

Title

Sapere Coop – educating consumers towards sustainable consumption

Short description

Consumer co-operatives are committed to educating consumers towards a conscious and sustainable consumption. Sapere Coop was established in 1980 by Coop Italy and is a nationwide consumer education project designed for teachers, students at all levels of education, and families. Through free interactive resources, such as workshops, exhibitions and editorial materials, Sapere Coop provides useful tools that enable children and young adults to elaborate a stand-alone and original point of view on consumer choices and patterns. Sapere Coop's educational materials are tailored to fit with the Italian school program.

Topic

Consuming and living – food and education

Characteristics (type, level)

National intervention implemented at the local level

Country/Countries of implementation

Italy

Aims and Objectives

Sapere Coop, a project that supports the school curriculum with educational activities, enables consumer co-operatives to provide schools with a wealth of courses, workshops, animations, exhibitions, seminars, and interactive experiences. These initiatives and tools help children and adolescents build the knowledge and skills to elaborate thought-through and original perspectives on *inter alia* nutritional and life choices and patterns of consumption.

Target Group

Children and adolescents in schools

Status

Ongoing

Start and Completion dates

1980 – today

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

The goal of each Sapere Coop educational path is to look within and beyond consumers and their consumption experiences, develop an open mind, address societal problems, as well as develop competences – at European, national, disciplinary and transversal level – that ought to be used in order to understand societal relationships and the complexity of phenomena. Coop's initiatives particularly promote experiences and reflections with regards to learning methodologies, the dynamics of choices, urging children and young people to get involved and feel part of a community that learns, shares, and transforms.

Each Sapere Coop initiative is tailored to the region and Community in which it is carried out.

The educational materials that each co-operative makes available to the schools in its community are developed around three major thematic areas which help to make sense of the global challenges identified in the United Nations 2030 Millennium Development Goals:

- **Food** – Consistent with the Nutrition Education Guidelines of the Italian Ministry of education, university, and research. Topics include the sensory relationship with food, nutrition and the scientific field, knowledge of food and production chains, hygiene and food safety, and the cultural aspect of food.
- **Environment** – Topics include economic geography; globalization and environmental sustainability; biodiversity; natural resources and waste production; product life cycle and the circular economy.
- **Citizenship** – Citizenship rights; identity; geography and cultural exchanges, the importance of meeting and dialogue; Solidarity, legality and cooperation.

Effects on:

Health and Wellbeing	Sapere Coop aims at providing children and young adults with the tools and knowledge to make conscious and healthy decisions. An example of this is the project “acqua, aceto, zucchero e... cannella”, illustrated below, which aims at teaching children about the nutritional value of certain foods and about how to cook simple dishes.
Vulnerable populations	The target of Sapere Coop initiatives are children and adolescents, which are considered as a vulnerable population in terms of consumption and carrying out a healthy, sustainable, and responsible lifestyle.
Environment	Sapere Coop aims to provide children and adolescents with the tools and knowledge to make sustainable and conscious decisions. One initiative that comes to mind is “acqua di casa mia” outlined below which raises awareness about water as a limited resource and about the negative implications of bottled water on the environment.

Initiated and/or implemented by

The program Sapere Coop is initiated and implemented by [Coop Italy](#), the biggest consumer goods retail chain in Italy, where consumer co-operatives created a network of stores that put together social responsibility with the reality of the market.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

Coop Italy is involved since it is the entity that initiates Sapere Coop. Initiatives mainly target children, adolescents, but also their teachers and parents. They are carried out in schools, as well as in Coop supermarkets.

Indeed, an original feature of this program is that Coop uses its supermarket as a sort of educational laboratory. Retail outlets are places in which intergenerational meetings may occur, where people socialize and compare lifestyles. It is in supermarkets that consumers may learn about supply chains, the journey of a certain product and its ethical implications, and may modify their consumption patterns.

Financial support

Educational material is provided to schools and families free of charge.

Evidence-base

Children and adolescents represent the citizens of tomorrow. Therefore, providing this population group early on with tools that enable them to make conscious decisions in a complex world is paramount.

Main activities

Sapere Coop includes a myriad of projects, of which I will just list a few examples below which illustrate Coop's commitment to teach children and adolescents about food, the environment, and citizenship:

- **Acqua di casa mia** [water of my house] – Italy performs badly in terms of using water resources, and is among the first users globally of bottled water. However, this practice is extremely unsustainable given that (1) to transport 100 litres of bottled water for 100 km, at least 10 kg of CO₂ are produced, and (2) plastic bottles are environmentally unfriendly. As such, Acqua di casa mia aims to raise awareness that water is a limited resource, and to promote environmentally friendly behaviour in terms of water use.
- **Sale, aceto, zucchero e... canella** [salt, vinegar, sugar and... cinnamon] – this initiative aims to teach children about food in all its aspects, e.g. sensory, cultural, and as part of tradition. Children prepare simple dishes, try new foods, and learn about the effects that foods may have on health.
- **Draw not War** – this project aims at enabling youngsters to reflect on the issues of integration and living together in a peaceful way. The aim is to address these issues in an artistic way, by creating a short movie, posters, etc. It was awarded with the Medal of the President of the Republic.
- **Bella Copia** – In the context of the current economic landscape, which is not always comforting, the co-operative model can be a valuable opportunity of employment for young people and a way of developing the local Community. Bella Copia aims to give students an insight into the co-operative model. Students in the class together with qualified tutors, develop an entrepreneurial idea to be implemented in a co-operative way.

Evaluation

Coop's collaboration with schools resulted in 1999 in the recognition of the Ministry of Education via a **Memorandum of Understanding that acknowledged and legitimized Coop's educational activities** with regards to consuming consciously. The MoU was renewed in 2007.

The 30 years celebrations of Sapere Coop and Coop's efforts to educate children and adolescents to consume consciously marked the recognition of these efforts by the **President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano who awarded the National Association of Consumer Co-operatives with a bronze medal.**

In a comparative study conducted in 2002 by the Deutches Jugendinstitut, a research institute looking at children's issues, the uniqueness of Sapere Coop was singled out, where the researchers state that the resources and skills made available to schools and teachers by **Coop Italia have definitely contributed towards establishing a conscious consumption model towards the end of the 1990s.**

Main results

In the 30+ years of Sapere Coop up to today, Coop is committed to educating the younger generation to consume consciously and sustainably. During this time period, Coop has involved about 2.5 million children and adolescents, more than 100.000 classrooms, as well as tens of thousands of teachers. Coop has trained about 2.000 facilitators who carried out interactive activities both in classrooms and in Coop stores. They have also distributed educational and multimedia materials to schools free of charge via the network of educational centers for conscious and sustainable consumption.

Specifically during the school year 2015-2016, Coop supported educational projects involving 11.613 classrooms, 15.097 teachers, in about 750 Italian municipalities.

Key success factors and barriers

Success factors include that Coop's educational initiatives focus on three very important areas in today's society, i.e. food, the environment and citizenship. In addition, Sapere Coop extends throughout the whole Italian territory and involves thousands of children and adolescents each year. In the future, Coop hopes for even more collaboration between consumer co-operatives and schools in their area.

INHERIT Perspective

The INHERIT project is driven by the quest to find the policies, practices, and innovations that are helping to foster healthier and more sustainable lifestyles and behaviours, looking more specifically at the aspects of living, moving, and consuming. Sapere Coop is a prime example of a practice that aims at educating the consumers of tomorrow with regards to living and consuming in particular. The aspect of health equity is also taken into consideration given that any school can apply to be part of a certain project, notwithstanding the region in which it is located or the socio-economic class of its students.

More information

More information is available on the Sapere Coop [website](#), as well as on the Sapere Coop [brochure](#) [in Italian].

Contact



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