

## Editorial

The journal again reflects a range of international perspectives on co-operation. There are theoretical and practically-oriented papers originating from Finland, Denmark, and Sweden, from China and the USA and, with the addition of the late Yair Levi's paper, also from Israel. The fact that the *Journal* is highly regarded internationally is to be welcomed and reflects recognition of the commitment to co-operative research and analysis emanating within the UK. The international focus of the *Journal* will be strengthened in the next edition which will contain papers entirely from Australia and New Zealand.

The academic contribution from Scandinavia is strong in this edition with papers submitted from Finland and, jointly, from Sweden and Denmark. Both papers examine theoretical approaches to co-operative management, but write in a way that has clear implications for managerial practice. Saksa, Jussila and Tuominen offer an analysis of institutional and competitive pressures faced by Finnish producer and marketing co-operatives. They draw on elements of institutional theories of organisation in order to explore the how managers of co-operatives can develop strategies to improve the position of co-operatives in the market-place. Jerker and Madsen reflect on the particular pressures of the cross-border mergers of co-operatives as they endeavour to complete in a global economy. The number of co-operative cross-border mergers is still limited, but the merger of MD Foods and Arla, the largest dairy co-operatives in Denmark and Sweden, has resulted in the creation of Arla Foods, now the second largest dairy co-operative in Europe. The authors offer some insightful practical comments on the process of co-operative merger and the role of CEOs, boards and the membership. The paper could prompt further research as the reality of cross-border mergers between co-operatives become more commonplace.

In his paper, Ratner equally aims to link theory to practice as he endeavours to articulate and explore, what he designates, a theory co-operativism, which he applies to co-operative management and practice. He

presents his theory as an '*activist programme for guiding organisations to promote high levels of co-operative behaviour*'. This theory is based on the experience of co-operation in the United States and claims to offer a comprehensive treatise that contributes to the social sciences, economics, philosophy, social policy, and conflict resolution. It is an adventurous, relevant and ambitious paper which could well provoke considerable interest and comment among co-operators worldwide.

The two shorter papers also have an international flavour. The Swoboda and Ruibin paper on China's rural credit co-operatives is particularly fascinating and relevant. Chinese rural credit co-operatives (RCCs) form the world's largest credit co-operative movement and serve an estimated 800 million Chinese members, most of them very poor farmers. The authors report on an assessment of the RCC sector that is being undertaken currently by the People's Bank of China and the World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU). As the paper explains, the future of RCCs is still somewhat uncertain but certainly is encouraging. Despite demutualisations, the co-operative ideal still persists in large parts of the country. With the support of the Chinese Government and WOCCU, the authors show how RCCs are developing into sustainable member-governed co-operatives which, properly established and managed, are still best placed to meet the needs of poor Chinese farmers for affordable credit.

The final short paper was written by the late Yair Levy for the International Conference on Co-operative Forms of Organisation, Reclaiming the Economy - the Role of Co-operative Enterprise, Ownership and Control, in Cardiff in 2006. It was given at the conference by Len Arthur in Yair's absence due to illness. Yair, who sadly died in August 2007, was a long standing co-operative researcher and member of the editorial board of this *Journal*. The *Journal* is honoured to publish Yair's paper in his memory and as his final contribution to the international co-operative research community. In the paper, he argues for a new research agenda around the notion of non-profit, particularly as

it applies to the co-operative sector. It is left to others to pick up the challenge of his research proposal.

Finally, may I commend the four book reviews to the readership as of particular and relevant interest to co-operators. They refer both to publications that concern the history of co-operation and others that present challenges for the future of co-operation and co-operative working. It is fascinating to see

how *ecovillages* clearly derive so much from co-operative traditions whilst, at the same time, demonstrate how to live in a more ecologically sound and sustainable way.

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