

# The Developmental Movement Model: A Contribution to the Social Movement Approach to Co-operative Development

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This article expands the conceptual repertoire of the social movement approach to co-operative development. It critiques market-focused and policy-focused approaches to co-operative development, arguing that neither accords a central role to democratic association and action. To illuminate this blind spot, ideal-types of a 'frozen' and 'developmental' movement are proposed. This continuum of development action further establishes the range – and difficulties – of movement-driven economic action. Similarly, the frozen movement ideology of 'business co-operation' is contrasted with the developmental movement ideology of 'social co-operation.' It is argued that business co-operation both reflects and reinforces co-operative movement degeneration – the tendency of movements to lose democratic vitality and development focus and 'freeze-up' as they mature. This is contrasted with the potential of 'social co-operation' to drive democratic regeneration and the achievement of developmental movements. Finally, the case of co-operative ambulance conversions in the Canadian province of Québec provides an empirical illustration of the model.

## **Introduction: Understanding Co-operative Development**

This paper argues that the problems and prospects of co-operative development can be better understood by more carefully conceptualising the movement's social and democratic foundations (Develtere, 1992; Fairbairn, 2005; Diamantopoulos, 2011; Diamantopoulos, 2012). Unlike economism or statist approaches, it contends that re-centring movement agency can better explain co-operative fortunes. For, it is argued, new co-operatives do not grow in a vacuum; they emerge from within a field of already existing co-operatives and assorted social movement ties. They are not merely socially embedded forms of economic action; they are democratically structured and member controlled forms of economic action that emerge from within historically specific ensembles of social relations. Although over-looked by the market-focused and policy-focused approaches, it is further argued that these networks are crucial determinants of emerging sector success; and that an expanded conceptual repertoire can help us better understand their role. Finally, the discussion contrasts two ideal-typical movements – the 'frozen' and the 'developmental' movement – and discusses their corresponding ideological orientations – 'business co-operation' and 'social co-operation' – to provide clearer understanding of these movement dynamics. Against the tendency of maturing movements to 'degenerate,' losing development energy, focus and commitment, the paper discusses the importance and difficulties of regeneration efforts.

## **The Social Foundations of Co-operative Action**

Investigating the role social movements play in co-operative development (Develtere, 1996; Fairbairn, 2001; Diamantopoulos, 2011; Diamantopoulos 2012) requires a careful conceptualisation of co-operation's distinct and problematic character – as a social movement. For while co-operation has its roots in social movements and is often tied to extended social movement families, co-operation's economic character as a business sector has deterred social movement theorists from its study. Indeed, Quarter, Mook and Armstrong (2009) have suggested that "any semblance to a social movement (eg 'the co-operative commonwealth') could be argued to be an artefact of history" (p8); and that – even within co-operative 'movement' circles – this dream "is no longer referred to, or at least is limited to the zealous few" (p53). The implication is clear: as co-operative movements mature, their focus shifts from their founding movement goals and values to the operational priorities dictated by market competition. Co-operative movements thus tend to degenerate, adopting a single bottom-line

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orientation. As market values prevail, co-operatives may become increasingly disembedded from wider movement currents and increasingly disinterested in emerging sector development.

Moreover, social movement theory generally deals with 'contentious politics' – groups' efforts to influence state policy. As both a movement of democratic associations and a sector of market-based businesses, the co-operative case is thus a square peg in this round conceptual hole. Co-operation might therefore be better understood as a form of 'contentious economics'. Like other social movements, co-operation is based on democratic social action. Unlike other social movements, which build popular *political* power, the co-operative movement focuses that action on building popular *economic* power. Through co-operative action, this movement struggles against the market power of investors, the entrenched hegemony of the investor-owned firm model, the competitive individualism of market-led cultures, and the lack of business confidence cultivated among popular classes and marginalised groups most in need of co-operative options. Like other social movement activists, co-operative organisers struggle to expand the scope of democratic citizenship and realise their constituents' interests – but they do so through economic institution-building rather than (or in addition to) protest politics. The similarities and differences between the social movement species and its social movement genus requires both theoretical extension of the social movement approach to co-operation and significant qualifications.

The social movement approach nonetheless offers an important alternative to reductionist thinking, in which co-operative formation rates appear to be either market-driven or state-driven; as if co-operatives spontaneously develop by virtue of market forces or public policies alone. This is an important distinction because, in fact, co-operatives often emerge as responses to *market failures* to meet communities' needs, and *policy failures* to adequately address that gap. While market opportunities and policy supports are important success factors for co-operative development, these are not typically what drive agents to organise co-operatives. They are driven to meet their own specific, unsatisfied needs (for housing, health care, employment, etc) through direct social and economic action. Unlike the reductionist approaches of economism and statism, the social movement approach argues for a fuller accounting of movement agency – and the importance of democratic association and action – in unfolding development campaigns.

In this paper, I therefore argue for an approach that places movement agency – and a developmental movement orientation – at its conceptual centre. This contrasts sharply with the over-determined approaches of economism and statism. Economism is the idea that all social facts can be reduced to their economic dimensions and that market power is the most important feature of social life. Similarly, statism reduces social facts to policy questions best solved by government policy and action. While economic and political studies make important contributions, reductionist explanations cannot adequately account for the popular well-springs of co-operative development.

## **Beyond economism**

Business-focused studies tend to view co-operatives as a sector of commercial enterprises engaged in market relations; but not also as a movement of aligned democratic associations geared into the networks of extended social movement families. Economism thus fails to account for the distinctive character of democratic economic action. At best, it tells only half the story; plunging co-operation's social development into darkness.

Economism thus proposes formulaic approaches that treat co-operatives as self-contained enterprises operating in markets alone; as simple profit-maximising firms which have neither a democratic structure nor social objectives. This is, from a realist standpoint, a "chaotic conception." As Sayer (1992) explains:

a rational abstraction is one which isolates a significant element of the world which has some unity and autonomous force, such as a structure. A bad abstraction arbitrarily divides the indivisible and / or lumps together the unrelated and the inessential, thereby 'carving up' the object of study with little or no regard for its structure and form. (p138)

Economism carves up the essentially dual structure of a co-operative – as both a commercial enterprise and a democratic association – as if effective co-operative development depends on market viability, but not the associative viability of the emerging coalition of social actors that structures and governs the firm.

Following the arguments of Granovetter (1992) and Bourdieu (2005) – that all economic practices are ultimately forms of social action – a social movement approach frames co-operative development as doubly embedded in market and social relations. For a co-operative fundamentally embodies a democratic logic of member control and expresses a social purpose that transcends, or at least rivals, strictly profit-maximising behaviour. As Develtere (1996) emphasises, it is both a member-based expression of a social movement and a business organisation embedded in a competitive market. This is a rational abstraction; it recognises that the development of co-operatives also hinges on associational work: the social development of democratic associations, co-operative movements and inter-movement ties.

### **Beyond statism**

Similarly, much co-operative development literature focuses on the role of supportive public policy such as dedicated government branches to liaise with the movement; promotions, research and education programmes; favourable taxation and legislation; and equal treatment for state subsidies. A social movement approach accounts for the role of social movements as well as the state, thus bringing the role of civil society and its “social economy” (Quarter, 1992; Shragge, 1993; Shragge and Fontan, 2000; Quarter et al, 2009) into clearer focus. This approach views the state as an important but embedded institution, the policy choices of which are shaped by the mobilisation of other economic and social actors. These actors include the co-operative movement and its extended social movement families. While co-operative action is powerfully conditioned by market and state structures, it is also capable, in turn, of reshaping those markets and influencing state action (Lipset, 1959; Vézina, 2001).

In this dialectical conception, social movements create openings for state action, place pressures on the state and create positive conditions for state-sector partnership. They also play an independent role by creating positive socio-cultural conditions for co-operative development and driving activist participation in emerging co-operatives. In contrast to economistic and statist views, this approach recognises that extended social movement families (including but not limited to the co-operative movement) often respond to popular needs and aspirations when the market and state fail to do so. It recognises that movement actors often provide resources, recruits and mobilising networks for co-operative organising campaigns.

### **Re-centring movement agency**

Theorising a central role for movement action in development campaigns corrects for the anti-democratic tendency of positivist approaches to obscure the role of popular power in co-operation. Movement agency readily disappears under prevailing preoccupations with market forces and state power – often reified as all-determining, natural, or inevitable states of affairs. Beyond painting a false picture of social reality, these approaches thus have a self-fulfilling effect, disempowering movement actors.

Statism and economism thus discount the efficacy of the popular actions that are, in the first instance, required to drive co-operative development. Democratic agency disappears in the fog of faulty abstraction and determinist conceptions; it is replaced by a misguided faith in the technocratic expertise of co-operative managers or state bureaucrats. This distracts from, and discredits, the driving role of associative agency in processes of collective action and social innovation.

From a social movement perspective, vital co-operative movements and their extended social movement ties influence the range of development possibility in a particular historic moment. Theorising a driving role for social movements as co-operative development actors thus involves a break with economism’s methodological individualism; it rejects the atomistic

and exceptionalist notion that individual co-operatives emerge through the utility-maximising behaviour of their proponents alone rather than as expressions of wider networks of influence and aspiration.

As Fairbairn (2001) suggests, institutional histories of individual co-operatives often contribute to such partial and misleading conceptions of co-operative development. This instrumental impulse treats co-operatives as “rational, self-contained, clearly-bounded organisations,” disembedding co-operative firms from the wider field of movement action which has generated them. These abstract and one-sided “creation myths” and “narratives of growth” simply reinforce economistic conceptions of co-operatives as stand-alone enterprises. By contrast, he argues:

Co-operatives form, and to some extent continue to exist, within networks of multi-polar interaction, as constellations and coalitions of various groups and interests. It may be more complete to view them, especially in their formative stages, as parts of a web of social ideas and organisations, rather than as isolated and self-contained structures. (pp25-27)

Against the economistic conception of co-operation as a series of rational choice transactions among utility-maximising joiners, a social movement approach suggests co-operatives are also democratic, social constructions. In this conception, co-operative campaigns express a broader sense of interest, identity, community and belonging. They coalesce often complex “development coalitions,” connecting to diverse social movements, networks and interests. Before the business-building stage, development is thus first a practice of community development and coalition-building; drawing together workers, end-users, host community members (from community economic development organisations, church groups, trade unions, or co-operatives and credit unions), or political allies. Each new co-operative is also, in part, and part of, a political process (McAdam, 1982). Indeed, Fairbairn (1994) clearly locates this movement’s very roots in such a political process:

It is ... reasonable to say that the forces of poverty and need inspired the formation of the Rochdale co-operative. But they did so somewhat indirectly, mediated by the agency of idealism and critical social thought, and by the activists of Owenism, Chartism, and other social movements. The Rochdale Pioneers did not rise spontaneously from need, but were organised consciously by thinkers, activists, and leaders who functioned within a network of ideas and institutions. The same can probably be said of all successful co-operatives in all times and places: they arise from need – when some activists, institutions or agencies consciously promote and organise them. (p4)

In the same vein, the social movement approach thus avoids imputing an abstract and ahistorical universalism to co-operative development – as if a best practice formula applied to state policy or development practice here necessarily makes sense there. It rejects the cookie-cutter notion that business development services that work for an investor-owned firm will meet the needs of a co-operative; or that mechanisms that work in an agrarian context will work in a city. Rather, it understands co-operative prospects as context-dependent. Interventions must therefore ‘fit’ within the formative logic and motion of historical movements for democratic action. This shifts the locus of action from the state, emphasising instead the important leadership role of strong sector federations (Cornforth and Thomas, 1990) and sector-owned infrastructure (Spear and Thomas, 1997).

## **The Democratic Foundations of Co-operative Action**

The historicity of the social movement approach is an implicit theoretical recognition of the “social embeddedness” of economic action generally (Polanyi, 2001; Granovetter, 1992; Bourdieu, 2005) and the “deep social embeddedness” of democratic economic action in particular (Develtere, 1996; Fairbairn, 2001; Diamantopoulos, 2012). For just as capitalist enterprise is parasitic on public infrastructure, legislation and norms of business conduct, co-operative enterprise both depends on these social structures of economic action and its own specific social wellsprings – in democratic movements. Co-operative economic action is not simply socially embedded, like most economic practices; it is also deeply embedded in democratic social structures – it is also ‘democratically embedded’.

## **Sector embeddedness**

Most obviously, established co-operatives are now embedded within a highly institutionalised co-operative *sector*, the dynamics of which shape further development prospects. Co-operatives are connected to each other by co-operative principles (International Co-operative Alliance, 2011), and a dense social network of international, national and provincial centrals, sectoral federations and second and third tier co-operatives.

As Bourdieu's field theory (2005) suggests, individual co-operatives do not exist in a vacuum; they emerge from within a field of competing forces that may or may not support their development. As co-operatives mature – and co-operative fields become more highly structured and differentiated – waves of established and emerging co-operatives will struggle to define their movements' identity and direction: through episodes of inter-co-operative support and rivalry; periods of expansion, programme development and institution-building; and intervals of setback, stagnation and retrenchment. Dominant co-operatives, emerging sector insurgencies, engaged states or aligned social movements each thus shape the historical context, character and trajectory of co-operation. Particular movements evolve as the balance of power within, and over, the co-operative field shifts. Development waves transform the field; bringing into being new field structures and forms of field dependence (Fairbairn, 2005; Lévesque, 1990). The structuring of new co-operatives and new co-operative sectors thus reflects the structure – and restructuring – of the movement itself. For example, a field in which the dominant players are preoccupied with consolidation of their own sectors may be uninterested in supporting new fields of development activity. Similarly, a field dominated by agricultural co-operatives or rural-based co-operatives may lack interest in developing 'urban' forms such as housing, childcare, or worker co-operatives. Since emerging sectors rely on established sector structures for technical, financial, or political support in their formative stages, the structure of the co-operative field importantly conditions new development prospects.

## **Movement embeddedness**

Similarly, co-operative sector-movements do not operate in a self-enclosed, autonomous field. Their development is also historically dependent on other, overlapping social movements (Develtere, 1996). Often, parent movements help give rise to emerging fields of co-operative activity. These movements may remain dependent on the fate of these fields for generations. They may provide mobilising networks to channel innovation-adoption (Rogers, 1995) or lend leverage for escalating orders of agitation, education, organisation and institutional and policy reform. For example, in the early twentieth century the farm movement drove the campaign for wheat pooling in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan (Brown, 1973; Knutilla, 1994) but the Catholic parish network provided the mobilising channels for Québec's *caisses populaires* (Poulin, 2000; Fairbairn, 2000). These parent movements provided campaign legitimacy, resources and recruits. They also shaped co-operation's specific socio-historical character, providing a basis for member adhesion that was farmer-based in Saskatchewan but clerico-nationalist in Québec. Movement patrons defined the field autonomy and ideological direction of those dependent movements, embedding co-operative action within a broader movement of defensive nationalism in Québec and an insurgent movement for agrarian socialism in Saskatchewan (Lipset, 1959). In other words, the rise, fall – and succession – of parent movements or patrons also conditions new development prospects.

Similarly, their engagement, disengagement and re-engagement – continue to reshape the evolving historical prospects for co-operative action. As urbanisation and the Quiet Revolution swept Québec in the 1960s, the roots and character of co-operation shifted away from the church and rural petit-bourgeoisie toward a new professional class and a wider social movement coalition. By contrast, agrarian co-operation in Saskatchewan faced a crisis when the movement's historic social base of middle farmers was radically and rapidly rolled back by the structural adjustment of agriculture, driving demutualisations in grains, poultry and dairy. In each case, the fate of co-operation reflects much more than might be ascribed to market forces or public policies alone. Their fates also reflect each movement's ability to either sustain

its traditional social base and 'historical bloc' or execute a successful transition to more viable social foundations (Diamantopoulos, 2011).

For these reasons, Develtere (1996) argues that "co-operatives cannot be analysed as distinct social movements". He suggests:

it is this relationship with other social movements which to a great extent accounts for the diversity and scale of co-operative activity. (p28)

Indeed, extended social movement families represent important resources for co-operative development – often furnishing their activists, supporters and members. Consider the population of child care boards by women's movement activists or the affinity between the values and objectives of worker co-operators and the labour movement. More formal examples of inter-movement synergy might include the joint-action of organised labour and farmers movements in Saskatchewan to support the formation of Saskatchewan's community clinics in 1962 (Rands, 1994) or the housing co-operative campaign jointly undertaken by the Canadian co-operative and labour movements in the seventies (Goldblatt, 2000). These cases illustrate how overlapping social missions and the pooling of farmer, labour and established co-operative movement resources met important community needs. Social movement ties thus also condition the prospects for a development-focused co-operative movement.

In this long-range, historical process of restless social innovation that is the co-operative movement, there is a leading role for intermediary institutions – like sector federations, educational institutions, technical assistance groups, or financing pools – in the deliberate creation of additional resources, communication channels and policy leverage. However, while these network mobilisations are crucial to successfully structure co-operative organising campaigns, these institutions and networks are themselves the achievement of co-operative, and/or social movement, pressures.

This associationalist perspective leads logically to the premise that the development of co-operatives thus begins neither with the state nor the market, but with the development of the movement itself, including its ties to an extended social movement family (Develtere, 1996) or 'historical bloc' (Diamantopoulos, 2011). For, as I have argued here, co-operatives are profoundly structured by social action. The social structure of the co-operative field, the dependence of this field on external movement parents or partners and the historic invention of development infrastructure all demonstrate the fundamental embeddedness of co-operative development in currents of democratic association and action. For example, Hammond Ketilson, Fulton, Fairbairn and Bold (1992) argue that the co-operative option must be championed by meso-institutional actors able to link and mobilise the grassroots base and effectively pool resources to carry the programme. Indeed, they argue no co-operative movement in Canada has ever emerged without such sponsors and mobilising networks:

Experience has ... shown that most communities cannot entirely 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps.' As the history of co-operatives has shown, every major co-operative movement in Canada today was sponsored originally by some larger social movement and received educational and organisational assistance from established agencies that had staff and resources. This was true of the Antigonish Movement, the *caisses populaires*, and the farmer co-operatives in western Canada. Canadian history does not support the idea that bands of individuals just come together to form co-operatives. (p4)

The rise of these classical co-operative insurgencies was neither automatic nor inevitable. Instead, historical contingency and agency loomed large in these campaigns, and parent (and partner) movements' support provided critical impetus to their success.

The social movement approach therefore suggests that vital co-operative associations, movement ties and movement cultures play a crucial role in driving new development campaigns. Indeed, the illusion that co-operatives can be socially engineered "from above" by state policy or "from outside" by development agencies is the key to the failure of patron-led co-operative development efforts in the developing world. Rather than adopting a "blueprint

approach” which sets the institutional framework for the development of a co-operative sector but not a movement, Develtere (1996) argues that viable sectors must build on a solid social base and emerge from democratic movement action (pp2-3). Comparing the failure of state-sponsored Northern co-operatives for Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan (Dobbin, 1981; Quiring, 2004) to the success of Inuit co-operatives in northern Québec – powered by a vision of co-operatives as an expression of their movement for self-determination (Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson, 2001) – reinforces this point.

At the most basic level, a social movement approach thus suggests that co-operative formations depend on democratic achievements. For example, like other social movement involvements, co-operative governance can empower members to build democratic skills, knowledge, confidence and escalating capacities for movement activity and community development. Effectively cultivated and supported, democratic participation continuously pools human and social capital (Coleman, 1988) for movement renewal. In this conception, social movements are the prime movers of co-operative innovation because they provide academies for democratic action. Co-operative development thus understood is a social process of adult learning, communication and democratic development as well as a process of business building. As agencies of socialisation, movements help connect and cultivate activist recruits to co-operation and make membership meaningful. Without committed agency, of course, there can be no collective action.

Develtere (1996) thus argues that evolving co-operative movements are not simply a collection of profit-maximising businesses; their democratic, member-driven enterprises also reflect community needs and social purposes; and are embedded in a shifting field of economic and political relations. Their development paths may thus reflect the interests of patrons, aligned movements and the wider balance of social forces. Driven and defined by the associative activity of this wider social movement family, the co-operative field is thus shaped by democratic strivings as well as market forces or state policies.

## **Development or Degeneration?**

Building on Develtere (1996), Fairbairn, Bold, Fulton, Hammond Ketilson and Ish (1991), Staber (1992) and Cornforth, Thomas, Lewis and Spear (1988), this paper further argues that co-operative movements embody contradictions and that new co-operative launches must often be achieved against the inertial drag of maturing co-operatives. This paradox reflects the fact that maturing co-operative movements’ democratic and developmental commitments tend to atrophy with time (Maaniche in Crewe, 2001). Well-established “old co-ops” often abandon developmental movement missions in favour of limited, firm-focused business goals (Meister, 1974; Meister, 1984; Fairbairn et al, 1991). A “firm consciousness” can thus easily come to displace a “movement consciousness” (Greenberg, 1986). Individual co-operatives, sectors or whole movements may degenerate – turning their backs on co-operative education, neglecting emerging sectors, eschewing new campaigns and orphaning new co-operatives (Lévesque, 1990; Diamantopoulos, 2011; Diamantopoulos 2012). Taken to its logical conclusion, this market instrumentalism may eventually lead to outright demutualisations.

Sector diversity may also lead to intra-movement conflict, which illustrates these degenerative dynamics. For example, a well-established, male-dominated and farmer-led co-operative movement may not share the interests or ideological orientations of struggling, urban-based, young parent-led childcare co-operatives. This is a barrier to the emerging sector’s development and the renewal of the co-operative movement at large. Part of the challenge of co-operative development is thus reconciling the need to build strong, internally cohesive sector-movements which may have distinct – or even opposed – constituencies, interests, values and understandings while also finding common ground within a broader co-operative movement coalition. This sense of common cause and commitment also conditions the prospects for substantive mutuality and an effective development coalition.

A coherent conceptual approach to co-operative development must, therefore, not only recognise that successful “new co-op” campaigns are a function of the development, and

developmentalism, of a vital and unified co-operative movement. It must also recognise the opposite: that development is equally undermined by the degeneration of that movement into a stagnant and fragmented set of enterprise and sectoral silos; and that this militates against substantive movement mutuality (ie co-operation among co-operatives). Often this degeneration reflects the historic decline or withdrawal of 'parent movements' – such as farm, labour, nationalist, or socialist movements. Sometimes it reflects the changing power or orientation of patrons – such as the church, state, or universities. For this reason, it is argued, developing new co-operatives must be part of a larger social project to build developmental movements.

While degenerative tendencies may be inevitable they are not irreversible; mature co-operatives and movements can and do also regenerate. Through a process of community re-engagement and movement-wide renewal, development campaigns may be driven by emerging social movements but supported by regenerating older co-operatives and movement structures. This form of concerted action defines what is referred to below as a "developmental movement."

### **The developmental movement**

In this holistic approach, a developmental movement is characterised as much by the regeneration of traditional social movement family ties, "old co-ops," and old movement structures and strategies, as it is by outreach to new social movements and emerging sectors of "new co-ops." Co-operative development may benefit from supportive public policy and sound management but it necessarily depends on concerted movement action to transform the field, periodically realigning movement frames and resources to effectively focus on new opportunities and drive new campaigns.

Indeed, the social movement approach suggests a three-step development process of:

- 1) Building a cohesive mobilising network (including apex and sector federations, and state, social movement and research and education actors).
- 2) Developing detailed plans and proposals for building new sector infrastructure (including research and promotions capacity, technical and financial assistance and policy and programme support).
- 3) Targeting this modernised network and development infrastructure in strategic support of emerging needs, publics and opportunities.

Conversely, movement degeneration involves the progressive de-emphasis and marginalisation of these movement-building priorities.

Clearly, a social movement approach does not focus on the micro-level choices of individual co-operative founders or the macro-level choices of public policy makers. Instead, this framework approaches new co-operative formations in terms of cyclical meso-mobilisations – the historical development, degeneration and regeneration of the movement families within which co-operatives are nested. For the action-potential of individual firms, campaigns and sectors are all conditioned by their democratic embeddedness within these complex fields, and the development waves that result from carefully orchestrated campaigns. For example, new co-operative formations may be buoyed by strong ties to vital social movements, effective co-operative education programmes, strong moral and intellectual sanction from trusted peers or institutions, or substantial financial and technical assistance. Equally, they may be suppressed by their absence. A developmental movement must therefore build movement-wide vitality, aligning a shared development strategy and mission within a unifying new 'effort bargain' and 'master frame'. To achieve these democratic tasks, movement leaders must engage in an ongoing process of reflexive self-regulation and continuous improvement. Only in this way can the co-operative firm-model become competitive in emerging fields of economic need and opportunity and remain competitive in established fields. This is a particularly urgent problem in maturing movements where the movement commitments, social networks and organising skills of founding members have eroded while the organisational values, priorities and practices of managerial cadres have become more dominant.



## **The frozen movement**

The process of co-operative movement-building and modernisation is thus neither natural nor automatic. It must be actively negotiated, planned, facilitated and provided resources and guidance. It requires pooling of movement resources – human, organisational and financial. When it is not, development is deprived of the oxygen it needs to thrive. MacPherson (1987) argues the decline of broad-based initiatives in the English-speaking Canadian movement after 1960 illustrates the need for reflexive and proactive movements to recognise and reverse degenerative tendencies and rebuild basic development capacities. For, as Maaniche's generation and a half theory argues, co-operative movements tend to degenerate as the energy, ideology and influence of founding members dissipate over time. Maaniche argued the life cycle of a co-operative will be limited to only a generation and a half without educational interventions to revitalise the founding principles and energy of the co-operative (cited in Crewe, 2001: 12).

As institutional memory and movement know-how erodes in maturing co-operative sectors, so does the movement leadership's understanding of how new co-operatives develop. MacPherson thus suggests arrested co-operative development reflects a "loss of organising skills." Without educational interventions, our "understanding of how co-operative entrepreneurship, building on context and networks, worked in the past" simply decays (p10). As we forget how fundamentally things have changed, the benchmark for "normal" in co-operative development may also shift. Diamond (2005) refers to this perceptual trap as "landscape amnesia." Forgetting how development campaigns were actually organised by previous generations of activist co-operators, we are left with a "common-sense" notion that co-operatives develop more or less spontaneously.

Capturing new opportunities and responding to new needs in changing conditions often thus requires an 'unfreezing' of mature movement structures. This implies the need to recruit a new generation of co-operative proponents and organisers; less obviously, it also suggests the continual adaptation and reinvention of founding development coalitions and interpretive communities. Coalition-building is a key and complex task that often involves matching diverse interests; fund-raising; establishing, refashioning, or renewing movement ties; articulating or rearticulating cultural meanings and attachments; and creating new models or entering new sectors of opportunity. Co-operative formations thus depend on a complex web of associational activity as well as the typical market metrics that apply to all firms.

## **'Associational intelligence'**

Rather than placing our faith in the "invisible hand" of the market to automatically allocate investment profitably, co-operative development requires that we look instead to what George Keen called the "associative intelligence" (cited in MacPherson, 1973: 28) of popular movements. Substantive 'modernisation' thus involves placing an emphasis on democratic movement dialogue and reflexivity rather than simply mimicking corporate practice or falling back on routine and tradition (Giddens, 1990). For, it is active, democratic and strategic social intervention in economic life that drives reflexive movement modernisation, including the periodic re-pooling and re-tasking of mutualist capital. Movement modernisation requires the same kind of sustained, focused and serious attention given to business modernisation. It also requires the organising know-how to work across movement networks and build new development coalitions. As Develtere (1996) emphasises, movement leadership and the conciliatory role of social movement entrepreneurs, in particular, play a key role.

## **Business Co-operation or Social Co-operation?**

Like the developmental and competitive models adopted by different states (Mackintosh, 1993), co-operative movement organisations (CMO) and state structures also adopt varied approaches to co-operative development. As Hoyt (in Fairbairn, 2004) argues, public policies may range from destructive efforts to suppress co-operative development to neutral, supportive, participating, or controlling policies. Like these state orientations, different movement

orientations are also of significant consequence for support to new co-operatives. They often constitute the terrain on which movement renewal is won or lost. While each movement has its own – often mixed and contradictory – character, a similar ideal typology can help place actual movements on a developmental continuum between the actively entrepreneurial or ‘developmental movement,’ on the one hand, and the developmentally passive or ‘frozen movement,’ on the other.

At one extreme, developmental sector-movements build structures, traditions and identities that are committed to actively interventionist models of support. They frequently proclaim movement values and principles and lead planned campaigns to drive new co-operative formation. In the developmental approach, CMOs invest significant time, resources and energy in unifying diverse sectors, and stimulating, coordinating and supporting an expanding movement. Developing new co-operatives is a priority but movement entrepreneurship is also committed to building an integrated community of mutually supportive organisations, to fostering social movement ties, and to developing grassroots leadership. A developmental approach is most likely to emerge among younger, emerging sectors with a less entrenched managerial class. They express the democratic ethos of more active, idealistic members with first hand development needs and organising experience. For these first generation co-operative founders, co-operation is a cause and campaigns are a priority.

By contrast, the structures, traditions and identities of ‘frozen’ sector-movements are more entrepreneurially passive, favouring a merely regulatory role for organs of movement governance. The notion of a frozen movement builds on Briscoe’s (in Fairbairn et al, 1991) characterisation of “frozen co-operatives.” Adopting single bottom-line business practices at the expense of democratic involvements, Briscoe and Develtere (1996) both argue that “traders” (Develtere calls them “managers”) are frequently the dominant faction in well-established co-operatives. They typically encourage movement activists and idealists to adopt a more realistic approach, based on pragmatic accommodation to market conditions. They tend to occupy managerial ranks and therefore have direct control over operational decisions, the shaping of organisational culture and the provision of information and options to the board. Due to this strategic structural position traders often influence recruitment, nomination and selection to the board. By attracting like-minded traders to the board, senior management can gain further influence over the membership-side of the organisation. Likewise, a “composition effect” (Giddens, 1986) may develop in the life of the movement overall. As individual co-operatives gradually recruit more business-minded directors, shift toward less movement-based organisational cultures and increasingly delegate ‘traders’ to movement bodies, the balance of power also shifts from activist-idealists to the trader-managers. Like the degeneration of maturing individual co-operatives, issues at the CMO level also become increasingly framed in the narrower, more short-term and operational terms of business co-operation. Business modernisation of the sector may proceed apace and short-term business vitality may improve, but movement goals and values are increasingly marginalised. As social movement ties fray and membership becomes less meaningful, co-operation’s long-range social viability may also be compromised.

By default, traders embrace a laissez-faire model, letting the market decide whether and how co-operative proponents emerge, and allowing new co-operatives to “sink or swim” on their own merits. In this hands-off approach, frozen CMOs confine their role to that of a trade association for established sector interests; do not take an active entrepreneurial role in fostering new co-operative development; and do not act to restrain the dissolution of movement ties, cohesion and co-operative identity in the face of sector fragmentation and market-driven pragmatism. This frozen movement frame is more likely to express the business ethos of movements dominated by more mature sectors, with more passive memberships, and more deeply entrenched managerial leadership – focused on the technical goals of efficiency, growth and cost-containment.

From this perspective, the likelihood that a movement will adopt a developmental orientation largely depends on its historical evolution, including the degree of mature sector dominance

over the co-operative field, on the one hand, and the success of democratic movement currents in sustaining a developmental culture, on the other. In other words, developmentalism is inversely related to the rise of managerialism and directly related to democratic vitality.

Moreover, this is a dialectical relationship: movement degeneration will tend to undermine development action and a reduction in new co-operative development will reinforce movement decline in a vicious cycle; as development networks are de-mobilised, formation rates decline, the sector contracts, dues are lost to the CMO and the resources, networks, skills, know-how and organising confidence to effectively regenerate erode. Conversely, of course, development action will contribute to movement regeneration processes and regeneration will further strengthen new co-operative development in a virtuous spiral; as movement resources are mobilised, formation rates increase, the sector expands, dues are gained and development resources, networks, skills, know-how and ambition are strengthened.

Rather than taking a given state of co-operative movement relations, structures and priorities for granted – as natural, functional or inevitable – we may more fruitfully thus treat them as products of social choice – often the outcome of a struggle between competing interests and conceptions. In fact, the intellectual, cultural and political shift implied by moving from a frozen to a developmental movement orientation might be usefully compared to the struggle between business unionism and social unionism in the labour movement.

The co-operative and labour movements face similar dilemmas of democratic degeneration, and thus face similar strategic choices. For labour, this dilemma often manifests itself in a ‘bread and butter’ orientation – a narrow focus on collective bargaining and the immediate short-term interests of current members. Since this orientation tends to expose workers to broader public policy threats while alienating it from its natural allies, a rival orientation often emerges. Social unionism features a broader focus on also exercising political leadership to protect and advance workers’ interests in the policy arena. This includes reaching out to unorganised workers, supporting other social movement struggles and building broad-based social movement coalitions to advance a larger social project.

Like business unionism, business co-operation is rooted in a narrow focus on those firms’ operational priorities and the immediate or short-term interests of already established co-operatives and their members. Conversely, like social unionism, social co-operation is rooted in a broader focus on movement goals and extending the reach of co-operation to new constituencies and sectors – by developing new alliances, models and solutions to broader socio-economic and ecological problems. Not incidentally, while business-minded trade unionists and co-operators show little interest in each others’ affairs and resist co-involvements as a needless – even counter-productive – distraction from their primary goals, movement leaders who frame their struggles as inter-connected are more likely to seek out opportunities for joint-action (Neamtan, 2004; Beaulieu, 2009).

Finally, while there are clearly movement and inter-movement politics with which to contend, it is also important to resist the essentialist and moralising reflex to simply blame established or emerging sector leadership for co-operative movement degeneration. For degeneration is a “coordination failure” – or loss of movement memory and organising skills – rather than a failure of character or ethical standing; likewise regeneration is a social project that requires inclusive, movement-wide involvement, education and action to arrive at a mutually advantageous new “place to meet.” While a certain amount of self-seeking, shirking, prejudice and free-riding behaviour is to be found in any group, degeneration is fundamentally a structural problem and collective challenge rather than a moral failure. Indeed, historic inter-sectoral rivalries or social antipathies within movement circles – toward workers (or managers), youth (or boomers), women (or men) or urbanites (or farmers), to cite only a few possible fault-lines – represent non-antagonistic contradictions that pose important cultural barriers to good faith discussion, negotiation and the achievement of the synergistic relations on which a developmental movement is premised. Overcoming these internal divisions must therefore be a central focus in rebuilding inter-co-operation and viable development coalitions. Effective mutuality must be

firmly grounded in a democratic foundation of mutual respect and recognition of the primacy of shared co-operative values and common movement interests. Scapegoating, rivalry and hegemonistic division will not advance that agenda.

## **Pulling Together the Threads: Illustrating the Model**

The conversion of many of Québec's investor-owned ambulance firms to union-led worker ownership provides one illustration of the role of an extended social movement family in building a developmental movement. Without the mobilising leverage of the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (CSN) (Confederation of National Labour Unions), which was open to the co-operative model and to collaborating with the co-operative movement (and vice versa), it is very doubtful that individual groups of emergency medical services (EMS) workers would have been able or willing to adopt this strategy in 1988. Moreover, the CSN itself did not even come into existence as an independent, non-denominational federation until 1960 – an expression of that broad-based social movement known as the Quiet Revolution. By establishing a credit union in 1971, the CSN built its financial know-how and capacity to subsequently launch an in-house technical assistance unit for worker co-operatives in 1987 and a labour-sponsored investment fund in 1996. Over three and a half decades, the trade union's commitments to social unionism thus put in place important mechanisms for later adoption of this innovation by its EMS workers.

Also crucial to the ambulance service conversions was a parallel chain of policy innovations within the state apparatus. Under pressure from organised social movements including the co-operative, labour and community movements, these reforms in favour of a developmental state included forming a co-operatives branch in 1963; introducing co-operative development subsidies in 1976; creating a system of development groups and a crown corporation to finance co-operatives in 1979; creating an Act enabling the formation of worker shareholder co-operatives in 1983; and creating a network of regional development co-operatives and an enabling policy framework, including tax incentives for worker buy-outs, in 1985.

These parallel and inter-dependent innovation chains transformed the climate for co-operative conversion in Québec, overcoming barriers to subsequent innovation adoption. They transformed the structure and autonomy of the co-operative field, both supporting and stimulating development action. Coordinating these disparate elements into a coherent development effort rested on a mobilising network which aligned the CSN, the *Conseil québécois de la co-opération et de la mutualité* (CQCM) and the state. A series of conferences, summits and new institutions and networks helped integrate popular sector and state efforts. Through this process, all three main players broke with traditional roles. Labour abandoned its functional specialisation in collective bargaining, retooling to both bargain the co-operatives' service agreements with the state and provide them financial and technical assistance. The state adapted its procurement policies to allow – and encourage – the workers to bid on EMS contracts. Finally, the CQCM shifted from a focus on lobbying and service for established co-operatives to an increasingly aggressive commitment to new sector development (Vézina, 2001).

The ambulance service buy-outs are therefore cases of “contingent innovation decision making”, “choices to adopt or reject that can be made only after a prior innovation-decision” (Rogers, 1995: 30). In particular, the conversions depended on the CSN's technical assistance unit and solidarity finance fund. The CSN's move to establish these development mechanisms, in turn, was conditioned by two prior innovation decisions. The first was its involvement in the founding of its *caisse d'économie*, which later provided financing to emerging co-operatives and built the CSN leadership's confidence in increased economic development involvements. A 1983 move by its rival, the Québec Federation of Labour (QFL), to launch the Solidarity Fund, further reinforced its commitments to social finance innovation.

This campaign thus built on a long-range mobilisation that involved the state, labour movement and co-operative sector in a sustained campaign of social innovation. These social innovations

effectively defined the viability and even possibility of co-operative conversion in the ambulance sector. Buoyed by the rising tide of this concerted, multi-party mobilisation, a substantial share of Québec EMS services are now delivered by worker and worker-shareholder co-operatives.

## Conclusion: Movements Matter

This conversion drive illustrates the importance of social mobilisations to new co-operative development. They provide the well-springs of social innovation but neither the market nor the state can be relied on to deliver these mobilisations; it falls to organised movement campaigns to imagine, and then organise to plan, fight for and secure them. The prospects for new co-operative development thus rest on the strength, vitality and reflexivity of a developmental parent movement, or movements, and often the creation of social movement coalitions in which co-operators may not act as first movers, but as facilitators, junior partners or honest brokers instead.

Of course, the conceptual focus of the social movement approach on mobilising networks and movement cultures as the driving force of co-operative development also implies its opposite: a need to understand the nature and significance of degenerative pressures that frustrate movement aims and drive the entropic decline of movement organising skill, know-how, relationships and developmental commitments. The analysis and regeneration of movements which have fallen into decline – or are at risk of doing so – is the central problem of the developmental movement model.

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