

Ciriec
international

CIRIEC
Italia

24th International Congress of CIRIEC

Napoli Italia 30 settembre - 2 ottobre 2002

THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL OF SOCIAL ECONOMY

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Workshop 2 – Education and Training

This talk will put forward certain points, necessary for the development of a human resources training system, on an international scale, which is part time and long distance, at a higher, relevant and up to date scientific level. This system, in maintaining the identity and potential of the collective actions efficiency across social economics businesses, will contribute to inserting them as fundamental actors in the renovation of well - being policies.

The system will rely on Internet usage as a massive, economic and instantaneous means of communication training. The participation and the academic support of the worldwide network of centres and university institutions which revolve around Ciriec – International will be necessary. This is a particular concern for Third World social economics, in particular those in Latin America, at least during its first stages.

Key words: Social Economics, Education, Training, Virtual, Capacitating, Internet, Cooperatives, Mutual Insurance Companies, International, Collective Actions, Associations.

1 - REASONING

In the Third World, and in particular in Latin America, the education systems could not only be called insufficient but the education there could also normally be described as deficient. This is, at the same time, both the cause and the effect of a lack of development, poverty and, in general, a lack of well being for a large sector of the population. The education system in the Third World has made an effort to bring education to as many people as possible. It is massive, that is true and what is also true is that third level (higher) education, ie the universities, above all in Latin America, are full of young people. This large number of young people will become qualified, in vast quantities and will then go on to swell the numbers in the unemployment queues or in the labour sector equivalent. Those who find a job will do so in the Public Sector (less and less) or in mercenary business due to the money and their knowledge will then be adjusted to this. The dominant mentality makes it virtually impossible for them to create their own jobs, however. Incidentally, Marxist studies are no longer followed in public universities; it is out of the question, totally out of fashion.

On the other hand, however, there is the increasing educational exclusion. It is becoming increasingly true that only those who can pay, study, have the time or the opportunity to educate themselves and actually wish to do so. Though some of these “men/women in a million still exist, they are less and less numerous. Justifiably, some of them wander in realities diametrically opposite to theirs, in search of studies in a field which, afterwards, will be of absolutely no use to them, being unenforceable. The others, equipped with an incomplete education, must filter into the working world

and the large majority of them cannot wait to be trained or reach adulthood. Prematurely of age, they look to survive, to prosper and do it all in a hostile atmosphere in which the only victors are those who are cleverer and those who are more implacable. In the other realities of the “developed” world, the young people are deserting, en masse, the formal education systems. They do not want to wait to educate themselves endlessly in order to occupy their roles in a society, which, often, throws them out of their homes. They need to take root quickly in the market economy in order to be able to survive emotionally. Logically, some graduates will incorporate themselves in the Social Economics businesses or in the collective occupations, job sources where they can find ways to satisfy their assertions and personal growth. Therefore, full of willingness but with serious educational deficiencies, they direct and manage these businesses, some of which are successful (sometimes very!) but the majority of which merely struggle along. The few graduates who filter themselves into the cooperatives, the mutual insurance companies, the savings banks, the credit banks, the non profit organisations, the community businesses etc arrive armed with criteria that is clearly lucrative. Efficiency, profitability, re-engineering, optimisation, globalisation and bargains are just a few examples. Badly learnt concepts from third rate university lecture theatres.

Charged with half-truths which are both badly digested and bestowed in a deficient manner by the temporary, or in the best case scenario, out of step, teachers. Tutors of imported theories, already forgotten in their place of origin or inapplicable in several realities. However, moreover, they are immersed in the values and the principals of a consumer society. It is there that the supreme value of personal success is judged according to the remuneration and the acquisition of higher standard of living that is based on the possession and the pleasure of goods and services. The best amongst them are certainly competitive on the job market of the globalised society based on the mercenary patrons and reflect these values and principles in both the direction and the management of these social businesses. The values and the “historical” principles, which, the cooperatives, the mutual insurance companies and other associative or collective action properties have, are a veritable contradiction in terms. They are diametrically opposite to those, which these professionals have in their stock of knowledge. Amongst others are profitability, efficiency, optimisation and usefulness etc and they try, in effect, to set themselves up in these, creating a veritable denaturalisation.

The previous points act as a reminder of the need to link together a suitable education system of human resources, which, is needed in the collective action, thanks to the Social Economics businesses. It is also necessary that, on an international scale, it will reproduce the principles, techniques and experiences of the sector, for example management. At the same time, there must be beneficiaries of a renewed system of well being of the population, directed especially at the Third World.

2 - THE EDUCATION WE WANT

It would seem to be a common ground to agree that education is the key to integral development and, consequently, of the well being of the population, if a humanist view - point is adopted on the matter. If we speak of the renovation of the well being policies, it is also necessary to discuss education, in particular, education in relation to Social Economics. Of course, if we consider education like an instrument of economic growth (training of the workforce so that the macro - economics work, or more simply that the businesses make a profit) then it is no longer about education. In the best case scenario, it could be described as training, technical or punctual and efficient technological aspects. It is, therefore, logic that not all education is favourable for improving the quality of people's lives. In order to do this, it (education) must fulfil a series of conditions, the first being its quality. Either it is a first class education or it is not an education at all, it is like a beautiful life, if its not beautiful then its not life! That is why education must be, above all, excellent, ie of a higher academic level. But, what's more, it must be relevant as an education which does not keep heads in the clouds, which is not abstract, which is without relation to the real world. It must also be in touch with what is happening, without forgetting what has already happened and taking seriously into account what is most likely to happen.

That is why education must be in relation with the practical, so that it can serve, effectively, to resolve the problems, which present themselves here and now. It is said that the real, the concrete and the practical only serve to prove the theory. It is about a relationship of reciprocal equilibrium, a good theoretical base sustains an efficient praxis while at the same time, and one cannot have a good theory without a base of real sustenance. Education must therefore have a solid theoretical base.

Nevertheless, central to this topic is education. Even if it is true that it is a mechanism to climb the rungs to the level of personnel and to make you socially dignified, it cannot detach itself from certain principles and in this field, Social Economics is rich. Our education systems must affirm identity, above all in a time where one tends to let it fall by the wayside because of the competitiveness of a globalized world.

Consequently, education, which we defend, must anchor itself deeply in the values and the principles, which we share. On the other hand, education must not be closed off; it cannot get stiff, but must rather reply to the permanent changes, which are taking place, and those, which are on the way. Still, education cannot be an identical model for everyone and for every circumstance. It must be personalised according to the visions, expectations, ambitions, desires, dreams and needs of each person and to each moment of their future. What is more it must be massive. The "private grounds" of higher level education are extremely undemocratic. People must have access to education systems without any limitation other than their abilities and their efforts in passing the entrance exams.

This also includes the problem of costs. Training only those who have the economic means is not possible. The result would be that very few people would become students, and these, perhaps, would not be the ones capable of obtaining the best results. This result is unacceptable to us. The well being of the population, necessarily, through education for all, comes at a reasonable price. The education that we want can not be closed off, nor offered in a predetermined place, which is better the further away and more difficult it is to reach. Nor can it be in a room with bad acoustics where the desks are lined up and which is badly lit with even worse ventilation. This education cannot be during the months of the year advised, or made bearable by, the climate of certain countries. Nor can it be during the days where the whole world usually does it and at a time that someone has chosen as being the best, within the deadlines and the customary pace in certain realities. The one being educated, according to us, must be able to select the time, the place and the pace in which to do it. They must also have the choice of the contents, which are necessary to their situation and to which they are inclined as well as the methods best suited to their personal style of learning. The trends in their preferred doctrine and the professor or mentor of their apprenticeship which seems to them to be the best suited must also be taken into consideration. All this, of course, must be within the framework of certain basic teaching and scientific parameters, which, guarantee adequate results. Certainly, it is about an academic liberty, which, like all liberty, is necessarily conditioned.

The previous points would lead us to believe that education, which is lacking for us to improve the well being of the population, in this the beginning of the century, must be based on the postulant's fees. It would also lead us to believe it had to be based on the roots, values, principles and experiences of each one. It also must be at the highest scientific level, be fixed firmly in reality as well as in a massive, economic, free and permanent transformation. All this while being liberal in location, time, contents as well as liberal in the methods and the direction or manners of peoples thinking but be no less strict because it is liberal. Next we will underline certain basic elements which must make up this education system, which we call The Virtual School of Social Economics.

3 - CHARACTERISTICS

Above all, the education given by the School must be of the utmost quality possible, in agreement with international standards and rigorous in the field of academic administration. It will have to have global vision and range as well as regional aptitude. To be, immersed in the universe and at the same time, be local. To be open to the whole world and yet, be close by. It will have to be a School of international character with a municipal foundation. It will have to be rigid in as much as a common basic platform for the apprenticeship and flexible in the determination of specialised contents.

It is also necessary that it be based on some very solid essential acquaintances and an extremely vast range of optative and complementary subjects. Study at a greater depth, of basic concepts, with ample diversity of specialised and complementary knowledge is also necessary. It will be closed to the generic but open to the specific. It should be adapted to the different needs of people according to their particular conditions and to the permanent changes of knowledge. Like has been said previously, the only constant thing is change and it is this, which the School must strive to move towards. What is valuable today will not be so much so tomorrow. Of that which is needed, something is useless. The school should be rigid when it comes to not only its evaluation mechanisms and its contents but also the quality and support for its apprenticeship. It then has to be flexible when dealing with time, location, pace and level of learning. It must be adjusted to the possibilities and the sequences of each one.

The School appeals to adults who are strongly motivated but do not have the necessary time to shut themselves away in classrooms for years. People who are rich in life and work experience and have those invaluable experiences, which, should be taken into account as part of their education. Lastly, it is about a large number of people who, increasingly, do not have the best economic means and for this reason are excluded from the traditional education systems. However, inspired by one of our founding theoreticians of Social Economics, we have realised that these people have the power of consumption. There are many of them, who thanks to a modest individual economic supply can do many things. Therefore, the School we want must be massive and economic. However, moreover, it is about people who come from all areas of knowledge and human activity. They can be technicians or professionals, economists, political analyst, sociologist, educators, doctors, all types of engineers, lawyers and public prosecutors, dieticians, priests, servicemen, farmers, vets, geographers, administrators, accountants, philosophers, literary people, historians or chemists. The studies must be, therefore, multi, pluri, and trans and inter disciplinary.

4 - LEVELS

The School should be able to take into account the different entry and exit levels of the participants. Theoretically, it should allow the interested parties access to the required level, from a basic management funds course for the treasurer of a small non profit organisation to the sophisticated studies of a doctorate in corporate finance of social economics. Of course, this would be the result of the School several years after its foundation. Nevertheless, for the moment we must focus on the technicians or the professionals who need to improve their exercise level of collective action at the heart of Social Economic businesses. They can also validate their exercise as fourth level studies, if they wish to do it and they fulfil the conditions. That is why the School should have it's headquarters in a university (which can grant the required diplomas) or even within a network of universities. Their rules will allow them to validate studies that are

done in any of the universities in order to hand out these required degrees. The School must serve to link the universities, which mutually recognise their studies, respecting, obviously, the internal rules, all while adjusting them to the specifics of each case.

5 - DURATION AND PACE

We all know that the value and the appreciation of time depend on social and cultural factors. In the Tropics, you are a man or a woman more so than in the north, as in Europe the rhythm of life is very different to that in the Carribean. It is very cold over there but the heat reigns in South America. Because of these differences, the studies must respect the individual requirements of each participant. Consequently, the duration of the studies cannot be uniform but rather must be adjusted to the needs of the individual. The time limits for study and completion should be different. For example, in certain countries, during the first few months of the year, people in the cooperative would be very busy with the end of the financial year. The working out of financial estates, the writing of reports and the calling together of meetings are just a few examples of this. During this period, it is useless to require formal educational work. That is to say that, periods of academic inactivity or a different pace of study have to be accepted. This is because Europe has nations and regions with different speeds. It is the same even for timetables as in one place it could be night - time while in another place the sun is shining.

6 - CONTENTS

We said above that the School must offer studies that are basic, common and solid as well as a vast range of specialist, optative and complementary contents. We think that every person who studies with us must obtain in depth knowledge of what Social Economics is. These studies must be fulfilled with the utmost seriousness and to the highest standard. This will allow us to maintain and enhance our identity, even in bad times, moreover and improve the exercise of our movement. These basic studies should not represent more than half the academic weight of the School. Each student according to their entry profile, at least, will choose the other half of contents, their expectations, their interests and the field in which they work or towards which they want or towards which they can move.

7 - BASIC CONTENTS

We feel that the basic subjects, which are obligatory for all the students, should be the following and we propose some objectives.

a) Introduction to the studies

To make known the goals, methodologies, scope and the rules of the School, as well as studying in part time, long distance environment, thanks to electronic support. To evaluate the study systems, information research, support of professors and specialists, teaching advice, evaluation systems and studies validation mechanisms or options. Changing the educational institution alternatives or the pursuit of studies.

b) Theory of Social Economics

To know and understand the historical evolution of the associative, cooperative, mutualist and collective action phenomenon in the universal domain. To appreciate the current trends in doctrines and the schools of thought on this matter. To analyse the content and the effects of cooperative, mutualist and socio economic principals and their affect on different cultures as well as to know some of the most significant experiences of their actual development.

c) Sociology of Social Economics

To appreciate the social component of businesses and of social economics and collective action sector. The different types and systems of organisations, the problems of liveliness and participation, the elements of motivation and the types of leadership at the heart of organisations. The basic principles of education and social action of associative businesses.

d) Business and Social Sector economic analysis

To consider the Social Economics Business from the economic and financial point of view. Analyse their possible sources of finance, internal as well as external for example, capital, funds and reserves, the debts, the capitalisation and the collective forms of reproductive investment. The joint employment of surplus.

e) Management of the social economics business

To understand the basic administrative procedures in the social organisations and to consider the associative business and collective action as a complex and participative organisation. To evaluate the particular and differential characteristics which the planning, organisation, management, decision-making, control, evaluation and the participation procedures Social Economics Business must adopt.

f) Social Economics law

To analyse the principle judicial institutions, which regulate the organisation and the functioning of Social Economics in the field of basic entities and to the second and last degree? To appreciate the different types and forms of organisations which can be adopted. To consider the relationships of the social sector with the state and the private sector as well as the judiciary system and the register of the sector.

6.2. Optative contents

Once the participant has finished their basic components of the studies with a high output, they should be able to have access to a large variety of subjects, which include the most diverse of their interests. They would select those which suit their specific needs best, and which would have, overall, an academic weight that is at least similar to the former. These subjects could be chosen from amongst an immense variety of existing educational offers in the Ciriec – International University system, at the discretion of the student, though under the teaching supervision of the School.

In this manner, each student, within the framework of basic common knowledge of Social Economics, would gather their studies in a particular way. Think of a doctor who is looking to specialise in the field of mutuals or in associative medicine. In addition to basic subjects, it is necessary for him to do other much-specialised ones, which cannot be the same, therefore, that an economist, a lawyer; an accountant or a teacher would need for example. Equally, he must not follow the subjects, which are obligatory in other systems, but, at the end of the day, are not going to help his particular needs.

7 - METHODOLOGY AND ACTIVITIES

All this group of students from different places in the world, equipped with dissimilar experiences and knowledge, with pace and availability particular to themselves, as well as different didactic contents, can access systematic studies at a higher and pertinent level, only through electronic means, without time or place specifications. These are called ansynchronics. For good, in the same way as the Internet has become the centre of worldwide information and business; it must also become the same with edu-

cation, and in particular, Social economics and collective action education. Its massive level of penetration within the population, the speed of transmission, the sheer amount of knowledge that is found there makes it an adequate instrument for the school we propose. The possibility of individual low costs that are available, the possibility of a truly socialised treatment and permanent interaction which it allows between the teacher and the pupil, pupil and pupil, make it adequate. For this, we attribute to it the connotation “virtual” and when we name it; we refer to a system of interactive part time distance learning on Social Economics. This includes all the implications, as much theoretical as methodical, which it entails.

Consequently, the school will have to offer virtual, distance activities or ones where attendance is compulsory, the first having greater weight according to the logic of the nature of the projected studies.

7.1. Potential

The materials, which are available in the electronic systems coming from the school, presented according to the part time distance methodology, would be apprenticeship guidebooks and study manuals for electronic methods. Information liaisons with the documentation research centres of the Ciriec network, universities all over the world and the Internet would also be available. Personal contact with the teachers, discussion forums, conference videos, chats etc will all be available in different languages.

The majority of students would follow basic studies with the school. Others would do it with other universities who had the virtual programs on Social Economics or in other branches of knowledge. They all could do incursions in all the different virtual educational offers, sharing the studies. Our job is validating all these simultaneous studies within our network.

7.2. Presentials

In addition to virtual studies, the students will have to have certain activities in a personalised environment where attendance is obligatory. If possible, this should be, nationally, regionally or locally. This does not mean that they cannot do these courses in far off places if this is possible for them. In this sense, the different university headquarters of Ciriec in the worldwide environment could serve as meeting points for the students and teachers, according to the nearby geographical zones. The interested universities should facilitate the presence of the specialist teachers of different fields, particularly those who form the basic lines of the School.

8 - TEACHERS

- a) *The school would have different types of teacher:* teachers of subject content. These would be charged with writing up the didactic materials of different subjects and preparing the complementary educational activities, according to the needs of the outline. They do not need to be situated at the central headquarters of the university necessarily, given that their work is personal and transmitted electronically. For just one subject it is possible to have several teachers, from different institutions and centres, in particular of different realities, with different points of view, all having a great similarity in content. That would allow the student to select the subject professor from amongst several other professors or schools of thought, languages, habits or different realities, to ease the criteria derived from specific perspectives. During the elaboration phase, these professors would supervise small groups trained by a graphic designer. Their job would be to adapt the didactic subjects to the virtual methodology and a computer technician would incorporate the multimedia technology resources into the program.
- b) *Mentors or tutors:* These are professors, who are specialised, in the concrete subjects, in charge of guiding, stimulating and evaluating the students of different subjects. These are auxiliary professors of the content professors. These professors would have to come from different universities, which would make up the School, by field of knowledge, by region, country and even language.

9 - STUDENTS

As we have already outlined, the participants would normally be young adults of both sexes, preferably university graduates of all disciplines, fundamentally social sciences with important experiences and a strong motivation for work and success. These people will be able to exercise management posts, be volunteers, permanent or temporary worker worker. They could even be consultants of Social Economics businesses, leaders of collective action organisations, professors in universities or in education technique in the cooperativeness and social economics field. Alternatively, even civil servants in public or private development organisations, and/or control sector, and people interested by the problematic respective.

10 - ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS

All while having an International character, the School will have to have a coordination centre with a minimum bureaucratic structure allowing it to have common frame of references and administration of the School. This would be the coordination nucleus of a horizontal network of universities with part time distance programs of study in Social Economics and collective action. This centre would exercise functions of training, politics and academic objectives, contents determination, definitions of methodologies, design instruction, validation of subjects, the accommodation of subjects, the search for and selection of professors, educational advice, evaluation control, validation, network administration etc.

The school will have to base its relations with the students on a major-domo, at the start, those in the university, which will welcome it, to the heart of the ciriec international network.

10.1. Personnel

The indispensable staff of the administrative centre of the School could be formed by, at least:

- a) Director: he will assume the highest direction of the school activities, its representation and the coordination of the Ciriec network. Direct the design procedures, elaboration, execution and validation of the educational programs.
- b) Virtual formative designer: they will determine and apply the educational strategies and the technical resources applicable to the program.
- c) An educational counsellor: to design and supervise the control of the academic output of the participants and assume the function of educational guide.
- d) Computer expert: to design and maintain operation of the computer systems, the web page, coordinate and supervise the activities of the computer technicians and the teams of formative design.
- e) An administrator: who will be charged with the administrative and financial management of the school. This includes accountancy, archives and other individual functions.

10.2. Financing

Logically, the School will have to benefit from a budgetary assignation, which allows it to fulfil its mission properly.

The necessary financial resources could come, in the initial stages of formulation and preparation, from loans from a university taking on the project, with the support of other universities in the Ciriec network interested in the project. Certainly, the expenditures will be quite high to begin with. It is in effect necessary to finance the elaboration of didactic subjects, to pay for author's rights.

No to mention having to acquire furniture equipment, finance the training of the professors in the virtual methodology etc. In so far as, the studies commence and the students are incorporated little by little, the admission fees paid by them would pay off the initial investment. This would cover the personnel and physical resource expenses until it starts to be profitable by half term. Of course, it will be necessary to pay special attention to guarantee the social profitability of the school in the long term and to convert it into a source of earning money.

11 - VALIDATION

The studies will have to lead to obtaining a diploma or certificate which validates the level attained by the participant. It can be third level studies, a diploma, an updated professional, a specialisation, a masters degree, even a doctorate if the case presents itself or if the passing of single subjects or apprenticeship modules can be proven.

The validation will have to be treated by one or several universities, fulfilling their conditions, which have been established for the level of studies selected. A university, which is led by a flexible normative but is, no less demanding because of this, would perhaps be the adequate model. However, the heart of question is the possibility of validation, by those or other universities, some subjects studied in all of them. In addition, this seems quite difficult but do – able.

12 - ACTIVITIES FOR THE OPENING OF THE SCHOOL

- a) Revise the project, evaluate the similar experiences, determine the academic membership and the physical situation of the centre, elaborate the initial budget and design the team management.
- b) If this is the case, decide the appropriate juridical form and prepare the legal constitution, attribute the initial budget, rent the premises, buy furniture and equipment, work out and approve the regulations, systems and procedures, select and contract the junior personnel etc
- c) Discuss the propositions and sign the necessary interuniversity agreements.
- d) Select and hire the virtual training teams for each basic and elective subject on the program as well as the first tutor professors.
- e) Train the content professors and the tutors to familiarise them with the concept, the needs, procedures and mechanisms of the virtual education.
- f) Write up the guide manuals for apprenticeship and the support subjects of different subjects.
- g) Design and accommodate progressively the subjects on the School web page.
- h) Start the massive communication procedures, which lead to the launching of the inscription procedure and write up the beginning inscriptions of the program.
- i) Start of activities. One pretends that in a delay of one year, to count from the beginning of the program, one can start the School studies.
- j) Write up a permanent and integral evaluation of the program, personnel, subjects, multimedia supports, the participants etc as integral part of the project.