

Editorial

The nominations for the UK Co-operative of the Year Award opened in May 2015 and the winner was announced in June. The Awards showcase the scope and diversity of co-operative businesses and organisations in the UK. Nominees for the 2015 award included: Jamboree — a worker co-operative owned and operated by adults with learning disabilities; Foster Care Co-operative which has been recruiting and training foster carers for the last 15 years; Oikocredit UK — also celebrating 40 years of social investing; the Phone Co-op — a consumer co-operative providing phone, broadband and mobile services; Unicorn Grocery — a worker co-operative with around 60 members; FC United of Manchester — a supporter-owned football club; and consumer societies Channel Islands Co-operative Society, East of England Co-operative Society and the eventual winner Midcounties Co-operative. Midcounties is now one of the largest independent customer-owned co-operatives in the UK with over £1.2bn turnover across a range of businesses including retail, travel, funeral care, childcare, and energy. Some might argue that the UK co-operative sector has changed considerably since its Rochdale roots, yet the historical flavour of several of the contributions to this issue of the *Journal* suggest we can still have lessons to learn from co-operative experience.

Andrew Bibby's article, for example, explores specifically the challenges of today's multi-stakeholder co-operatives and draws on the experience of a nineteenth century British producer co-operative. He suggests that "the experiences of early co-operatives which brought together different classes of member can be relevant today in our approaches to contemporary multi-stakeholder co-operatives" (this issue, p21). The paper considers the decision of the Hebden Bridge Fustian Manufacturing Society to increase the viability of the Society through external investment to boost the weekly subscriptions from members of the co-operative. It examines the bringing together of different classes of members — individual workers, individual investors, and co-operative societies — and the consequent issues around governance and profits sharing.

A more recent, but still reflective account is the first paper in this issue. The paper, from Spear and Thomas, looks back on research carried out in the 1980s. While some of the external and infrastructural frameworks have changed (eg Greater London Enterprise Board originally set up under the auspices of the Greater London Council (GLC) became an independent company — Greater London Enterprise (GLE) — after the GLC was abolished in 1986), the paper focuses on the still relevant and topical question of worker control in worker co-operatives. The authors outline 5 case study organisations ranging in type (start up, rescue) and size (from 5 to 35 workers) and examine the limitations on full democratisation of internal organising and managing processes. The constraints of power and control are discussed, but the paper also highlights the achievements of the worker co-operatives in relation to 'conventional' business. The authors conclude, now as then, that what is needed is "recognition and promotion of the relatively few examples of sustained radical changes to work practices" (this issue, p17). That two of the finalists in the 2015 Co-operative of the Year award and a previous (2014) winner are worker co-operatives might help to do this.

To continue the historical theme, the book review this issue is Richardson's new edition of *A City of Light* — an overview of socialism, Chartism, and co-operation in Nottingham in 1844. Jim Craigan provides an excellent overview.

Back to the future and we have two international papers. Ellerby and Leviten-Reid provide an account of the involvement of young members (those aged under 30 years) in the governance of Canadian housing co-operatives. The on-going challenge of engaging and strengthening participation of young people in co-operative governance is a significant one recognised by the International Co-operative Alliance. Viability and sustainability of co-operative enterprise rests, in part, on successful integration and motivation of young people to join and remain as active co-operators. The paper provides findings from recent research that highlight the benefits and challenges of young persons' involvement in co-operatives, the added value both for individuals

and organisations offered through learning, development, and the social connectivity which also reflects broader engagement with a wider community base. The authors suggest that in some cases, attraction of young people may not necessarily be about strategies targeted at youth, but by co-operatives examining their own structures and cultures that may prevent active participation and engagement — a finding which the authors feel “concur with the ICA’s focus within the *Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade* on strengthening participation in co-operatives by promoting excellence and best practices in ‘communication, decision-making, meeting ... and openness” (this issue p39). Ellerby and Leviten-Reid conclude by suggesting that co-operatives from different sectors may benefit from collaborating to engage young people as this may sustain engagement in other co-operatives: for example their involvement in housing co-operatives, may then influence their decisions to become members of a credit union, or consumer owned grocery store, and they suggest that this may be worth additional research.

Finally, the short paper from Solel describes the challenges of starting a co-operative bank in Israel. The review starts with the 2011 social protests that marked widespread discontent towards social, economic, financial, and political factors in the country. Solel focuses on the financial and banking market and documents a number of events and interventions, from which a new co-operative movement emerged with the intent to establish Israel’s first co-operative bank. The paper concludes with the set up in 2015 of financial non-banking services and peer-to-peer lending as a step towards this co-operative goal.

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