

DOBRZE COOPERATIVE

COOP CARD*

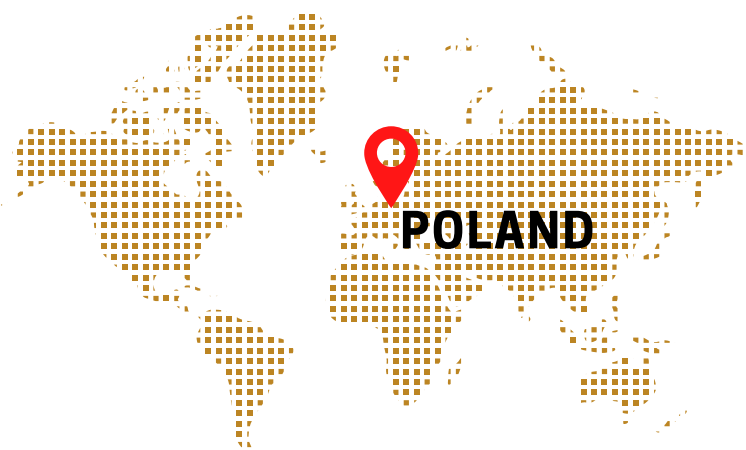
Location: Warsaw

Year of foundation: 2013

N° of members: 357 families

Sector: Food cooperative

Key themes: Healthy food, short food chain, community building, gentrification



CONTEXT

Having joined the European Union in 2004, Poland has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of approximately US\$ 594 billion and has recently been experiencing a period of inclusive growth and poverty reduction. Poland's cooperative movement has a long history: settled at the beginning of the 19th century, it suffered a setback during World War II. After this, cooperatives in the communist Polish People's Republic were used as a vehicle for economic policy. In recent years, a renewed interest in cooperatives has emerged, responding to contemporary challenges. Nowadays, there are over 8,900 cooperatives in the country, active in different sectors. Almost 60% of them are focused on real estate activities, agriculture, and the food industry.

AUTHORS

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*Information collected during a fieldwork carried out in August-September 2020.

COOP STORY

Dobrze Kooperatywa is a consumer food cooperative established in 2013. The idea came from three people who wanted to purchase healthy and sustainable food from local farmers. In August 2014, the cooperative opened its first store in Warsaw, followed by a second one in 2016. The shops belong to and are fully managed by members, who work three hours per month as volunteers. They deal with logistics, distribution, and sales. The contribution of the members is fundamental to reduce costs and, thereby make quality food affordable for all. In fact, the stores are not only for members, but anybody can buy there.

The cooperative intends to be a sound alternative to supermarkets and expensive organic stores. It supports and contributes to developing a sustainable food system which meets consumers and producers' needs while taking care of the environment. The cooperative established sales criteria for the products offered in its stores. The two fundamental principles are the seasonality of the food and the proximity of production.

Dobrze coop contributes to shortening the food supply chain, bringing consumers closer to producers. This idea is also pursued in practice, as every month the cooperative organizes visits to its local producers. On these occasions, consumers can meet farmers and learn how their food is produced.

In 2018, the cooperative developed an educational programme dedicated to young farmers and aimed at promoting alternative food systems. The cooperative also advocates in favour of small-scale farmers and it is among the founders of the Nyeleni Polska Food Sovereignty Network. Most notably, aside from providing high quality food at affordable prices, the cooperative contributes to re-shaping the city by developing active citizenship, creating a sense of community and a fairer society.

Today, Dobrze coop gathers 357 members, employs 15 people and collaborates with 20 small-scale farmers. Some of the latest initiatives are a plan to launch a third shop and the development of an e-commerce system to cope with the pandemic.

HOW HAS THE COOPERATIVE CHANGED MEMBERS' LIVES?

- **Healthy food:** It improves the access to healthy short-chain food at a fair price, as members enjoy a discount in exchange for their three-hours work per month in the cooperative's shops;
- **Cooperative environment:** Creating a supportive cooperative-environment where members can share values and a healthy food culture in the heart of the city;
- **Community building:** Building social spaces and organising participatory events where members of the cooperative can meet.

SELECTED QUOTE

“I consider our business model as an anthill. We are like cooperating insects doing small things individually, but, all together, we are creating something really big.”

Kasia Kalinowska - Member of the Dobrze Cooperative



KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Food cooperatives are key actors of sustainable food systems, improving farmers' income, increasing people's access to healthy food and contributing to improving urban-rural linkages.
- Food cooperatives can enhance the development of a sustainable city and a fairer society, by promoting active citizenship and integrating environmental concerns with decent urban lifestyles.

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