

# Editorial

It is fitting that at the close of the International Year of Co-operatives 2012, the Journal in this edition reflects a truly international experience of co-operation. Peer-reviewed articles emanate from South Africa, from the Netherlands but focusing on co-operatives in Mexico and from Germany but writing about co-operatives in India. There are short papers that discuss developments in Europe and in Wales. The book reviews add further international considerations with a review of an important book on co-operation in the British Empire.

The first two peer-reviewed papers explore issues relating to agricultural co-operatives. Dr Liezel Alsemgeest and Professor A v A Smit of the University of the Free State in South Africa analyse farmers' perceptions of the conversion of agricultural businesses from co-operatives to investor-oriented firms. This is a fascinating study that examines the conflict that exists in agricultural businesses due to the customers also being the shareholders. This issue though is not one confined to agricultural co-operatives. In Britain, for example, the same issue arises in credit unions as well where the members are both shareholders (the owners) and also the customers. This can create a whole range of dilemmas and contortions in the good governance of these financial co-operative institutions.

The second agricultural paper, written by Benigno Rodríguez Padrón, Ruerd Ruben and Kees Burger, authors from Mexico and the Netherlands, relates well to the first paper as it aims to analyse the key factors influencing membership of co-operatives in Mexico's coffee sector. This is a positive and encouraging paper particularly as it concluded that there is good evidence that participating in co-operatives is to the economic advantage of the farmers involved. The authors quote consistent evidence that co-operative farmers in co-operatives get better prices for their coffee.

The third reviewed paper by Jennifer Meyer-Ueding of Humboldt-University of Berlin explores the context and development of co-operatives in India, particularly in Hyderabad. This is an informative and worthwhile paper which raises some key issues as to the control of co-operatives by governments or other outside agencies. These risks the future of authentic co-operative enterprise as the author explains.

The Hyderabad paper forms a good introduction to the review by Hans Munkner of Rita Rhodes' powerful new book, *Empire and Co-operation - how the British Empire used co-operatives in its development strategies 1900-1970*. This review is clear and accessible guide to Rita's work which explores how co-operatives were seen as making a significant contribution to building civil society in advance of independence in post-colonial territories. However, situations were often complex and the collaboration of the imperial and the co-operative was not always an easy affair.

In this edition there are a number of informative articles bringing readers up to date in a number of areas of co-operative endeavour. Ian Snaith's paper on *The Study Group on European Cooperative Law* outlines an important initiative in raising understanding of co-operative law within the legal, academic and governmental circles. Alan Burge and Molly Scott-Cato bring readers up to date with the Welsh Co-operative and Mutuals Commission.

There are three further book reviews in this edition. These form an essential element of the *Journal's* contribution to academic and practical thinking on co-operation and the co-operative sector. In this edition they relate to housing, the nature of co-operation and co-operative organisation. They are to be commended to the readership.

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