

Co-operative Research Inventory Project

META-ANALYSIS: CONCENTRATIONS AND GAPS IN ENGLISH- AND FRENCH-LANGUAGE RESEARCH ON CO-OPERATIVES

by Brett Fairbairn

January 2004

Introduction

This document was prepared at the request of the Co-operatives Secretariat, Government of Canada, in order to provide a framework for comparing the inventories of French- and English-language literature surveyed in the Co-operative Research Inventory Project. What follows is based on the *Overview of English-Language Literature*, prepared in November 2003 primarily by Carol Shepstone with assistance from others at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives and at the British Columbia Institute of Co-operative Studies, and the *Inventaire des publications en langue française sur les coopératives 1993-2003* completed in December 2003 by Marie Bouchard and her collaborators at CIRIEC and CRISES.

This meta-analysis has three parts. The introduction provides a kind of executive summary drawn from the succeeding sections. Following that, the main body provides tabular comparisons of observations about co-operative research in the French- and English-language project reports. The tables are followed by brief textual comments that mirror what is in the introductory summary. Finally, there are, in the conclusion, a few reflections about the nature of research and its application to co-operative development.

The following sections use the same categories and terms as are used in the main English- and French-language reports. As described in those publications, the categories are based on themes of interest identified by the Co-operatives Secretariat in connection with its Co-operative Development Initiative. Readers wishing more precise information should consult the corresponding sections of those two documents.

Adding Value to Agriculture. The literature related to co-operatives and Adding Value to Agriculture is extensive but uneven. Agricultural co-operatives are the best-documented form of co-operatives, especially from the point of view of economic studies. This pertains, above all, to studies of agricultural co-op sectors, competitive pressures, capitalization, and (in English) New Generation Co-operatives. With this said, little of the literature focuses on noneconomic analyses, even basic methodologies such as analytical case studies of recent successes and failures. Also, little research is

actually focused on issues of added value, either in the conventional economic sense of vertical integration and processing, or in the more innovative sense of co-operative added value in serving distinctive member needs. There is room for new research on possible roles of co-operatives on adding value in relation to food safety, food quality, and compliance; on innovation, particularly in leadership and management; and on member commitment. Focusing on such issues may provide new insights into issues studied so far from particular points of view, such as capitalization.

The French- and English-language literatures are similar in many of their concentrations and weaknesses, but there are some differences. The English-language literature on agricultural co-ops includes a wide array of U.S. agricultural economics analyses; French-language literature is more descriptive and more European in origins and focus. In both cases, there is little specifically about Canada. The French literature includes many discussions specific to the dairy and financial sectors; in English, there are some dairy studies, but studies of the agricultural role of financial co-operatives are not apparent. On the other hand, New Generation Co-operatives have been greatly studied in English but hardly at all in French; and the international literature in English has more mention of the role of co-ops in global causes and environmental sustainability, though is still a new and not very well-developed area.

Health and Home Care. In both French and English communities, there seems to be some growing interest in the role of co-operatives in health services and home care; yet the research base is extraordinarily thin. There are scattered studies from around the world, yet no systematic national overviews, especially for Canada. Much research needs to be done of existing co-ops, their relation to the health systems around them, and their connection to public policy. In English, clinics and health services are better-studied than is co-operative home care, about which almost no published information appears to exist. In terms of specific topics, there seems to be considerable need for research to deal with devolution of rural and remote healthcare, challenges in service to marginalized communities in urban areas, and the need for home care by growing elderly populations.

Aboriginal Communities. The literature on Aboriginal communities and co-ops is scant, though unlike the health and social-services area there is now a foundation of recent Canadian work on which to build. Much of the research to date has been built around case studies. Large gaps exist in both French and English concerning policy and regulatory environments, international comparisons, urban CED and Aboriginal co-ops, resource management, outcome evaluation, social and cultural dimensions of member engagement, and gender — to name only the shortcomings identified by the various authors. Specific, promising topics for further research include membership and identity, self-government agendas, and Band-operated businesses, and the implications of each of these for co-operatives. Barriers to co-operative development, including regulatory issues, lack of knowledge of co-ops, and lack of support organizations, have also been little researched so far.

Local Economic and Social Development. There is expansive literature related to local economic and social development, which is, however, very uneven in its applicability and

relevance to co-operatives. To assist with this large and somewhat amorphous body of work, the analysis in this project has been broken down into numerous sub-themes and sub-categories. There is considerable asymmetry between the French and English literature in the sense that much relevant francophone research is oriented around the newer concept of social economy, while much anglophone research remains concerned with the slightly older concept of community economic development or CED, about which there is a vast body of American research. In English there appears to be more relevant research on community leadership and social capital, and on rural revitalization; in French there is more on social and workforce integration, the role of financial co-operatives, housing co-operatives, antipoverty campaigns, social-economy associations, and the like.

General gaps identified by the authors include rigorous studies of the social impact of co-operatives, statistically or on local economies; the hybridization of market and nonmarket logics in co-ops; longevity and reasons for success and failure; the significance of regional or multi-co-operative systems or networks; possibilities for rural service co-ops; the role of social cohesion in enterprise success; and the relations of co-ops to public-policy frameworks. Urban economic development appears to be an underexamined area, although it was not singled out by the Co-operatives Secretariat for separate analysis in the Co-operative Research Inventory project. There is considerable potential for further research concerning the role of social cohesion in co-operatives, the application of co-operative models for alternatives to public service delivery, and innovative forms of co-operatives as well as learning from co-operative-like organizations. Regulatory, legal, and funding barriers may need research, particularly for certain kinds of co-operatives. The ways in which co-operative development is or may be lodged within broader social economy (French) or CED (English) may need examination. Important new areas of research — with little published in either official language — include social innovation, service for hard-to-reach communities, and integration of immigrants in and through co-operatives. In French, there is considerable research related to some of these areas in terms of the roles of financial co-operatives, of the social economy sector, and of workforce integration, as already noted. The rapidly developing francophone literature on multistakeholder or solidarity co-operatives has no counterpart in the English language.

There are a few studies of environmentally related co-ops, including in forestry, energy, fisheries, small-scale recycling, transportation, and community-supported agriculture, but this literature is scant and fragmentary in both French and English. There is a little bit more study, again in both languages, about adaptation of agriculture to environmental requirements and opportunities, and (on a general conceptual level) about co-ops and sustainable development.

Governance and Management. Numerous issues related to governance, management, strategy, and planning in co-operatives are examined in this section. There is a considerable body of published works, which, however, both the English- and French-language review teams found ultimately unsatisfactory in a variety of ways. In most subcategories, there is a notable lack of research focused on what is different or distinctive to co-operatives. The authors of the reports generally indicate a need for more

systematic examination of member commitment, member involvement, and leadership, and the role of these factors in co-operative innovation and success.

Concerning globalization, many studies in both languages have to do with general competitive pressures, necessary adaptations, and capitalization issues, especially in agricultural co-operatives. These comparatively well-researched topics contrast with research on other aspects of globalization, including the impact on service to members and co-operative democracy, the impact of international harmonization, the significance for co-ops of global social movements and international solidarity, and international transfers of co-operative knowledge, about all of which topics almost nothing has been published in either language. As in other categories, more has been published about financial co-operatives in French than in English.

Capitalization, as noted, is one of the most widely researched and written-about topics in relation to co-operatives in the last decade. The authors identified some specific gaps, including different capitalization needs of co-ops of different degrees of maturity and in different sectors; and the analysis of impact of legislation in international comparison.

The literature on co-operative development and endogenous funding is less well-developed. There are studies of agriculture and New Generation Co-ops, especially in English; and of social and co-operative housing, especially in French. Again, different needs of other sectors, and alternative approaches to investment and development, have not been much researched.

Co-operative Development. The French-language report, in particular, offers a few additional comments on research about co-operative development, while the English-language report summarizes opportunities and constraints identified within the other sections. A fair generalization is that co-op development, as a topic in and of itself — with both opportunities and limitations — has not been an explicit subject of much research. There may or may not be a need for more studies of legislation and start-up procedures, but there does seem to be a need, in both languages, for analytical studies of organizational and institutional factors, particularly in case studies.

Research Overview and Comparison by Themes

The purpose of the charts below is to highlight apparent “gaps” or thinly developed themes in the literature. Those that are identified explicitly by the authors of the two reports are underlined below: gap. Some areas are identified as new, meaning there is little research but it is recent and perhaps growing. Where the other report does not explicitly identify the same concentration or gap, but it can be tentatively inferred, this is flagged more in parentheses: (gap).

It should be kept in mind that this is a meta-analysis, meaning that the actual reports and indeed the underlying databases should be consulted to determine what research actually exists and to estimate its usefulness for any particular purpose. Also, the fact that “numerous studies” exist in a given area does not necessarily mean these serve all purposes and that no more are needed. The following provides a rough first guide only and should be seen in that light.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON
THEME: ADDING VALUE TO AGRICULTURE

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
<i>dynamic and sizeable literature; many relevant U.S. agricultural economics publications; many based on property rights analysis</i>	<i>general comments</i>	<i>mostly descriptive; many European publications and few Canadian ones; little specific literature on value added by co-ops</i>
a number of studies	sectoral profiles and information; statistical studies; comparisons of co-ops and IOFs	numerous studies
numerous studies (<u>recent, in-depth cases – gap</u>)	histories; case studies; studies of success factors	numerous studies
dairy – a number of studies; financial – (gap)	dairy co-ops, financial co-ops	a number of studies
numerous studies (<u>social-cultural change and farmers' roles – gap</u>)	democracy and co-op principles; problems of individualism, heterogeneity, and collective action	some studies
numerous studies (<u>implications for governance, leadership, compliance – gap</u>)	market challenges, competition, multinationals; adaptation of co-ops to structural change	mentioned in many studies
numerous studies (see also Governance-Capitalization below)	financing and capital	some studies (see also Governance-Capitalization below)
a number of studies	business strategies (holdings, joint ventures, alliances)	mentioned in many studies
a number of studies (see rural economic development)	role/impact of agricultural co-ops in local economic development	a number of studies (see rural economic development)
a number of studies	ecology, sustainable development, co-ops and social justice, resistance to globalization, urban and community agriculture	<u>new/gap</u>
(gap)	international trade (effect on agriculture; place of co-ops in public policy)	<u>gap</u>

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
<u>new</u> – some studies	“adding value” by focusing on distinct member needs rather than commodities	(gap)
<u>new</u> – some studies	organizational innovation, social factors, farmer motivations	(gap)
burgeoning literature	New Generation Co-ops	(gap – very few studies)
some studies	development opportunities and barriers	<u>gap</u> – very few studies (see Co-operative Development)

Comments. The literature related to co-operatives and Adding Value to Agriculture is extensive but uneven. Agricultural co-operatives are the best-documented form of co-operatives, especially from the point of view of economic studies. This pertains, above all, to studies of agricultural co-op sectors, competitive pressures, capitalization, and (in English) New Generation Co-operatives. With this said, little of the literature focuses on noneconomic analyses, even basic methodologies such as analytical case studies of recent successes and failures. Also, little research is actually focused on issues of added value, either in the conventional economic sense of vertical integration and processing, or in the more innovative sense of co-operative added value in serving distinctive member needs. There is room for new research on possible roles of co-operatives on adding value in relation to food safety, food quality, and compliance; on innovation, particularly in leadership and management; and on member commitment. Focusing on such issues may provide new insights into issues studied so far from particular points of view, such as capitalization.

The French- and English-language literatures are similar in many of their concentrations and weaknesses, but there are some differences. The English-language literature on agricultural co-ops includes a wide array of U.S. agricultural economics analyses; French-language literature is more descriptive and more European in origins and focus. In both cases, there is little specifically about Canada. The French literature includes many discussions specific to the dairy and financial sectors; in English, there are some dairy studies, but studies of the agricultural role of financial co-operatives are not apparent. On the other hand, New Generation Co-operatives have been greatly studied in English but hardly at all in French; and the international literature in English has more mention of the role of co-ops in global causes and environmental sustainability, though is still a new and not very well-developed area.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON
THEME: ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND
HOME CARE

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
<i>relatively little research, but interest may be growing. Canadian-specific literature is relatively well-developed on clinics, but not on home care. "More gaps than literature."</i>	<i>general comments</i>	<i>few publications overall</i>
a number of studies, particularly of health centres/clinics (<u>home care – gap</u>)	studies of various co-ops and their situations in Canada and elsewhere; case studies	a number of studies
<u>gap</u>	systematic national overviews	<u>gap</u>
numerous studies (<u>home care – gap</u>)	response of co-ops to disengagement of the state; role in public healthcare systems	a number of studies
<u>gap</u>	effects on co-ops of changing sectoral structures and institutions; relation of co-ops to community governance	<u>gap</u>
a number of studies	practically oriented information on start-up and development	(gap?)

Comments. In both French and English communities, there seems to be some growing interest in the role of co-operatives in health services and home care; yet the research base is extraordinarily thin. There are scattered studies from around the world, yet no systematic national overviews, especially for Canada. Much research needs to be done of existing co-ops, their relation to the health systems around them, and their connection to public policy. In English, clinics and health services are better-studied than is co-operative home care, about which almost no published information appears to exist. In terms of specific topics, there seems to be considerable need for research to deal with devolution of rural and remote healthcare, challenges in service to marginalized communities in urban areas, and the need for home care by growing elderly populations.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON**THEME: DEVELOPMENT OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES**

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
<i>thin and scattered; 1960s-70s research and recent resurgence</i>	<i>general comments</i>	<i>very few documents exist on this subject; the whole area is a gap</i>
some studies	suitability of co-ops for economic development and Aboriginal culture	some studies
a growing number of studies (particularly for the North)	social-economic profiles of co-ops; case studies	a small number of studies
<u>gap</u>	public-policy environment; impact of regulatory and legal frameworks	<u>gap</u>
<u>gap</u>	international comparisons	<u>gap</u>
some studies	urban community development and co-ops	(gap)
a number of studies, not all of which specifically mention co-ops	Aboriginal business development and entrepreneurship	(gap?)
some studies	collaborative resource management	(gap?)
<u>gap</u>	social auditing, outcome evaluation	(gap)
<u>gap</u>	diversity and identity – member engagement	(gap)
<u>gap</u>	gender	(gap)

Comments. The literature on Aboriginal communities and co-ops is scant, though unlike the health and social-services area there is now a foundation of recent Canadian work on which to build. Much of the research to date has been built around case studies. Large gaps exist in both French and English concerning policy and regulatory environments, international comparisons, urban CED and Aboriginal co-ops, resource management, outcome evaluation, social and cultural dimensions of member engagement, and gender — to name only the shortcomings identified by the various authors. Specific, promising topics for further research include membership and identity, self-government agendas, and Band-operated businesses, and the implications of each of these for co-operatives. Barriers to co-operative development, including regulatory issues, lack of knowledge of co-ops, and lack of support organizations, have also been little researched so far.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON**THEME: LOCAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
<i>large volume of literature, much of it practitioner-based: case studies, best practices, etc.</i>	<i>general comments</i>	<i>there are many publications in this general area, concentrated in a few of the subthemes</i>

— COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING —

numerous studies (CED)	community economic development (CED), esp. social impact	numerous studies (social economy)
	social economy – impact	
a number of studies (more studies of leadership needed)	general considerations of contributions of co-ops to membership, leadership, and social capital	(gap?)
(gap)	impact of financial co-ops on local economies	a number of studies
(gap)	social and workforce integration	a number of studies
(gap)	impact of co-op housing on various populations	a number of studies
(gap)	economic development, antipoverty campaigns	some studies
(gap?)	rigorous studies of social impact of co-ops; statistical studies	<u>gap</u>

— RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT —

numerous studies	rural revitalization and diversification through co-ops	(gap)
(gap)	impact of small co-ops and social-economy associations	numerous studies
(gap)	local impact of financial co-ops	a number of studies
a number of studies	role/impact of agricultural co-ops	a number of studies

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
(gap)	hybridization/market and nonmarket logics	<u>gap</u>
<u>gap</u>	longevity of co-ops, reasons for success/failure	(gap)
<u>gap</u>	rural service co-ops (see also health care and home care)	(a small number of studies)
some literature, growing	regional/multi-co-operative systems and networks	(gap?)
<u>gap</u>	role of social cohesion in enterprise success	(gap)
— URBAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT —		
<i>Urban economic development was not identified by the Co-operatives Secretariat as a theme of special interest. It is, however, a potential area for future exploration and new co-operative research. Marginalized urban populations (First Nations, youth, immigrants, people with disabilities, the economically disadvantaged) may be of particular interest. Many studies of CED or social economy are applicable to urban settings.</i>		
— COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS —		
limited research	communities using co-ops to address environmental problems	<u>gap</u>
some research	adaptation of agricultural production to environmental concerns (including ethanol, bio-diesel)	a few studies
some studies	sustainable development	a few studies
<u>gap</u> – a number of studies, but possibly growing interest	co-operative forestry management	(gap)
a few studies	energy co-operatives	(gap)
<u>gap</u> – some studies, but little about recent developments in Canada	fisheries, aquaculture	(gap)
<u>gap</u> – little research	small-scale energy, recycling, transport co-ops	(gap)
some studies (see also “Adding Value to Agriculture”)	community supported agriculture; community ag. and consumer co-ops	<u>gap</u>

— SOCIAL COHESION —

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
<u>new</u> – little research to date; relevant research on trust, association, identity	relationship between social cohesion and co-ops	<u>new</u>
(gap)	role of financial co-ops	numerous studies
(gap)	overall impact of social-economy sector, including co-ops	a number of studies
(gap?)	social and workforce integration	a number of studies

— SOCIAL INNOVATION IN CO-OPERATIVES —

numerous studies (many European)	new roles of co-ops in relation to private and public sectors; public services for marginalized communities	numerous studies
(gap)	new forms of financing	a few studies
(gap?)	new forms of work organization	a few studies
<u>gap</u> – few studies	multistakeholder or solidarity co-ops	numerous studies
(new/gap)	new forms of democracy and participation	some studies
(gap)	studies of macro social impact; longitudinal and global studies; appropriate evaluative tools	<u>gap</u>

— SERVICE DELIVERY (FOR THE HARD-TO-REACH) —

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
concentration/gap	topic	concentration/gap
numerous studies	co-ops as alternatives to public and private sectors; co-ops and disengagement by the state	numerous studies
(gap)	roles of co-ops in influencing policy and pioneering new approaches	<u>gap</u>
(gap)	impacts of decentralization; co-op responsibilities and the public interest	<u>gap</u>
a few studies	sectoral studies (health, home care, CED, rural development, financial co-operatives, child care)	(gap/few studies)

— INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS —

<u>gap</u> – a very small number of studies	integration through work or housing	a tiny number of studies; the whole area is a <u>gap</u>
a few studies	social cohesion in immigrant communities	(gap)

Comments. There is expansive literature related to local economic and social development, which is, however, very uneven in its applicability and relevance to co-operatives. To assist with this large and somewhat amorphous body of work, the analysis in this project has been broken down into numerous sub-themes and sub-categories. There is considerable asymmetry between the French and English literature in the sense that much relevant francophone research is oriented around the newer concept of social economy, while much anglophone research remains concerned with the slightly older concept of community economic development or CED, about which there is a vast body of American research. In English there appears to be more relevant research on community leadership and social capital, and on rural revitalization; in French there is more on social and workforce integration, the role of financial co-operatives, housing co-operatives, antipoverty campaigns, social-economy associations, and the like.

General gaps identified by the authors include rigorous studies of the social impact of co-operatives, statistically or on local economies; the hybridization of market and nonmarket logics in co-ops; longevity and reasons for success and failure; the significance of regional or multi-co-operative systems or networks; possibilities for rural service co-ops; the role of social cohesion in enterprise success; and the relations of co-ops to public-policy frameworks. Urban economic development appears to be an underexamined area, although it was not singled out by the Co-operatives Secretariat for separate analysis in the Co-operative Research Inventory project. There is considerable potential for further research concerning the role of social cohesion in co-operatives, the application of co-operative models for alternatives to public service delivery, and innovative forms of co-operatives as well as learning from co-operative-like organizations. Regulatory, legal, and funding barriers may need research, particularly for certain kinds of co-operatives. The ways in which co-operative development is or may be lodged within broader social economy (French) or CED (English) may need examination. Other new areas of research — with little published in either official language — include social innovation, service for hard-to-reach communities, and integration of immigrants in and through co-operatives. In French, there is considerable research related to some of these areas in terms of the roles of financial co-operatives, of the social economy sector, and of workforce integration, as already noted. The rapidly developing francophone literature on multistakeholder or solidarity co-operatives has no counterpart in the English language.

There are a few studies of environmentally related co-ops, including in forestry, energy, fisheries, small-scale recycling, transportation, and community-supported agriculture, but this literature is scant and fragmentary in both French and English. There is a little bit more study, again in both languages, about adaptation of agriculture to environmental requirements and opportunities, and (on a general conceptual level) about co-ops and sustainable development.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON
THEME: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
<i>much sector-specific literature or studies of responses to globalization, but overall “disappointing”</i>	<i>general comments</i>	<i>there are numerous publications in this area</i>
— GLOBALIZATION —		
numerous studies	globalization, competitive pressure, markets, impact on co-ops (general)	numerous studies
<u>gap</u>	distinct co-op responses, impact on service to members, on democracy and co-op principles	gap/some studies
numerous studies (see below)	financing and capital	numerous studies (see below)
(gap?)	financial co-ops	a number of studies
(gap)	management	a number of studies
(gap)	statistical analyses	a number of studies
(gap)	international integration: harmonization of regulations – impact	<u>gap</u>
(gap)	impacts on social (non-market-oriented) co-ops	<u>gap</u>
(gap)	effect on co-ops of new global social movements, international solidarity	<u>gap</u>
<u>gap</u>	international transfer and adaptation of co-op models	<u>gap</u>
— CAPITALIZATION —		
a number of studies	capitalization problems in co-ops, esp. agricultural	a few studies
a number of studies	conversion, demutualization, public offerings	(gap?)

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
(gap?)	capitalization in banking and insurance co-ops	a few studies
(gap)	different capitalization issues of new vs. mature co-op sectors	<u>gap</u>
(gap)	capitalization in socially oriented sectors; role of public policy and the state	<u>gap</u>
(gap)	impact of legislation; international comparisons	<u>gap</u>
— CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT & ENDOGENOUS FUNDING —		
concentration/gap	topic	concentration/gap
some studies (see above)	general financing and capitalization	numerous studies
(gap)	social/co-op housing	a number of studies
some studies (see Adding Value to Agriculture)	agriculture	a very small number of studies
<u>gap</u>	special development needs of new vs. old sectors	<u>gap</u>
<u>gap</u> (see also Worker Co-ops, below)	mechanisms for institutional investors (e.g. pension or mutual funds) to support co-op development; tax incentives	<u>gap</u>
some studies	in New Generation Co-ops	(gap)
<u>gap</u>	CED and new co-op development	(gap)

— CO-OP MODEL & ADAPTATION TO GLOBALIZATION —

Little specific research was found in this area. Again, studies of capitalization changes, especially in agricultural co-operatives, predominate. Other issues have not been researched to any notable degree.

— GOVERNANCE —

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
some studies	director responsibilities and liabilities in co-ops	(gap?)
<u>gap</u>	role of co-operative boards and members	(gap?)
<u>gap</u>	in-depth case studies of governance	(gap/some studies)

— STRATEGIC PLANNING —

numerous studies, as above	finance, capital; globalization; competition, markets	numerous studies
(gap?)	institutional features, ideology, environment, organizational change in co-ops	a number of studies
(gap)	strategic planning and co-operative identity	some studies
(gap)	alliances, networks, federations	some studies
(gap?)	human resources	some studies
(gap)	distinct character of planning and management in co-ops	<u>gap</u> – underdeveloped despite the large size of the literature

— WORKER CO-OPS & ENTERPRISE CONVERSION —

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
numerous studies — often of particular sectors and regulatory contexts	management, finance, and capitalization; viability as compared to IOFs	a number of studies — different models, studies of sectors and enterprises
numerous studies	participation, co-op principles, democracy	some studies
(gap?)	legal matters	some studies
<u>gap</u>	explicit studies of enterprise conversions to co-ops	<u>gap</u>
a number of studies	worker co-ops in marginalized communities and declining industries	(gap?)

Comments. Numerous issues related to governance, management, strategy, and planning in co-operatives are examined in this section. There is a considerable body of published works, which, however, both the English- and French-language review teams found ultimately unsatisfactory in a variety of ways. In most subcategories, there is a notable lack of research focused on what is different or distinctive to co-operatives. The authors of the reports generally indicate a need for more systematic examination of member commitment, member involvement, and leadership, and the role of these factors in co-operative innovation and success.

Concerning globalization, many studies in both languages have to do with general competitive pressures, necessary adaptations, and capitalization issues, especially in agricultural co-operatives. These comparatively well-researched topics contrast with research on other aspects of globalization, including the impact on service to members and co-operative democracy, the impact of international harmonization, the significance for co-ops of global social movements and international solidarity, and international transfers of co-operative knowledge, about all of which topics almost nothing has been published in either language. As in other categories, more has been published about financial co-operatives in French than in English.

Capitalization, as noted, is one of the most widely researched and written-about topics in relation to co-operatives in the last decade. The authors identified some specific gaps, including different capitalization needs of co-ops of different degrees of maturity and in different sectors; and the analysis of impact of legislation in international comparison.

The literature on co-operative development and endogenous funding is less well-developed. There are studies of agriculture and New Generation Co-ops, especially in English; and of social and co-operative housing, especially in French. Again, different needs of other sectors, and alternative approaches to investment and development, have not been much researched.

— OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITS FOR CO-OP DEVELOPMENT—

English-Language Research	Topic Area	French-Language Research
(a number of publications)	guides to legislation and start-up	numerous studies
(some studies?)	studies of organizational and institutional limitations	a number of studies
(a number of studies)	case studies of the development of individual co-ops	a number of studies

Comments. The French-language report, in particular, offers a few additional comments on research about co-operative development, while the English-language report summarizes opportunities and constraints identified within the other sections. A fair generalization is that co-op development, as a topic in and of itself — with both opportunities and limitations — has not been an explicit subject of much research. There may or may not be a need for more studies of legislation and start-up procedures, but there does seem to be a need, in both languages, for analytical studies of organizational and institutional factors, particularly in case studies.

Conclusion

The preceding summaries and comparisons of the reports on the French- and English-language literature have highlighted a number of concentrations and gaps. It seems apparent that some of the broad areas identified as interests by the Co-operatives Secretariat are very weak in terms of existing research. These include the following:

- health and home care co-ops — there is some research on clinics in Canada, providing a foundation for a well-developed literature, but there is no overview; and there is very little research on home care, on the relationship of co-ops to sectoral institutions and policy, and other important questions.
- Aboriginal communities and co-ops — foundational work has been done but much more is needed
- community responses to environmental problems — only scattered and suggestive research has been done
- social innovation in co-operatives — little exists except the studies in French of multistakeholder or solidarity co-ops
- service delivery for the hard-to-reach
- co-ops and immigrant communities

By contrast, broad areas such as agriculture, local economic development, management, globalization, and capitalization have extensive literatures associated with them, though not always well-focused on distinctive aspects of co-operatives.

There are also a few more specific, crosscutting areas identified by the review teams under more than one heading. These include the following important themes for new or needed research:

- role of membership in enterprise success
- what is distinct about how co-operatives achieve economic success and what is similar to other forms of enterprise
- the importance of membership and leadership in co-operative innovation
- rigorous studies of social and economic impacts of co-operatives on their memberships and communities
- relation between co-ops and the logics of membership communities on one hand and markets or public-policy régimes on the other
- the significance of social cohesion
- relationship between new social and global movements and possibilities for co-operative development: for example, environmental issues, global justice issues
- learning from international examples, including learning from examples in developing countries

Some of the observations by the inventory teams have implications for methodologies:

- analyses that provide broad views of institutional structures, members, and their interactions with their local and market environments have typically been done through case studies
- detailed evaluations of impacts and effectiveness have often been done by statistical means
- the importance of co-operative members and the relevance of needed research to their interests suggests dissemination strategies and participatory action-research methodologies need to be built in

All three of the preceding types of methodologies are likely needed.

A final point concerns different types and uses of research. It may be important for researchers and research funders to consider carefully the merits of different varieties of research, and to be clear about which kinds are most useful for different purposes.

The complete research inventory rates indexed documents under the headings of “Research Implications”, “Practice Implications”, and “Readability”, which together provide some indication of the audiences for which each item may be appropriate. “Research Implications” might be important for researchers and students and for co-op leaders in higher-level education programs. “Practice Implications” are more important for those concerned with development and application. “Readability” makes documents more suitable for broad audiences such as general employees, members, and students.

Such a classification is only preliminary and does not substitute for a full appreciation of the diversity of what is denoted by “research.” Indeed, one of the most important questions raised in this project concerns the understanding of research, and the need for a dialogue among researchers, policy-makers, co-op leaders, development practitioners and others about what research is for and why different kinds are conducted.

I would suggest that, in addition to the thematic classifications and the ratings used in the inventory database, that it would be helpful for this wider discussion if we conceptualized several different types of co-operative research:

Conceptual Research is the basic and most fundamental kind. It deals with “how we think about” co-operatives. It may define new models or kinds of co-operative structures, or new ways of thinking about old ones — new terms, new goals, new kinds of intellectual tools. The distinguishing feature of such research is the creation of something new, of a new intellectual construction. An example would be the theoretical conceptualization of the idea of social auditing, what it is and why organizations might conduct it. Such a conceptualization is necessary for people to understand the idea, as a prior step to their applying, implementing, or modifying it within particular sectors or organizations. Conceptual research is inherently creative. It is often conducted in connection with a university environment as part of the “job” of academics, but it need not occur only there. Reflections by visionary leaders and practitioners often amount to

conceptual research. This kind of research is especially useful for leaders and doers who are also thinkers, who are looking for new ideas or who are involved in advanced formal education programs; for thoughtful practitioners, publicists, and educators — people whose job is to explain co-ops to their publics; and for other students and researchers. In the long run, we can't do without conceptual research if we are to avoid intellectual stagnation; but if it is the only thing that is on the shelf, some leaders, developers, and students will be frustrated by not being able to find more specific and detailed research to meet their needs.

Conceptual/Empirical Research combines new models or thinking with study of at least some illustrative real-life examples. The idea of such research is to bootstrap thinking in a certain area by looking at what is “out there” in dynamic or leading communities, and combining this with reflections, analysis, and/or recommendations about “what is needed” or what is possible. The Co-operatives Secretariat has opened up the discussion of Aboriginal co-operative development in Canada by funding a project of this type at the national level in 2001. Business case studies also often follow this approach. Such studies invite further elaboration and application of the concepts in additional case studies as well as in follow-up or related conceptual studies. For example, in the instance just mentioned, analysis of selected country-wide case studies opens up theoretical issues about the nature of and differences among Aboriginal cultures and identities, Aboriginal leadership and governance systems, and co-operative-like business models in Aboriginal communities. These theoretical concerns are complemented by a search for additional or different case studies. While this example uses case-study methodologies, a similar process can occur with theoretically informed statistical or other investigations. Such research thus goes back and forth between the inductive and the deductive. It seems often to be conducted either by academics who have a community or sector orientation or by community-based consultants who have academic training. Because it involves real examples or data, this research helps publicize and disseminate existing or embryonic models, and can give practical ideas to leaders and developers even at a local level. It is also suited to education programs.

Empirical Research as denoted here is an application of existing concepts, theories, or frameworks without much emphasis on reflecting back and modifying the concept or theory in use. Such research provides new information but not necessarily new ideas: it is used when we already know “why” and “where” to look and just want to know “what” or “how much” is out there. It is valued particularly when the information involved is seen to be “hard” or reliable. Examples might include market research, financial analyses, feasibility studies, surveys, and so on. Another type of example might include self-published histories of individual co-operatives. When academics conduct such research, it is usually tied back to some conceptual research from which the model or research tool in question ultimately came. However, research of similar type is widely done by consultants and firms simply for the sake of obtaining the information itself. Such research may be contextually limited in that the firm conducting or commissioning it may not want it to be widely shared, and is certainly chronologically limited in that the value of such information is dependent on its currentness. Such research therefore may need to be frequently repeated or duplicated in different contexts. It may not ever be

widely published, which means it will also not be widely reported or indexed in databases such as the ones created for the Co-operative Research Inventory project.

Technical Research or information is a compilation of known or understood ideas and data for purposes of easy practical application. Start-up manuals, technical guides to legislation, training manuals, sample plans or templates seem to be good examples. In relation to the preceding kinds of research, these can be seen as dissemination or popularization tools for concepts and information originated and refined in other kinds of research activities. Such research is generally not used in education but may be used in training. It often comes from development agencies or government offices.

These four categories are of course only one way of classifying research, but they are presented here to help provide a framework for ongoing discussion about different kinds of research roles and needs. Within any of the “gaps” identified in this meta-analysis, all four types of research may be needed, or perhaps it will be apparent that some are needed at certain stages more than others. Each type of research implies differing sorts of partnerships among universities, governments, research funding programs, co-operatives, and community-based consultants, researchers, trainers, developers, or practitioners.

Comments and questions to:

Brett Fairbairn, Professor of History
Director, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
University of Saskatchewan
101 Diefenbaker Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 5B8 CANADA

tel. (306) 966-8505 fax (306) 966-8517
e-mail brett.fairbairn@usask.ca
website <http://coop-studies.usask.ca>