

Book Reviews

Karin Hakelius, *Co-operative Values - Farmers' Co-operatives in the Minds of the Farmers*

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Economics, Box 7013 750 07 Uppsala, Sweden ISSN 1401-4076 ISRN SLU-AVH-23-SE

Åke Edén, *The Lever, Co-operative Development Attempts in Bangladesh (East Bengal) 1860-1980*

Department of Economic History, Gothenburg University, Box 720, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden ISBN 91-85196-45-2 ISSN 0072-5080

Both authors are members of the Swedish Society for Co-operative Studies and their work arises from their PhD studies.

The first is by Dr Karin Hakelius of Uppsala University and is entitled *Co-operative Values - Farmers' Co-operatives in the Minds of the Farmers*. Although based on a survey of Swedish agricultural members the study is likely to have significance to agricultural societies elsewhere and also to other kinds of co-operative. It provides the most recent study into how co-operative members view their societies and is also one of the most detailed of its kind.

Dr Hakelius's starting point was that most Swedish co-operative organisations were formed at the end of the 19th century or at the beginning of the 20th Century when their most commonly shared values were those of solidarity, democracy and fairness. The questions she posed were how far these still motivated today's co-operative members, or might there be a 'discrepancy between farmers' values and the co-operative organisations' attributes'. In attempting to answer these questions Dr Hakelius surveyed 2,134 Swedish co-operative farmers through a questionnaire initially tested on a group of 100 Swedish farmers and later on 1,000 co-operative farmers in Michigan in the USA.

Her thesis records the various stages of the research and records the results of the Swedish and American test surveys. It also includes the final questionnaire to Swedish farmers, and

the statistical results of the survey based upon it. One of Dr Hakelius's conclusions was that '... younger farmers seem to be less willing to adhere to those co-operative values dealing with solidarity and democracy. These farmers tend to concentrate on their own financial situation.' In placing a higher value on economic efficiency, they differed from older co-operative members who still emphasised the value of self-help. Moreover, in putting greater emphasis on the economic side of their membership, younger members '... do not hesitate to sometimes trade with other actors on the market'. Older members, on the other hand, tended to be more loyal to their societies and more ready than younger members to attend meetings and to take up democratic positions.

It seems likely that such generational differences exist in agricultural co-operatives elsewhere, and also in other kinds of co-operative. Dr Hakelius has raised the question of how such differences could impact on the forms that co-operatives take. She has also provided a methodology that could well be relevant beyond Swedish borders.

The second Swedish thesis is by Dr Åke Edén of Gothenburg University. Its title is *The Lever; Co-operative Development Attempts in Bangladesh (East Bengal) 1860-1980*. Dr Edén explains that the 'lever' is a frequently used symbol of the co-operative movement. It was also the title of a popular Swedish co-operative film distributed to co-operative educationists throughout the world. He therefore chose the symbol of the 'lever' in his investigation of how far the implementation of co-operative methods and ideas as a tool, or lever, had contributed to the relief of the rural poor. Unlike Dr Hakelius's thesis which is in English, much of Dr Edén's text is in Swedish. There is likely to be a full English translation in the future. In the meantime it is possible to grasp the salient points from parts that are already in English, including the summary.

Dr. Edén's thesis is significant for two main reasons. One is its topicality and the fact that it will be relevant to two on-going studies. One is a history of the Indian Co-operative Movement which is being prepared by the Indian Society in Studies in Co-operation to help celebrate the Movement's centenary in 2004. The other study is that which our own Society is undertaking into Co-operatives under British Colonial Administration 1900-

1960. This will be complementary to the Indian study. Written from the British perspective, it will also trace co-operative developments in other British colonies and assess how far these shaped co-operatives in the post-colonial period.

The second reason why Dr Edén's study is significant is that it helps to explain why the export of western style co-operatives to the Indian sub-continent failed to be as successful as hoped. One reason he suggests was that, from 'time immemorial' there had been indigenous experiments in 'a variety of co-operative principles and forms'. Dr Edén studies and records these and then compares them with the attempts to introduce Western European forms of co-operation from the 1860s to 1980. As far as Bangladesh was concerned, he concludes that 'The western co-operative concepts are hardly applicable to the co-operative reality of Bangladesh; this is one of the reasons for the failure of co-operative development aid projects . . .'.

The hallmark of a good thesis is that it is based on original research, or approaches a well known subject from a new direction. Both these theses expand co-operative knowledge and illumine our past and our present. British co-operators will benefit from studying the work of their Swedish fellow co-operators.

Dr Rita Rhodes

**Eds Andreas Eisen and Konrad Hagedorn,
*Co-operatives in Central and Eastern Europe - Self-help in Structural Change.***

**Edition Sigma, Rainer Bohn Verlag, Berlin, 1998.
ISBN 3-89494-644-9**

Co-operatives in Central and Eastern Europe - Self-help in Structural Change is the title of a new (1998) book, edited by Andreas Eisen and Konrad Hagedorn, both of whom work at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Located in the former East Berlin and surrounded by the former East Germany, the Humboldt University has established an institute for research on co-operatives with special respect to co-operatives in the Eastern and Central European Countries.

The book contains twelve chapters describing the conditions for and trends of co-operative development in one country each. Furthermore, four prominent researchers on co-operatives (Johann Brazda, Tode Todev, Juhani Laurinkari, and Hans-H. Münkner) have written one analytical chapter each, with comparisons between a few countries.

The root of the book is a conference on co-operatives in the former state socialist countries, that was held in Berlin in 1996. Some of the presentations have been selected and translated into English. Hence, the articles have previously (1997) been published in the conference proceedings book *Genossenschaften in Mittel- und Osteuropa*.

The topic of the book is highly relevant in these years. History shows that co-operative organisations have been very instrumental in the development of the market economies in the western world. Through co-operatives, disadvantaged groups have succeeded to defend their rights and secure their welfare. By alleviating many badly functioning market mechanisms, the co-operative organisations have contributed to more effective market economies. In the present transformation of the former communist countries, one would expect co-operative organisations to play a similar role. This is the point of departure for the book.

According to the book, co-operative organisations in the east and central European countries have, however, not (yet) fulfilled

this role. The reputation of the co-operatives in the old regimes was very poor, and still today, the concept of co-operation has no positive connotations. The problems of the co-operatives is also aggravated by the invasion of domestic as well as international competitors on most markets. In the transition from command economies to market economies, economic gaps evolve when the economic actors are given large freedom to act, at the same time as the legal and institutional frameworks have not yet been developed. As a result, large groups of citizens may suffer from scrupulous businessmen, having insufficient possibilities to get legal protection. It seems, however, that today's market forces are stronger and hence, more difficult to correct, compared to in the childhood of co-operatives in the western countries. Today, it is more difficult for a group of individuals to take action on badly functioning markets. Perhaps this is an explanation to the tardy development of co-operative movements in the countries under study.

Because of the large differences between these countries it is very difficult to grasp the co-operative development in them. The differences between the countries are huge when it comes to tradition, economy, legislation and institutions. While some countries, such as Estonia and Poland, are already negotiating for membership in the European Union, others like Belorussia and Ukraine have not yet become true market economies. This heterogeneity makes it also impossible to summarise the book. Against this background it is also understandable that the theoretical contributions from the book are limited. The book is written for a broad circle of readers with special interest in either co-operative organisations or in the former communist countries.

The greatest strength of the book is that it presents a wealth of information, in depth as well as overviews. By far most of the articles are written by native citizens of the country they write about. And the authors are recognised authorities on co-operative organisations. All in all, this book represents a rich source for valuable information about a contemporary topic.

Jerker Nilsson