

Bilbao, March 2nd 2022

Dear young cooperators,

When I first sat to think on why did I want to take on the responsibility on leading the youth network in the upcoming 4 years I wasn't sure where and how to start approaching all of you. There is so much that I wanted to share as of why I see myself as a valid candidate to this position, but most of all, to share **how I feel I can contribute to the development of this network and committee further and as a legacy for the future.**

First I'd like to share a bit about myself. **I am Ana Aguirre, original from the Basque Country** in Northern Spain, home to one of the example of the worker cooperative movement worldwide, Mondragon, with all the pros and cons that living in such a cooperativised region can bring. Thus, I have been exposed to the cooperative movement all my life (my dad worked in cooperatives and I studied in Mondragon University).

Second, **I am a cooperative entrepreneur myself.** I have lived the struggles, the joys and the full ride of what it means to be a young person starting a cooperative project. Back in 2009 I co-founded a worker owned cooperative alongside 7 people, that is today home to around 30 people in 5 countries today, TAZEBAEZ S.Coop. This past and present experience **allows me to understand, from the very ground and in first person, what other young people feel when starting cooperative ventures.**

And if that weren't enough, back in 2015, we made the decision of joining the international cooperative movement. Although it was a matter of being in the right place at the right time, my cooperative and me myself took the decision to pursue a supportive action of what would later become the Young European Cooperators' Network, the current youth network under Cooperatives Europe. I served in the board from the very beginning, but in 2017 with the election of Sebastien Chaillou as Global Youth President, **I stepped up as VP for Europe in the Youth Committee. This allowed me to understand not only our local and European situation but the reality of the cooperative movement world wide, first hand.**

In the last years, I like to think I have grown from a worker-cooperator into a cooperative activist. My experience in the worker cooperative sector in education and training at the global level, my participation in the youth committee and other groups of work of the ICA (like the Cooperative Identity Advisory Group) and my presence in various cooperative events has allowed me to generate an opinion for myself. The connection with the ground that my everyday cooperative job provides, reassures me in my believes knowing that **everything I say, everything I voice, all the fights I fight, come from the real experience of being a young person that is lucky to participate in various faces of this cooperative movement: the ground cooperatives, the structure and the academic discussions.**

This vocality may sometimes feel uncomfortable to some, but I can assure that everything I say, everything I advocate for and everything I act upon in this movement, **is always lead**

by my willingness to contribute to a common good and the relevance, role and visibilization of youth in the overall cooperative movement.

Back in the time I started, as a young naive new cooperative entrepreneur, I had quite some disregard for the structure. During our entrepreneurship course in university a clear message was “actions speak louder than words” so I felt, as is the philosophy in Mondragon, that one should do more than speak and let people see what one defended through the actions. Yet, I came across an excellent and exciting group of international youth in Europe that took the time and effort to balance my active energy and help me learn the relevance of diplomacy.

I never thought I'd reach the point where I felt comfortable being the voice of youth in the structure. This is why I gather my strength from action, from the ground. But my historic participation in the structure allows me to see the work done till the day and the improvement ahead of us. **I'm standing in the shoulders of giants. Walking the talk everyday.**

I don't know if you feel I will be the best to fill the shoes of Sebastian, he leaves an amazing legacy. But **I believe in the power of teams and I'm sure that together with the Youth Committee I can be our collective voice.**

I am here because I believe. I believe in taking responsibility and leading with example. **I believe in the power of action but I have also learn the power of diplomacy.** I don't only believe in coops, I am coops. The presidency has never been my goal. I see it as a platform to elevate initiatives, concerns and transformation to a movement that desperately needs to listen and acknowledge its youth. And I feel I can help. I know it is in our hands, together. I hope you do too.

Thank you so much for the time you took to read this and I hope you decide to believe in us,

Ana Aguirre
ana@tzbz.coops
TAZEBAEZ S.Coop

POTENTIAL DIRECTION YOUTH WORKING PLAN 2022-2026

Throughout these last years the world has shown that our plans can be disrupted by the craziest of situations, and that the only way to face the challenges and succeed is together.

This is why building a whole 4 year plan by myself, as candidate for presidency of a network I know first hand to be extremely diverse seems very presumptuous. I have spent enough time working together with the colleagues in the Youth Committee to know that each region and people has a good understanding of the needs of their cooperators and there are many agents around the cooperative movement that will also want to support and contribute to a youth plan.

This is why, if I am elected as president, the working plan, although with some direction and vision, will be co-designed with the Executive Committee and the youth representatives of the regions.

But I will share some of the points that I think would be of major interest in the upcoming years:

Visibility of cooperative youth

In the previous youth plan, three different cooperative youth categories were defined and during this new plan, the direction and work will be reinforced.

Working youth. Young people that work in the cooperative movement but although they are potential key members of their organization and could be a great representative for the youth movement, they aren't yet engaged in the youth activity. These are very interesting because they can be supportive of their non-youth fellow cooperators that already take part in the ICA activities.

Entrepreneurs. Those who being young create cooperative ventures and work to promote this form of entrepreneurship among youth in different sectors. These are normally the ones that take most of the attention because they tick a lot of boxes when it comes to "empowerment" but they are "just" one out of three in our categories.

Potential Cooperators. Those people that believe in the cooperative principles but aren't part of the movement yet, they can become one of the two categories mentioned above. But also those that do not know about the movement just yet and that as youth committee and representatives we should work to reach and engage during these years.

Representation

Youth is said to be one of the main strategic points of the movement. As youth president I would be able to voice our concerns in different forums (and languages) to make sure that the activity that is said to be developed actually happened, and that that importance in the discourse actually translates to the allocation of resources and support.

There is another important point that I always come across when talking representation and youth. Youth is more than a topic, it is a constituency. It's a collective that is active in many sectors across the cooperative movement and that is present in many committees. One of the goals that I want to pursue in the next years is for young people to represent more than youth in the cooperative movement. I will work to see a sector or a committee represented by a young cooperator for the work and not the age.

Collaboration with other committees and working groups

Cooperative development projects. My connection to the network and the years of work in the committee have provided me with a vision of the amount of activity that happens parallel to the youth committee and the connection it has. We will work to improve the connection with those projects that have youth as part of their activity and support to create a stronger and deeper impact together. For example as we did in the *Coops4Dev* project.

Identity. As a new generation of cooperators we have a lot to contribute to this review and I think there should be a lot of connection and spaces to work together in what makes cooperators, what it means to be a cooperator and how does youth see this differently.

Committees and sectors. As a newly created committee, this is the first presidential term that will act as one and I think we should work together with other committees to make the youth represented in those committees visible and to share the knowledge that our young constituency has. Same with sectors. Youth extends throughout all the sectors and is present in all of them. To have representatives of youth in sectorial meetings and to even have a youth representing a sector would be a great way to visualize the work of youth in the cooperative movement.

Trends and verticals

As stated before youth is present in every sector, but through these years I would really like to stress the work on three verticals that I think impact the whole movement in a greater scale.

Education and Training. To have more cooperatives we need entrepreneurs. To generate better projects within existing cooperatives we need intrapreneurs. In short, we need more cooperators. And these do not “pop out of nowhere”. Cooperators, are made and training and skill building is one of the main ways of fostering it. Many young people don’t create or don’t feel their coops, not because they aren’t aligned with their values, but because they don’t know of their existence. This is a work that we should be looking into in the next years.

Previous projects such as *GYF20/GYF21* have proved the eagerness of the youth constituency to learn and share knowledge in different set ups. This years will keep up with the work of strengthening the network and the ability of young cooperators to learn together.

Cooperative entrepreneurship. Linked to the point above. To generate jobs and wealth, there needs to be work. This vertical has already been worked on too in the previous cycle, with projects like the *Replication Project* that supported the funding and creation of 8 projects in the four regions and 1 project in two regions. More projects like this should be encouraged and the usage of the youth network to prototype potential entrepreneurial projects to set example in the wider cooperative movement is a great vision.

IT and Tech. In so many forums youth and digital are like magnets, they tend to stick to the other. Maybe is the closeness to technology, the generational change or maybe it is just a believe. But it is very true in so many forums. During the last year, there has been a growing number of young people that have created or visibilizad their tech cooperative, creating an international network and developing projects together.

This is a field that will grow, and will create jobs and wealth and as youth we should be part of the movement as it will not only generate revenue but shape the reality we live in and thus, the cooperative identity and model as we know it.

I hope this serves to understand the direction of thought and as inspiration to a much more grounded and shared youth plan in as soon as the new youth committee is formed.