

Making Co-operative Promoters — 40 Years ICDC: Report on the degree course in Co-operative Economics and the Institute for Co-operation in Developing Countries (ICDC), University of Marburg, Germany

Edited by Hans-H. Münkner
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As the title of the book states, it is very much a report on the degree course offered at the University of Marburg. It includes a variety of supporting documentation, with about half of the book devoted to interviews and additional papers from former students. It offers the reader an introduction to the Institute for Co-operation in Developing Countries (ICDC) and the course and touches on a range of issues of relevance to co-operative education.

Münkner was closely involved in the activities of ICDC at the University of Marburg, from 1963 to 2000. He started as a lecturer and ended up the managing director of the Institute. The ICDC's activities during those years included co-ordinating a degree course in co-operative economics along with co-operative options for economics and business administration students, delivery of specialist programmes, and research and development work. The co-operative economics degree course ran from 1963 until 2002. This book provides a description and evaluation of the research and education work undertaken by the ICDC during the time that the course was running.

The introduction and chapter two provide a brief overview of the ICDC and the degree course. Chapter two starts by setting out the Institute's mission and tasks, goes on to outline the degree course, its structure and content, funding and support, and sets out the resulting achievements of students, academics and institute staff. The degree course incorporated subjects from business administration and economics as well as co-operative specific content on "the theory of co-operation and co-operative science" (p. 9). There is also a focus on areas of interest to students working in developing economies.

This first part of the book is relatively brief and, while providing a lot of information in just a few pages, it would have been interesting to read more about the co-operative specific course content and its fit with the other more mainstream business content. This could potentially have been developed further in subsequent chapters.

Chapter three, which makes up more than half of the book, is devoted to interviews with former students. There are twenty interviews with former students from various parts of the world including Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The interviews are in the form of written responses to questionnaires disseminated by the editor. Some information on the interviewees is included in the chapter along with the questions and interviewees' responses. A short summary at the end of the chapter picks out respondents' comments on several topics including: what impressed them, what they learnt, whether there is sufficient teaching and research on co-operative subjects, and what is needed. Chapter four provides further insights from two of

the interviewees in the form of short papers which, in different ways, consider aspects of the influence of the course on their own areas of interest. There is a lack of developed analysis of the interview quotes, although on the whole the students who responded had positive experiences.

Chapter five is based on an interview with Münkner. The interview explores, among other things: motives for offering the course, level of demand, the role of scholarships, the initial focus on students from Africa and the subsequent broadening out to incorporate other regions of the world, why the degree ended, the impact of the course, networking, and continuing collaborations. There are some interesting questions here which remain relevant to co-operative education. Issues concerning, for example, student demographics, the extent to which courses should be or are aligned with developing new co-operatives, enabling career development within the co-operative sector, enhancing and retaining skills in the sector, and ensuring course content stays relevant.

Chapter six is a paper by Münkner which provides examples of three different programmes: training for co-operative advisors for developing countries, the degree course in co-operative economics (also discussed in most of the rest of this book), and training for rural volunteers of an agricultural co-operative federation. The paper suggests a tension between the importance of long term investment in resources to deliver comprehensive training programmes to underpin sustainable development and the apparent reluctance of policy makers and planners to provide anything other than short term project funding. The suggestion is that increasingly funders are tending to limit strategic thinking and planning to no more than one budget cycle. The problem of short term, project based funding is something referred to across a range of literature. With organisations negotiating various pressures to achieve what are often very long term outcomes, within much shorter time scales and with limited and often narrowly focused funding.

Arguably there is more that could have been said on the nature of the co-operative specific course content, but perhaps that requires another book and possibly one that looks at a range of co-operative courses, their characteristics, successes, failures, lessons and so on. Those with a keen interest in co-operative education linked to economic development issues may find this a useful addition, offering a window on a university co-operative course that ran for nearly forty years.

The Reviewer

John Maddocks is a trustee of the UK Society for Co-operative Studies and is involved in research on co-operative accounting and reporting.