

The Cooperative Economy:

A Case-Study-Based Introduction to Business Models, Management, and the Organization of Cooperatives

In times of economic turmoil, marked by glaring environmental problems, unequal wealth distribution, demographic shifts, and profound financial and debt crises, corporate behavior focused solely on financial gains is increasingly reaching its limits. Such “market failures” have recently become apparent, among other things, in the local energy transition, in ensuring adequate medical care in rural areas, in the inadequate provision of affordable housing, and in addressing climate change. As a time-honored form of **collective economic activity**, the legal structure of the registered cooperative offers solutions to these (and many other!) challenges. Cooperatives are active in many sectors of the German economy, both at the local level (e.g., banking and housing construction) and on a supraregional basis (e.g., retail). They open up (international) markets for small and medium-sized enterprises and secure jobs as well as economic development in the regions. Many new cooperatives can address the challenges outlined above and are becoming increasingly important.

Against this backdrop, the goal of the course is to identify cooperative responses to the diverse global challenges using concrete practical examples. First, the course will provide a practice-based overview of the **specific characteristics of the cooperative organizational form** and how it integrates into a comprehensive overall structure. It will also cover the theoretical foundations of cooperatives. However, it focuses on (inter)national **case studies** across various fields of activity and cooperative business models, including industry analyses, **management aspects** (including organization), the specific characteristics of the legal form, and current economic and social challenges.

The **6-LP module** will cover the conceptual foundations and introduce the case studies in a single block session at the beginning of the semester (Friday, October 30, 2026, from 9:00 a.m. to approximately 4:00 p.m.). Afterward, participants will work on case studies in groups of three, focusing on designing and conducting **interviews** with relevant (inter)national **cooperative experts** from various industries and regions (including Germany, Europe, Africa, and South America), arranged by the ifG Marburg. The results will be compiled into a **podcast** and subsequently presented in short group presentations on January 15 and 16, 2027. No specific prior knowledge is required for the module. It is aimed at **B.Sc. and M.Sc. students in all relevant degree programs** and can be credited as the “Accounting” seminar (B.Sc. or M.Sc.) or as an interdisciplinary qualification (including “key competencies”).

Dr. Andreas Wieg, an alumnus of the Department of Economics at Philipps University of Marburg, teaches the course and currently serves as a department head on the executive staff of the DGRV e.V. (German Cooperative and Raiffeisen Association) and heads the federal office for “Energy Cooperatives.”

Please register for the module via **MARVIN (LV-02-021-182)** by **October 20, 2026!**