

Local Society and Global Economy: the Role of Co-operatives

By Simeon Karafolas, Roger Spear and Yohanan Stryjan

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Reviewed by Rita Rhodes

To my mind a book review has three main functions. First, to bring to the notice of readers a book that might be of interest to them. Secondly, to outline its contents and thirdly, to assess its merits. Having said that, this review of *Local Society and Global Economy* says much about one and two but fights shy of three. The reason is that the eminence of the writers tends to inhibit criticism while at the same time commending their papers. These were presented at a recent international conference of co-operative researchers and its report usefully complements the Society for Co-operative Studies' ongoing interest in UK co-operative research.

The conference was organised by the Research Committee of the International Co-operative Alliance and the Technological Educational Institute of Western Macedonia in Greece. By way of background it is interesting to note that the ICA's Research Committee has changed somewhat in recent years. First under the Chairmanship of Dr Roger Spear, UK, and more recently that of Akira Kurimoto, Japan, it has widened to include academic researchers as well as the Research Officers of national co-operative organisations who originally comprised it. Its academic researchers come from a wide range of academic disciplines including organisation, management, economics, government, development, the law, history, sociology and geography. All have a strong interest in co-operatives and many are active in them. This increased academic interest has prompted the view that there is perhaps now a need to map Co-operative Studies. This was, in fact, the subject of another ICA Research Conference held last year under the auspices of the British Columbia Institute for Co-operative Studies at the University of Victoria under the leadership of Professor Ian MacPherson. The report of this conference will appear shortly.

Developments in co-operative research are therefore well worth watching and the report of the Naoussa conference gives one such opportunity. Before looking at it in greater detail

we should perhaps note that in terms of organisation, as distinct from subject matter, the ICA Research Committee has now become a global committee. Its conferences, held every second year, are interspersed with regional conferences. However, these are not geographically exclusive. The Naoussa Conference was mainly a European one but also attracted co-operative researchers from Brazil, South Africa, Israel, Iran, Canada and Japan. Such a wide geographical spread was fortunate. It aided the conference's examination of *Local society and Global Economy* by providing accounts from many different countries of co-operatives' attempts to reposition themselves in this period of accelerating globalisation.

Recent ICA Research Conferences have also seen the emergence of distinctive strands of enquiry. Perhaps the strongest is that relating to credit unions and the report of the Naoussa conference includes five such papers. Issues facing Irish, British, Polish and Ukrainian credit unions were examined, while Paul Jones, a member of the SCS Executive, viewed changes in British credit unions against a background of lessons from Latin America.

Co-operative movements in countries in transition were also well represented in a number of conference strands. That studying Co-operatives, the State and Civil Society included papers on Northern Ireland, Poland and Hungary, while that considering Agricultural co-operatives in Transforming Societies included papers from Bulgaria and Hungary. A complementary strand was one dealing with tourism and in this a paper from Israel explored the potentials and limitations of rural co-operatives operating in tourism, while another from Greece traced the problems and successes of Greek women's tourist co-operatives.

A particularly strong strand in the conference in terms of the number of papers presented, was that dealing with wine and olive oil co-operatives, with five papers on the French, South African and Portuguese industries.

However, the group of papers that may be of most interest to British readers was that dealing with co-operative organisation and management. Not only are these relevant to British co-operation at this time of transition, but they also included papers by well-known members of the Society of Co-operative Studies. Roger Spear, current SCS Vice Chair, together with colleagues from the Co-operatives Research Unit at the Open University, presented a paper on the Success Factors in UK Retail Co-operatives, while Johnston Birchall, previous Editor of the *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, together with a colleague from Stirling University, presented a paper on What Motivates Members to Participate.

All in all, this conference report provides much of interest for British readers involved in co-operative studies. It also provides an international perspective that complements well this Society's interest in UK co-operative research.

Readers wishing to obtain copies of the report (free of charge) should contact Simeon Karafolas at skarafolas@yahoo.gr