

Editorial

This edition of the *Journal* assembles a series of international articles on a range of co-operative issues and themes. The five articles, three peer-reviewed papers and two shorter think-pieces, originate from Austria, Brazil and Sweden. In trying to identify commonality running through these articles, at least two major themes seem to stand out – these are the relevance of co-operatives to their members and to contemporary society and, secondly, their financial stability and performance. In the first group, I would include the articles written by Susanne Gaurwitsch and Jerker Nilsson from Sweden, Dietmar Roessler from Austria and Mariza Almeida from Brazil. In the second group, there is the paper delivered last year at the ICA Research Conference in Oxford by Marina Teixeira Trindade, Francisco de Assis Ferreira Filho and Sigismundo Bialoskorski Neto from Brazil and the interesting think-piece composed by Holger Blisse from Austria.

The article, *Members' readership of annual reports – a cross-national comparison of supply co-operatives* by Gaurwitsch and Nilsson develops the findings of a baseline study by Robb, Shanahan, and Lord, previously published in the *Journal* (2006: 39). The article undertakes a comparison between co-operatives in Sweden and New Zealand and explores the relationship between annual reports and member involvement. It should be of interest to readers involved in making the annual reports of co-operative organisations more relevant to their members. Roessler's paper on *Corporate Social Responsibility as a Component of a Co-operative Member-Relationship Management*, also, yet in a different manner, relates to member involvement in the contemporary co-operatives and their perceived relevance to a wider public. His study reveals the importance for members not only of the quality of services offered by co-operatives but also of the values that co-operatives exhibit in relating to wider society. This is reminiscent of the experience of The Co-operative in the UK where the development of its value-driven ethical policy had a marked impact on member interest and engagement (see the article by Fiona Young in a previous edition of the *Journal* (2006: 39)). The final article in this

group is the think piece on *Co-operative Incubators to alleviate poverty in local communities in Brazil*. In this short paper, Almeida describes and analyses the development of a model of the co-operative incubator directed at creating jobs and increasing the prospects for some of the most impoverished communities in Brazil. It demonstrates how co-operation can take the lead in improving the life chances of those marginalised by mainstream society.

The remaining two articles both relate to the financial performance and stability of credit unions. The Trindade, Filho and Neto paper makes a ten-year performance comparison between Brazilian credit co-operatives and financial banks and, positively, the co-operative banks were shown to hold their own and to perform satisfactorily as financial intermediaries. The final paper tackles a distinct but related subject. As credit co-operatives strengthen financially, in many countries there is often the danger of hostile take-overs, de-mutualisation or their conversion to stockholder banks, especially if their shares are already listed on the stock exchange. In his short article, Blisse tackles this issue and opines the design of an investment fund based on investments of co-operative members to strengthen co-operative ownership.

Following the articles, this edition includes three fascinating book reviews, two of which, both certainly worth reading, relate to the development of co-operation and the social economy in Canada. The third book review concerns the development of The Oddfellows which will be of interest to many co-operators who will find many parallels with this often little-known organisation within their own co-operative movement. The book reviews have always been an important part of the *Journal*, as they bring developments within the wider co-operative literature to the attention of our readers. *Journal* readers are encouraged to contact Molly, our review editor, if they come across publications they consider are worth including in the *Journal*.

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