



**Humanity @ Work & Life: Global Diffusion of the Mondragon Cooperative Ecosystem Experience. Edited by Christina A. Clamp and Michael A. Peck**

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How to cite this article:

Bird, A. (2023). Humanity @ Work & Life: Global Diffusion of the Mondragon Cooperative Ecosystem Experience. Edited by Christina A. Clamp and Michael A. Peck [Book review] *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, 56(1), 42-43.

# Humanity @ Work & Life: Global Diffusion of the Mondragon Cooperative Ecosystem Experience

**Edited by Christina A. Clamp and Michael A. Peck**  
**Oak Tree Press, 2023. ISBN (pbk): 9781781195703, 429pp.**

In some ways, this book is a smörgåsbord of themes. They range over so many aspects of the Mondragon phenomenon, such as its origins, influences, and effect on the Basque economy. At around 200,000 words across 30 chapters, it is a longish read, and with 35 contributors, there's a big variation in style, but this makes it also a great example of co-operative production. The final section brings everything together and shows us a way that a real change of ownership can come. Others may disagree whether worker ownership can grow from within capitalism to provide the social change we wish to see, but the Mondragon way is clearly laid out here.

The book is arranged in five sections, starting with reimagining capitalism, and moving through the social innovation of Mondragon, its global influence, looking at worker ownership in America and how it's influenced by Mondragon, and finally looking at the resourcing of future worker co-operative development. Furthermore, as a project in a Catholic country, founded by a priest, José María Arizmendiarieta, and with at least some of the book's contributors being practising Catholics, the focus on the influence of Catholic Social Policy on Mondragon is hardly surprising (see, for example, Chapters 7 and 13). Catholic Social Policy ideas address oppression, the role of the state, subsidiarity, social organisation, concern for social justice, and issues of wealth distribution.

In Part One, Michael Peck looks coolly and realistically at Mondragon, detailing not just the inspirational parts, but facing up to the bankruptcy of the founding co-operative, Fagor Electrodomesticos, in October 2013. He also tackles the splitting off of Ulma and Irona co-operatives in December 2022, pointing out that whilst they have left the 'co-op of co-ops', they are not demutualising and are staying with the wider co-operative family. In Chapter Two, Jason Spicer looks at the importance of descriptors, how they affect the perceptions of how capitalism might end and what replaces it. Following that, Charles Chawalko, Sandra McCardell, Elroy Natuchu, Kandis Quam, April de Simone, and Damien Goodmon look at how co-operative democracy can 'undesign' American racism. They focus on the work of the Racial Equity Collaborative, which is a community partnership studying co-operative groups in Trenton (New Jersey), Los Angeles and the Pueblo of Zuni (New Mexico).

Part Two starts with Christina Clamp exploring social innovation in the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation. She examines the role of retained capital in the individual's capital share account which provides the co-operative with working capital rather than allowing it to be exported each year. She also looks at the way the co-operative bank, Caja Laboral Popular, enabled the financing of new co-operatives through retaining capital in the system of the 'co-op of co-ops' which was then available for growth or new-starts. Following the finance theme, Ibon Zugasti and Michael Peck examine how we might make a 'just transition' from shareholder primacy to stakeholder capitalism. They discuss how Environmental, Social and Governance investing (ESG) and Social Development Goals (SDG) have influenced the work of Mondragon, and how they could become the key performance indicators (KPIs) of the future. Jesús María Herasti then goes on to examine the influence of the Catholic Church's social doctrine on the Mondragon story. This is followed by five case studies looking at various aspects of social innovation.

Part Three focuses on Mondragon's global reach. This starts with Brian Corbin and Michael Peck looking in further depth at Catholic Social Justice policy, followed by Julian Manley's reflections on how his connections with Mondragon influenced his input into the development of the Preston Model of Community Wealth Building. For UK readers this is of particular interest, and Julian examines the start of the project, when an inward investment-based city centre regeneration project fell apart as outside investors withdrew. Through the local university (UCLAN) he invited Mikel Lezamiz from Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, on a 3-day visit, in November 2013, and the Labour-controlled City Council were enthused at the potential that worker co-operatives could bring to Preston. Since then, much work has been put in and Preston Co-operative Network is at the heart of the Preston Model and the emerging union-coop movement in the UK.

Part Four demonstrates five examples of worker ownership in America and Part Five examines seven specific examples of resource challenges to building a large-scale worker ownership economy in the USA. Three of these focus on the idea of fully unionised worker co-operatives, which bring the combined resources of the trade union movement and the co-operative movement into play in a potential partnership to create decent work. This is a growing movement in the USA, where the three largest worker co-operatives have grown out of the collaboration between unions and the co-operative movement.

Finally, it is all brought together in a virtual discussion between the authors, where each contributor summarises their key points, and from the ensuing discussion, Martin Lowery has produced a short summary of the key points.

All in all, it is a very interesting read. It is academic in its research and its rigour, but the writing style is generally very accessible, and the breadth of coverage is exemplary. This is an essential read which points a potential path to a humanised economy through worker ownership.

## **The Reviewer**

Alex Bird has over 50 years of management, board, and practitioner level experience in commercial business, social enterprise, and the public and voluntary sectors, together with 20 years as a freelance business advisor specialising in co-operatives and social enterprises. He is now retired from offering business advice, but continues as an independent co-operative researcher and activist.