values of member-driven governance and community impact.

Research Area 3: Personnel Management in Cooperatives

Research topics in this cluster relate to strategies and measures to enhance employer attractiveness, employee development, as well as diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The research aims to identify organizational practices that foster a positive work environment in cooperatives, employee participation, generational transitions, and succession planning through cooperative buyout models.

Institutional Role and Regional Significance of Cooperatives

Project: Housing Needs and Cooperative Housing (ABI – COOP)

This commissioned research carried out by the Competence Centre is part of the project “Housing Needs and Housing Cooperatives” led by EURICSE with the support of the Autonomous Province of Trento. The project aims to understand the potential of housing cooperatives in addressing the affordability challenges faced by specific demographic groups.

As the housing affordability crisis deepens across Europe, cooperative housing is re-emerging as a powerful and viable alternative to traditional models. This study explores both long-standing and innovative cooperative housing models, highlighting their growing relevance in addressing urgent needs for affordable, high-quality living.

Traditional cooperatives — whether ownership- or rental-based — have long proven effective in offering cost-efficient housing solutions across diverse European contexts. At the same time, a new wave of cooperative initiatives is gaining traction, shaped by evolving resident preferences that emphasize community engagement, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

The Competence Centre’s study results provide a comprehensive overview of current literature on cooperative housing, identifying key themes, emerging trends, and critical gaps. Through inspiring examples from cities across Europe, it showcases how innovation in financing, collaboration with local governments and social services, and the non-specu-



Photo: unibz | Richard Lang

lative use of land are enabling cooperative housing to scale responsibly.

Despite their promise, cooperatives continue to face complex challenges related to inclusivity, financial sustainability, and active resident participation. The study concludes with forward-looking policy recommendations designed to support the broader adoption of housing cooperatives — without compromising their core values of social justice and democratic governance.



Key results of the study were published in a working paper in the EURICSE Working Paper series, which is now available online.

RESEARCH AREA
Institutional role and regional significance of cooperatives
PROJECT NAME
Housing needs and housing cooperatives (ABI – COOP)
DURATION
2024 – 2025
PROJECT TEAM
Richard Lang, Michela Giovannini
EXTERNAL PARTNERS
EURICSE, Autonomous Province of Trento

Personnel Management in Cooperatives

Project: Advancements in Social Economy through Technological Solutions (ASSETS)

ASSETS is a collaborative project that aims to drive innovation in the social economy in Europe. Although social economy organizations (SEOs), including cooperatives, account for more than 10% of EU enterprises and support 13.6 million jobs, they face challenges related to legal issues, financing and scalability.

Assessing their social impact continues to be problematic, while employees in SEOs often face low wages and unstable working conditions. Current evaluation tools focus more on accountability than on addressing local needs, which reduces their effectiveness. There is an urgent need to broaden the scope of social impact as-

essment beyond service beneficiaries, incorporating the impact on SEO's employees. In this context, technological advancements hold the potential to support SEOs progression, with platform cooperatives emerging as influential contributors committed to citizen involvement and improving members' working conditions through collaborative governance.

Against these backdrops, ASSETS employs a four-step strategy to explore SEO's impact on social inclusion, quality job provision, and sustainability: conducting research and case studies spanning regions both within and outside the European Union, improving evaluation tools through local integration and technological advancements, and creating a digital collaborative platform to engage stakeholders and enhance working conditions within SEOs.

The research will derive relevant insights for the management of cooperatives and for policy makers. Results will be presented at conferences and published in academic journals as well as disseminated to practitioners and the wider public.



RESEARCH AREA
Personnel Management in Cooperatives
PROJECT NAME
Advancements in Social Economy through Technological Solutions (ASSETS)
DURATION
2025 – 2027
PROJECT TEAM
Richard Lang, Michela Giovannini, Alessandra Piccoli
EXTERNAL PARTNERS
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), Roskilde University (Denmark), University of Cologne (Germany), Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (Italy), Izmir Institute of Technology (Turkey), National Distance Education University (Spain), Sole Società Cooperativa Sociale (Italy), European Movement International (Belgium), Ethos Legal Solutions (Bulgaria), Ainigma (Belgium), Artemis Research & Innovation (Romania), P2P Lab (Greece), Huset Venture (Denmark), Doğa Derneği (Turkey), Fundación Entretantos (Spain)



Kickoff meeting of the EU Horizon Project ASSETS in Thessaloniki [December 11–12, 2024]. Photo: Faidra Stylianou



Third Mission

Observatory on Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship (OISIS)

OISIS was the Observatory on Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship of the Faculty of Economics at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. The project ran from June 1st, 2020, to June 30th, 2023, and laid the groundwork for the new Competence Centre for the Management of Cooperatives.



Prof. Alessandro Narduzzo speaking at an OISIS-workshop. Photo: unibz

OISIS identified and studied the social innovation ecosystem in South Tyrol, promoting the development of an entrepreneurial approach to solving social problems and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Understanding the ecosystem provides valuable insights for shaping policies that foster innovation and socially impactful entrepreneurship in the region. OISIS also explored how open innovation can drive social innovation, recognizing that impactful solutions often emerge through the active involvement of diverse stakeholder networks.

The project embraced a perspective that goes beyond profit maximization, promoting a learning-oriented mindset aimed at advancing both individual and organizational goals to create social impact and address persistent societal challenges.

An important element of the OISIS-project was the “Social Business Model Clinic”, open to social cooperatives to analyse their value proposition and develop a stronger social business model.

Succession Planning Through Cooperative Buyout Models

In times of economic uncertainty and generational transition, converting conventional enterprises into cooperatives is gaining attention as a resilient and community-oriented business solution. The Competence Centre is actively researching business conversions to cooperatives (–including worker buyouts–) as a way to safeguard employment, strengthen local economies, and promote more democratic and sustainable forms of entrepreneurship. This work is being developed in close collaboration with local cooperatives, visiting researchers and students through various research and outreach formats.

One recent highlight in this area was the “COOP – Evergreen Economy” study trip, which provided 30 students with a hands-on opportunity to experience how cooperatives in South Tyrol are putting people and planet before profit. Organized by the Centre in partnership with Coopbund and the unibz Career Service, the one-day visit to the Puster Valley introduced participants to three leading cooperatives with strong social and environmental missions:

- + Co-Opera: supporting employment for people facing social and economic barriers;
- + Grünes & Co: a social cooperative dedicated to floriculture rooted in ecological practice and social inclusion;
- + Ecopassion: a pioneer in sustainable hemp cultivation and green product development.

The visit was complemented by a workshop with Centre Director Prof. Richard Lang and recent unibz graduate Armin Ferretti, who introduced key concepts around the management of social cooperatives and worker buyouts, sparking discussions on the cooperative model’s potential for a more equitable and sustainable economy.

This initiative not only showcased inspiring local examples but also underlined the Centre’s commitment to linking academic insight with real-world impact –empowering students to explore cooperatives as future-ready, values-driven enterprises in South-Tyrol.



Study Excursion “COOP – Evergreen Economy” to Brunico (April 5, 2025). Photo: unibz



Events and Dissemination

The Competence Centre has actively disseminated knowledge and research outputs to the scientific and practice community, institutional stakeholders and the public through different channels. This included workshops, seminars, events, publications and conferences, that received substantial attention from local and regional media, and show the relevance of the topics for the region.

Workshops, Seminars and Events

These gatherings have brought together experts, researchers, practitioners, stakeholders and ordinary citizens to discuss emerging trends related to cooperatives, share insights, and develop solutions to contemporary challenges, creating spaces for learning and networking, and helping to bridge the gap between scientific research and real-world application.

In 2023, the Centre organized the following key events:

The Evolution of the Cooperative Form (September 11, 2023)

A workshop co-organized with EURICSE at the 9th EMES International Conference on Social Enterprise in Frankfurt, focused on innovative cooperative initiatives addressing community building, food production, climate change, aging populations, and long-term unemployment.

The New Opportunities of Social Cooperation (October 5, 2023)

This multidisciplinary conference at unibz was organized in collaboration with Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II. The event addressed social enterprise strategies for workforce inclusion.

In 2024, the Centre organized the following seminars and events:

Centre Kick-Off Workshop (February 7, 2024)

The workshop aimed to foster collaboration among the Centre's board members and key stakeholders. It provided an opportunity to discuss and gather feedback on the strategic goals of the Centre for 2024 while also supporting team development. Key regional stakeholders that participated in the event were Manuela Paulmichl (Province of Bolzano), Andrea Grata (Cooperdolomiti), Monica Devilli and Alex Baldo (Coopbund), Christian Tanner (Raiffeisen), and Nicola Grosso (AGCI).

Das (Gesellschafts-) Recht der Social Enterprises (May 22, 2024)

In this seminar guest speaker Dr. Matthias Pendl (Max-Planck-Institut Hamburg) explored the growing significance of social enterprises from a corporate law perspective. It focused on understanding the regulatory frameworks governing social enterprises across different countries, aiming to clarify the similarities and differences between international models. The seminar offered insights into how these laws shape the structure,

operation, and sustainability of social enterprises, providing valuable guidance for their future development and growth.

Innovation through Cooperation (June 11, 2024)

This was the opening event and official public presentation of the Competence Centre. It included speeches and round tables with key institutional stakeholders from South Tyrol and Trentino, including Landesrätin Rosmarie Pamer (Province of Bolzano), Enrico Brammerini (Cooperdolomiti), Monica Devilli (Coopbund), Nicola Grosso (AGCI), Manuela Paulmichl (Province of Bolzano), Gianluca Salvatori (EURICSE), Robert Zampieri (Raiffeisenverband). It also showcased successful and young cooperative entrepreneurs such as Theodor Lanthaler (E.U.M.), Luca Passadore (Centralcoop), Viviana Zanella and Lorenzo Zendri (Pastrafood). During the event, the book "La rivoluzione dell'impresa sociale" by Carlo Borzaga and Giulia Galera was presented, and space was given to open discussions and round tables.

The Anthropology of Entrepreneurship (October 15, 2024)

In this seminar, Prof. Richard Pfeilstetter from the University of Seville applied an anthropological framework to analyze cooperative entrepreneurial ventures, exploring the interplay of value systems in diverse societies. He delved into the complexities of the gift economy, examining how non-monetary exchanges influence entrepreneurial practices. Additionally, the seminar addressed the dy-

namics between innovation and imitation in entrepreneurship, providing a comprehensive understanding of how cultural and societal factors shape entrepreneurial strategies and business models.

Future Housing in South Tyrol: Cooperative Approaches for Affordable and Sustainable Living (October 24, 2024)

The event offered a platform for discussing innovative cooperative solutions in the field of housing and neighborhood development. In light of rising housing costs, demographic changes, and the urgent need for sustainable housing concepts, experts and professionals from South Tyrol and other regions gathered to explore the potential of cooperative housing models. The event demonstrated how cooperative approaches can not only promote ecological and economic sustainability

but also strengthen social and community cohesion. The meeting featured a series of scientific presentations, successful housing projects, and discussions on how pressing issues of affordability and housing access can be addressed with concrete solutions. The event was covered by major media outlets including TV channels Rai Tre, Rai News TV, ORF Südtirol and radio station Rai Südtirol.

Key speakers included: Jennifer Duyne Barenstein (ETH Zürich), Marco Peverini (Politecnico of Milan), Francesco Minora (Trento), Riccardo Bodini (EURICSE), Johannes Kaufmann (JK&P Architects), Leonhard Resch (Arche in KVV), Samuele Verucchi, Roberta Massi and Miriam Di Diego (Cooperativa Sole).

The following representatives from local cooperative associations and regional administrations were also present: Alberto Bocchio (Coopbund), Manuela Paulmichl

(Province of Bolzano), Florian Pedron (Raiffeisenverband), Antonella Rovri (Province of Trento), Fabrizio Tiego (AGCI), Stefan Walder (Province of Bolzano).



Leonhard Resch, Richard Lang, Marco Peverini, Jennifer Duyne Barenstein, Johannes Kaufmann (October 24, 2024). Photo: unibz



Dr. Michela Giovannini and Prof. Richard Lang moderate the event „Future Housing in South Tyrol“ (October 24, 2024). Photo: unibz

Sustainability Reporting, Social Impact and Cooperatives: Future Challenges and Opportunities (November 11, 2024)

The main question of this event was how sustainability reporting and social impact measurement can be valuable tools for cooperatives, as well as the potential and limitations of their applicability in the cooperative world. The experiences of practitioners, theoretical perspectives, and empirical evidence presented by the academics stimulated reflections and enriched the discussion among practitioners from the cooperative sector at the event. The following key national and international speakers have been involved: Ericka Costa (University of Trento), Elisavet Mantzari (University of Bir-

mingham), Chiara Monduzzi and Roberta Massi (Cooperativa Sole), Tiziano Mazurana and Maria Susat (Cooperativa Novum2), Christian Christianell (Confidi), Ulrike Nicolussi-Leck (Raiffeisen), Luca Filippi (Handelskammer Bozen).

In 2025, the Centre continued advancing knowledge transfer and dissemination through events and seminars. Two major events have already taken place and another seminar is forthcoming:

Coprogettazione: Innovating the Creation, Development and Management of Public Services (January 23, 2025)

The event provided an opportunity to analyze the legal, organizational, and relational tools essential for building participatory welfare solutions, focusing on horizontal subsidiarity and shared administration. It served as a platform for discussion among academics, legal professionals, business actors, and the pub-

lic, fostering collaboration and the exchange of ideas on participatory welfare systems. Among the speakers were Emiliano Frediani (Università di Pisa), Silvia Pellizzari (Università di Trento), Stefano Foglia (Università di Pisa), Alessandro Berrettini (Università di Macerata), Chiara Monduzzi and Roberta Massi (Cooperativa Sole), Manuela Paulmichl (Province of Bolzano) and Peter Agstner (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano).

Community Cooperatives: Innovation, Development, and Inclusion (March 26, 2025)

The event provided an opportunity for discussion and in-depth exploration of the role of community cooperatives, highlighting concrete experiences and best practices that are contributing to

the growth of various areas, from alpine valleys to small villages. Through the contribution of academic experts and those working directly in the field, we explored the potential of this model, analyzing the key factors for success and the challenges to be faced, with a specific focus on the regulatory framework and legislation that govern and support these initiatives. It was an opportunity to gain insight into the strategies adopted to revitalize local services, promote ecological transition, and create new job opportunities, while simultaneously strengthening the sense of belonging within communities.

The event featured representatives from academia, local and regional administrations and cooperatives: Jacopo Sforzi (EURICSE), Stefano Foglia (University of Pisa), Manuela Paulmichl (Province of Bolzano),



From left to right: Stefano Foglia, Alessandro Berrettini, Silvia Pellizzari, Peter Agstner, Emiliano Frediani, Richard Lang (January 23, 2025). Photo: unibz | Rosmarie Hagleitner



Audience at the event "Community Cooperatives: Innovation, Development, and Inclusion" (March 26, 2025). Photo: unibz | Matteo Vegetti



Group picture with participants at the event "Community Cooperatives" (March 26, 2025).
Photo: unibz | Matteo Vegetti

Alessandro Narduzzo (unibz), Andreas Schatzer (Südtiroler Gemeindenverband Genossenschaft), Franzjosef Roner (Genossenschaft Tramin), Felix Ploner (Gemeinde St. Vigil in Enneberg), Alexander Mair (Genossenschaft 3B), and Simone Zampol and Fabio Fiori from the cooperative Alberi di Mango (Comelico, BL).

save jobs, strengthen communities, and address crises in a sustainable manner. This seminar with guest speaker Prof. Marcelo Vieta (University of Toronto) will represent a great occasion for researchers, students and local actors to better understand the potential of the cooperative model in crisis contexts.

Confronting Crises by Converting Businesses to Cooperatives: Lessons from Argentina, Italy, and Canada (May 29, 2025)

At the end of May 2025, the Competence Centre will address the issue of increasing business closures, providing an in-depth analysis of case studies from across the globe. From Argentina to Italy, and all the way to Canada, a concrete alternative is emerging: the conversion of businesses into cooperatives. A way to



Publications

Centre members have ensured a consistent publication output of their research. They published monographs, edited volumes, guest edited journal special issues and contributed to international conferences.

The following selected articles by Centre members were published in class A journals according to the classification of the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR).

New Legal Forms and Rules for Italian Innovative Enterprises

In a bold move to foster innovation, Italy became the first European country to reshape its legal landscape for startups – transforming the traditional SRL (limited liability company) into a powerful tool for high-growth, tech-driven ventures. This pioneering legal framework has positioned Italy at the forefront of startup-friendly regulation in Europe.



Agstner, P. (2024). New Legal Forms and Rules for Italian Innovative Enterprises. *European Business Law Review*, 35(7), 1065–1082. doi.org/10.54648/eulr2024054

A “Flexible Kapitalgesellschaft” for Austria, with a Look at Italian Company Law

Austria has introduced the innovative Flexible Kapitalgesellschaft (FlexCo), a modern corporate form designed to meet the evolving needs of the market. This contribution explores its key features and offers a comparative look at Italian company law, with a spotlight on the novel concept of enterprise value shares (Unternehmenswert-Anteile).



Agstner, P., Heinrich-Pendl, E., & Pendl, M. (2024). Una “Flexible Kapitalgesellschaft” per l’Austria, con uno sguardo al diritto societario italiano. *Rivista di Diritto Societario*, 4, 891–908.

images.rivistadirittosocietario.com/f/articoli/945_articolo_2SBfy_RDS.pdf

How Production Cooperatives Operating a Sharing Economy Business Model Innovate in Rural Places

This study reveals how cooperatives using Sharing Economy Business Models spark innovation in rural communities by reimagining how shared resources are mobilized across networks.

Focusing on a case of an innovative agri-food cooperative in Greece, it highlights how place-based trust and social capital turn local attachment into a powerful driver of both economic and social innovation – offering a fresh perspective on the future of collaborative production in cooperatives.



Fink, M., Maresch, D., Lang, R., Richter, R., & Chatzichristos, G. (2024). How Production Cooperatives Operating a Sharing Economy Business Model Innovate in Rural Places. *R&D Management*, 54(5), 1213–1233. doi.org/10.1111/radm.12679

Practicing Sustainable Eating: Zooming in a Civic Food Network

As demand for sustainable, local, and organic food rises, Civic Food Networks (CFNs) are reshaping the way communities connect producers and consumers. This study explores how grassroots participation in CFNs not only diversifies diets but also transforms everyday food

habits — highlighting their growing role in building resilient, community-driven food systems.



Giovannini, M., Forno, F., & Magnani, N. (2024). Practicing Sustainable Eating: Zooming in a Civic Food network. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 41(3), 921–933. doi.org/10.1007/s10460-023-10526-3

Navigating the New Normal: Exploring the Evolution of Entrepreneurship Education in the Aftermath of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a digital revolution in business schools, pushing entrepreneurship education into uncharted territory. This study explores how innovative teaching methods re-shaped student engagement and learning, offering strategic insights to build more adaptive, resilient, and future-ready entrepreneurship programs.



Knaut, A.E., Thaler, H., Maran, T., Kraus, S., & Narduzzo, A. (2024). Navigating the New Normal: Exploring the Evolution of Entrepreneurship Education in the Aftermath of COVID-19. *International Journal of Management Education*, 22(3), 1–18. doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2024.101067

Nurturing Innovation Through Intelligent Failure: The Art of Failing on Purpose

This paper reframes failure as a powerful driver of innovation, introducing the concept of intelligent failure – deliberate, knowledge-building experiments that help firms navigate uncertainty and spark breakthroughs. By unveiling a new process model, it offers a practical roadmap for organizations to harness failure as a tool for learning and competitive advantage.



Narduzzo, A., & Forrer, V. (2024). Nurturing Innovation Through Intelligent Failure: The Art of Failing on Purpose. *Technovation*, 131, 1–11. doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2024.102951

How Social-Symbolic Work Changes Places

This study uncovers how organizations turn abandoned and overlooked spaces into meaningful places through social-symbolic work. By analyzing England's "Empty Homes" Programme, it offers a powerful model for how place transformation blends physical change with new purpose and identity – revealing how space becomes strategy in driving social and organizational impact.



Wright, A., Lang, R., & Kibler, E. (2024). How Social-Symbolic Work Changes Places. *Journal of Management Studies*, 1–36. doi.org/10.1111/joms.13178



Conference Participations

The Centre's members have regularly participated and presented their research at key scientific conferences and symposia on the national and international level. Here are some examples:

EMES|International Research Conference on Social Enterprises: Prof. Alessandro Narduzzo and Prof. Richard Lang participated in the 9th EMES Conference in Frankfurt in September 2023, where the Competence Centre had an active role in co-organizing a workshop within the transdisciplinary forum on the evolution of novel cooperative forms together with the Office for Cooperatives of the Province of Bolzano represented by its Director Manuela Paulmichl and Maud Brouwer.

ESA|European Sociological Association: Dr. Michela Giovannini participated and presented her research on sustainable food networks at the 16th conference "Tension, Trust and Transformation" in Porto in August 2024. ESA is an academic association of sociologists, and a non-profit Europe-wide association made up of 3000+ members.



Dr. Michela Giovannini presenting at the ESA-conference (August 2024). Photo: Michela Giovannini

ESU|European University Network on Entrepreneurship: Prof. Richard Lang presented on "Getting your research funded" at the conference "Technology for better futures" at Johannes Kepler University Linz in September 2024. The aim of ESU is to strengthen European research traditions and networks in entrepreneurship.

Scientific Symposium "Cooperatives and demographic change": Prof. Richard Lang was a speaker at this cooperative conference in Nuremberg, in July 2024, and presented his work on new housing cooperatives and sustainable urban development.

In November 2024, Prof. Peter Agstner participated in the **Conference "Gestione dell'impresa nella società per azioni"** in Catania.

Prof. Richard Lang and Prof. Alessandro Narduzzo presented at the **18th Scientific Colloquium on Social Enterprise of the IRIS|Italian Research Network on Social Enterprises** in Perugia in October 2024.

Dr. Matthias Pendl and Prof. Peter Agstner attended the **Italian-German Symposium on Company Law** at Università degli Studi di Padova in May 2024.



Speakers at the symposium in Nürnberg (from left to right): Prof. Werding (Ruhr-Universität Bochum), Prof. Reichel (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg), Dr. Weingarz (Bundesverband Deutscher Volksbanken und Raiffeisenbanken), Prof. Wrede (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg), Dr. Algner (DATEV eG), Prof. Lang (unibz). Photo: Forschungsinstitut für Genossenschaftswesen in Nuremberg

Prof. Richard Lang presented his work on collaborative housing at the **Conference “Making Housing Systems Work – Evidence and Solutions”** of the ENHR | European Network for Housing Research in Delft in August 2024.

Prof. Richard Lang was invited speaker at the **International Conference “The Contested Provisioning of Care and Housing”** at WU Vienna in May 2024.

Competence Centre members and staff were also engaged in various outreach events on the national and international level. Here is a selection:

Prof. Peter Agstner and Prof. Michael Nippa participated in the **25th IGA (International Institute for Alpine Cooperative Research) annual conference “Artificial Intelligence in cooperatives”** in Bozen-Bolzano in November 2023.

Prof. Richard Lang was the international keynote speaker in the conference and policy and practice consultation event on **“The Role and Impact of Social Enterprises in Sustainable Development”** in Dublin in August 2024.

Dr. Michela Giovannini attended the 5th Edition of the **“Biennale della Prossimità”** in Napoli in October 2024.

Prof. Richard Lang was keynote speaker at the **“Tag der Sozialgenossenschaften”** organised by the Raiffeisenverband in Bozen-Bolzano in October 2024.



“Tag der Sozialgenossenschaften” (from left to right): Christian Tanner, Robert Zampieri, Filipp Zwerger, Prof. Richard Lang, Gloria Dolliana und Herbert von Leon (October 11, 2024). Photo: Raiffeisenverband Südtirol

Prof. Alessandro Narduzzo gave a presentation on his recent research on community cooperatives at the event **“Comunità intraprendenti”** in Cavalese in December 2024.

As part of the **“School Beyond Regions and Borders”** project, Michela Giovannini delivered a lecture in January 2025 titled “Beyond Market Logic: Exploring Cooperative Models as Agents of Development and Transformation” for high school students from 9 European countries, both in person and online.

Dr. Alessandra Piccoli presented at the **20th National Conference of the Fragile Areas Association** in Rovigo in March 2025.



External Communication

Through various channels such as press releases, social media and newsletters, the Centre's research reaches and resonates with the scientific community, the public and local stakeholders. By sharing key research findings, event updates, and insights from the Centre's projects, the Centre aims at increasing awareness and engaging stakeholders in meaningful conversations about the impact of the Centre's work.

Social media

The Centre's social media presence on LinkedIn has significantly expanded reaching the target audience and helping to share updates on events, initiatives, research, new recruitment, while also fostering new collaborations through increased interactions in trilingual content.

Website

The Centre's webpage, accessible directly from the University website serves as an important communication channel to showcase research output, publications, projects, events and achievements.

Newsletter

In 2024, the Centre started issuing a newsletter on a regular basis providing personalized information to key stakeholders.

Press

The Centre garnered significant media attention, with over 30 features across local, regional, and national outlets, including major newspapers like Dolomiten, Corriere dell'Alto Adige, and Alto Adige, as well as TV and radio channels such as Rai Südtirol, Alto Adige TV, and Südtirol1. Media coverage highlighted key events like the "Zukunft Wohnen in Südtirol" conference, focusing on cooperative housing models, which attracted widespread interest.

Interviews with renowned international speakers and images from the Centre's events were featured on television and radio channels such as Rai Tre – Trentino Alto Adige, Rai Alto Adige Radio, TV33, ORF1, and Südtirol1, as well as in newspapers like Alto Adige and ff – Das Südtiroler Wochenmagazin.

Through regular press releases and media outreach, the Centre continues to raise awareness of the importance of cooperatives in society and their impact on regional policy and practice.

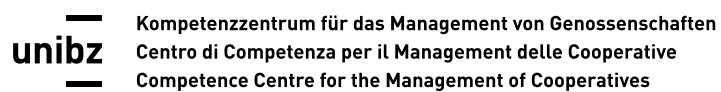


Teaching and Supervision

Competence Centre members are active in teaching and student supervision to foster knowledge acquisition and exchange about the cooperative sector which has so far been under the radar in management teaching at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano.

In 2024, the Centre expanded significantly its educational offerings on cooperatives, with courses like “Social Entrepreneurship” and “Management and Organization of Public Services” taught by Prof. Richard Lang. In 2025, a new course by Prof. Richard Lang and Dr. Michela Giovannini on “Management of Cooperatives” was added to the University’s teaching programme Studium Generale.

Moreover, Dr. Giovannini is lecturer of the course “Actors and processes of welfare production” that also features social cooperatives in the bachelor degree programme in Social Education at the Faculty of Education.



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