

The I.C.A. Project

by Sven Ake Böök

What are the relevant values and principles after some 150 years of Co-operative development? Are the old ones still good or do we have to change them? I am responsible for an ICA project about these kinds of issues, following up the resolution at the Stockholm Congress on "Basic Co-operative Values". I am just at the beginning of my work and this is a short presentation of the project

1. The Task

The leading issue of the project can briefly be worded like this: what are the basic Co-operative values for the future and what are the basic Co-operative principles against that background? The perspective must be global, as it is a main role for the ICA to make recommendations etc. about the values and the principles in this perspective. To be relevant this perspective must reflect the perspectives of important parts of the World Co-operative Movement.

This is not a true research project in the academic sense. I will try to use a combination of normative and positive approaches: The leading character of the project will be normative and it will result in a main report of estimations and judgments. On the other hand these will, as far as possible, be built on findings and empirical observations from Co-operators, Co-operative organisations and Co-operative research.

In fact, in order to emphasise the normative character, the final issue of the project should more correctly be worded like this: what should be the basic values for the future and what should be the basic Co-operative principles against that background?

2. Why this Follow-up Task?

As a research oriented person, I must stop for a while and consider the motives. because the motives tell something about the expected results. Why has the International Co-operative Movement, through the ICA, decided, to "search for its soul" now as it is poised at the threshold of a new century?

I have encountered the following motives in this starting up phase of the project:

Firstly, the Co-operative principles have more or less remained the same since the beginning. They are mainly connected to consumer Co-operatives and

credit Co-operatives based on the Rochdale and Raiffeisen values. Today the pattern of the World Co-operative Movement has changed, particularly since the 60s. New generations of Co-operators with new experiences have joined the movement. New Co-operatives and new types of Co-operatives are emerging and the main part of the World Co-operative Movement is not any longer located in Western Europe. Are these principles, and the values behind, still valid?

Secondly, there are the increasing problems of Co-operative identity, partly within the Co-operative Movement itself, partly in relation to the environment. What do we basically represent as Co-operative organisations? How could we explain the true character of Co-operative organisations, e.g. to the State, in order to get proper respect in conditions for development, in legislation, taxation and in measures of economic policy?

Thirdly, in adapting to the changing environment, the Co-operative organisations have experienced increasing difficulty in expressing and maintaining Co-operative values and principles. The Co-operative values and principles might even to some extent be regarded as too old in the contemporary society and as such even as undue restrictions and obstacles to an efficient performance.

Fourthly, the Co-operative organisations have felt and experienced, that they have to express themselves more clearly in order to engage more people, particularly young people for the Co-operative contribution to the future society. What are then the most important and relevant values for the Co-operative organisations to stress and to develop towards the year 2000?

These are important motives. I definitely consider it as crucial today to pay attention to the value issues. I believe that a consciousness about the basic Co-operative values and principles, and an agreement on them, are pre-requisites for good Co-operative performance.

3. Two Purposes

Against this background the project has two main purposes:

- a) To serve as a basis for discussion and review at the ICA Congress in Tokyo 1992 of Co-operative values and of the need to change the Co-operative principles, If the Congress decides there is a need to change the principles, the ICA Executive will need to make a further study on such changes for a presentation to the Congress in London in 1995.

- b) To initiate and encourage a process of consideration and development among the Co-operative organisations on how to apply Co-operative values and principles in order to improve Co-operative performance and Co-operative (economic) efficiency.

I will be assisted by an Advisory Committee with members appointed by the ICA Executive. This Committee will serve as a reference group to the project and the members are the following:

Philip Chilomo, Zambia
André Chomel, France
Dante Cracogna, Argentina
Morley Fletcher, Italy
Teruka Ishikua, Japan
Raija Itkonen, Finland

Janos Juhasz, Hungary
Alexander Krashenninikov, USSR
Dionysos Mavrogiannis, ILO
Hans Münkner, W. Germany
Ian McPherson, Canada
Lloyd Wilkinson, U.K.

In my work I will rely substantially on seminars, conferences, hearings and interviews in order to get a relevant and practical point of departure. And in this part of the work I hope to get help from the Advisory Committee, the ICA Specialised Committees and Working Parties and the ICA Regional Offices. Of course, I also hope for assistance from Co-operative organisations, interested Co-operators, Co-operative researchers and Co-operative research institutions.

4. Crucial Context

The project will highlight various views on the basic values, discuss problems of applications, search for agreements on the basic core of values, study the principles against this background and finally make recommendations in order to make the project practically relevant, I will initially endeavour to relate to problematic aspects of the Co-operative Movement. From my earlier experience and from my discussions with Co-operators I have selected some contexts, within which I plan to analyze the values and principles, with particular emphasis on the problems of applications. But I also want to collect and express the good examples for the future.

For the time being I have selected the following contexts:

- Types of Co-operative environments
- Capital formation
- Conditions for democracy, participation and mobilisation
- Co-operatives and the State
- Economic efficiency

- International co-operation
- Benefits for members and benefits for the society at large
- New areas of activity
- Value changes in society

I will try to highlight Co-operative values and principles within these contexts. I will try to find out the crucial problems from a "value and principle perspective". And I will estimate the needs to change, or at least to re-interpret the values, and to revise the principles.

As you will understand I feel humble before this task and I need all the help I can get. If you feel you can be of assistance please contact me or send relevant details to:

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The Author

SVEN AKE BÖÖK is Director of the I.C.A. Basic Values Project. Our good wishes to him are particularly fraternal - he has been chairman of the Swedish Society for Co-operative Studies for ten years.

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