

# Swiss National Bank investing in education

With its educational programme Iconomix, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) is seeking to promote an understanding of economic and financial matters in Switzerland. Ten years after its launch, the programme is now reaching 40% of its target audience.

*Carlos Lenz, Manuel Wälti*

**Abstract** The Swiss National Bank (SNB) launched its Iconomix teaching programme ten years ago with the aim of promoting an understanding of economic and financial matters in Switzerland. The programme is geared towards Swiss upper secondary schools since economics is already taught at this level. The well-founded and didactically sound teaching and learning resources Iconomix offers are regularly reviewed and updated, and are designed to complement existing teaching material. Interested teachers can download and order Iconomix resources free of charge from the website.

Central banks' decisions have far-reaching consequences for the population. From an economic policy perspective, it is therefore desirable for as many people as possible to understand such decisions and the thinking behind them, and for them to have a grasp of fundamental economic principles. In Switzerland, where citizens regularly vote on complex economic issues at all levels of government, it is particularly important for the general public to have a solid grounding in this area.

The SNB is keen to contribute to the teaching of these topics, and to this end launched the Iconomix programme ten years ago. Iconomix is focused on achieving a lasting impact, and forms part of the SNB's long-standing commitment to economic education that began back in 1984 with the setting up of the Study Center Gerzensee.

Iconomix is primarily intended to support teachers at upper secondary schools in conveying the knowledge and skills required for an understanding of economic processes. The programme also enhances teachers' expertise through various educational and training events. And last but not least, it aims to provide input for modern and attractive approaches to teaching economics.

Around 95% of all young people in Switzerland attend one of the various types of upper secondary school, making a total of around 330,000 students. The number of economics and humanities teachers in these schools comes to around 4,000.

## Centred around the website

The core element of the programme is the [iconomix.ch](http://iconomix.ch) website. This features teaching

### Iconomix – facts & figures (for 2016)

<b>91</b>
teaching units in three of Switzerland's official languages and in English
<b>136</b>
blog posts in German and French
<b>114,000</b>
unique visits to the website
<b>80,000</b>
downloads of teaching material
<b>666</b>
class sets ordered including teacher resources
<b>18</b>
teacher events with a total of around 400 participants
For more information, please visit <a href="http://iconomix.ch">iconomix.ch</a>

### Resources for teachers



material in German, French, Italian and English, broken down into teaching units comprising case studies, browser-supported simulations, knowledge sheets and games. There is also support material to provide assistance and presentations for teachers, as well as one or more worksheets with answer sheets and videos on given topics.

Besides the teaching material, Iconomix offers a selection of useful links and an economics blog. Added to this, there are training and further development events where teachers can brush up on their specialist expertise. These are aimed at helping them find the most suitable resources and provide specific suggestions on how best to use them. Allowing teachers to familiarise themselves with the material and adapt it to their own lessons and the needs of their students is of pivotal importance. After all, it is ultimately the teachers who have to feel confident enough to actually use these new resources in the classroom. Iconomix's practical workshops help overcome the challenges that exist in this regard.

Even ten years on from its launch, Iconomix also finds itself in a continuous learning process. Regular dialogue with users provides valuable feedback that can be harnessed to enhance and develop the offering. This approach meets two key requirements for high-quality teaching and learning resources: ensuring the possibility of adapting and refining the material over time, and involving the target group in the ongoing development.

## More than 90 modules

The Swiss secondary school system consists of various school and subject types, which vary greatly in terms of the methods used, required standards, teaching hours, etc. The country also has three different regions each with their own specific requirements and characteristics, not least in terms of the language spoken. Addressing these contrasts calls for a diverse offering, and Icono-



The Iconomix module 'Common pool resources' adopts a playful approach to addressing the problems in this area.

mix covers a broad range of topics, methodological and didactic approaches, and proficiency levels.

At one end of the spectrum there are modules that require only little previous knowledge. One such example is the 'Leasing' module, which provides a understanding of the basic elements of this method of financing using a case study and worksheet. At the other end there are modules that address topics on a more abstract and academic level, such as one covering monetary policy. All in all, there are more than 90 teaching units in four languages.

## Professional support

The Iconomix education programme is managed by a small team of SNB staff in Zurich and Lausanne and has an annual operating budget for administrative expenses of CHF 0.7 million. The team focuses on operating the website, programme management, customer support and quality assurance. For all other services, they work together with professional external experts including authors, teachers, graphic designers (print, web), IT specialists and editors. Over time, this has evolved into a well-coordinated and efficient network.

Iconomix maintains a close dialogue with companies, publishing houses and education institutions including universities, universities of applied sciences, vocational colleges and upper secondary schools. This cooperation plays a key role in bolstering the acceptance of Iconomix, establishing it as a firm fixture in the Swiss education system.

## Reaching the target group

It was clear from the outset that Iconomix would only be successful if it was actually used in the classroom. At the end of 2016, some 1,500 teachers working at the upper secondary school level were actively using the Iconomix website.<sup>1</sup> Based on a target group of around 4,000 staff teaching economics and humanities in such schools, this represents a share of just under 40%. All three major language regions have a similarly positive showing in terms of spread and usage.

Anyone investing in a programme over many years naturally wants to know what benefits they are getting out of it. Performance measurement is therefore essential, and Iconomix thus tracks the spread, use and effectiveness of its services and

material, and provides a wide range of performance data (cf. box). Some of this information is available on the website and in the Iconomix catalogue, which is published in June.



**Manuel Wälti**

Deputy Head of Research Coordination and Economic Education, Head of iconomix.ch, Swiss National Bank (SNB), Zurich



**Carlos Lenz**

Head of Economic Affairs, Swiss National Bank (SNB), Zurich

<sup>1</sup> Active users are defined as persons having used their account at least once in 2016.