

Globalization and the "cooperative difference"

by

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Abstract

Opposing logics support the global capital market and cooperatives. The first, in its pursuit of maximum gain, tends to detach itself from non-economic considerations. The latter, in their pursuit of maximum member and community servicing, have to subordinate the economic to social and other meta-economic considerations if they want to preserve their difference and *raison d'être*. For the purpose of this paper and drawing on Polanyi, the separateness of the economic from other institutions of society will be denoted as disembeddedness and its contrary as embeddedness. The disembeddedness/embeddedness phenomenon can be observed at the micro and macro level and is viewed here as strongly related to the "cooperative difference". It is argued that: 1) the greater the degree of disembeddedness in a cooperative, the less it is likely to differ from non-cooperative organizations, mainly investor owned firms (IOFs); 2) the greater the degree of embeddedness in a cooperative, the more it is likely to differ from other organizations; 3) the greater the degree of global disembeddedness, the greater the capacity of mainstream economics to weaken the cooperatives; 4) the greater the degree of global embeddedness, the greater the cooperatives' capacity for asserting and defending their difference. These propositions are put to the test of empirical experiences.

Be more cooperative to be more competitive

by
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Abstract

This paper discusses how the current institutional framework and market competition affect the strategies of Latin American agricultural cooperative's businesses. Faced with the trend of organizational isomorphism, it is important to deepen our understanding of the values and principles of cooperatives, incorporating them into competitive strategies, relying on cooperation, trust and loyalty as coordinating forces of economic activities and as sources of competitive difference in the agricultural system.

The Cooperative Movement and the Agricultural Cooperatives in the Context of Globalization

by
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Abstract

Following a short review of the major trends that characterize the globalization process at the economic, political-ideological and socio-cultural levels, this article takes a look at the rationality of agricultural cooperatives and reflects on the effects of globalization. Understanding globalization as a dialectical process, my reflection will draw on the effects of globalization on cooperatives, in particular agricultural ones. I am referring to the threats, challenges and opportunities brought about by globalization. This means evaluating the threats and opportunities that result essentially from increased competition, trade liberalization and changes in the role of the Nation-state. The article ends with some conclusive remarks.

Solidary Economy: Challenges of Cooperative Agrarian Reform in Brazil

by

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Abstract

A concrete alternative economy has been developing in Brazil since the end of the 1980s, which involves both country and city workers and is based on the structuring of solidary economic enterprises (SEE), in which self-developed popular cooperatives stand out. This alternative economy has brought with it new challenges, among them the need for ongoing technical, administrative and political education as a fundamental element in the search for equilibrium between social and economic issues. This article analyses the Solidary Economy in Brazil, particularly from the standpoint of the challenges faced by the cooperative agrarian reform of the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST). Starting from the historical process in which landless workers began to organize, agrarian cooperation has become an important tool for the workers' settlements. On the other hand, the reality of the capitalist economy has obliged cooperative workers to adopt administrative tools that contribute toward the social and economic viability of their enterprises. The backdrop to this issue is the need to deepen the debate about the possibility of conceiving SEEs that are capable of survival and growth in the capitalist economy, incorporating technical progress, rationalizing productive and work organization, bringing social benefits to their members, and acting as the political force behind the workers' struggles, as well as ensuring democratic and autonomous administration.

Virtual Cooperatives in Brazil and the Globalization Process

by
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Abstract

Agricultural cooperatives in Brazil, as in other countries, develop through vertical integration in order to promote industrialization of the agricultural product and to aggregate the value of agricultural commodities. The vertical integration strategy was a predominant business planning adopted by Brazilian agricultural cooperatives in the 1980s. It was responsible for greater assets in cooperatives, larger agro industrial plants, and higher debt structure. Nowadays, it is possible to observe new agro industrial cooperative organizations in Brazil called "Virtual Cooperatives". These virtual organizations do not possess significant assets or industrial plants, but represent a network that has a particular business strategy in the markets. In order to discuss virtual cooperatives, this paper describes the agricultural cooperatives in Brazil, the globalization process, and the institutional environment that has given rise to virtual cooperatives. The paper also describes the nature of a virtual cooperative, and the advantages and disadvantages when these organizations are compared to traditional agro industrial cooperatives. Two different virtual cooperative case studies are presented.

Agricultural Cooperatives and Dilemmas of Survival

by

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Abstract

The context of agricultural cooperatives is undergoing major change with the development of various food and information monitoring technologies. Large multi-nationals have moved to take advantage of these developments with the construction of agri-food chains. These chains are being facilitated via various mergers, acquisitions, and alliances, with the power, and deepening power of such deep-pocket organizations as Cargill, ADM, and ConAgra. Cooperatives have been integrated into these chains for their core competencies, generally for their supply functions, and capacity to handle primary commodities. These direct links to the farmers serve as markets for biotechnology innovations, and as a source of raw material for later processing. Agricultural cooperatives in general are not well suited to compete with these giants, given they are highly specialized at the first handler level. However some cooperatives are able to enter the competition along the lines of multi-nationals competition, i.e. non-price competition in product differentiation, branding, advertising, research and capacity expansion. Farmland, Gold Kist, AGP, Land O'Lakes and Growmark are examples. The cost of these positionings is to shift these organizations toward positions that are characteristically less cooperative, and more bureaucratic, and more top down, though likely more efficient, and with greater market penetration.

Basic Dilemmas of Utopia in Comparative Perspective

by
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Abstract

This paper is intended to consider, at the light of the recent transformation of the Israeli kibbutz, the variety of social experiments which similarly illustrate the Proudhonian-Comtian-Durkheimian emphases on cooperation and collective solidarity, within societies dominated by market economy, the philosophy of progress and, nowadays especially, processes of globalization. These forms draw their interest from the fact that they put this vision to empirical test which shows the tensions, difficulties, and potentialities involved. We will especially focus on the kibbutz, the Mondragón complex of cooperatives and the American communes which show, beyond the differences of context and the singularity of each specific type, how far collectivism may concur with individualism, and solidarity and egalitarianism with social differentiation and conflict. On the other hand, the comparative analysis also reveals, in varying respects and at diverse degrees, similar concerns, dilemmas and tensions. As a rule, the tension between the enterprise and the community principles has gradually witnessed a predominance of the former over the latter and this “embourgeoisement” leads to confrontations between values and aspirations as well as between callings and interests. The collective’s survival, it appears, is endangered both when it is threatened by insolvency - ipso facto - and when it is successful - as it risks then to be torn apart by divergent interests which impend on its moral purposes. Above all, this comparative analysis breaks the naivety of those who fully participate in this era of globalization and still perceive utopia beyond technocracy.