La Lega: The Making of a Successful Network of Co-operatives

by

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Abstract

This is a study of the Italian co-operative enterprises associated to La Lega Nazionale delle Co-operative e Mutue (National League of Co-operatives and Mutual Aid Societies), with particular attention devoted to studying the co-operatives established in the region of Emilia Romagna where La Lega is most developed. The major objective is to examine how these co-operatives have managed to flourish despite the poor survival record in other countries with a market economy, proving that a form of enterprise different to capitalist and State enterprises can survive and grow in a market economy which operates under a Liberal Democratic State.

A historical overview of the co-operative movement in the western world is presented together with a comparative study of the co-operative sector in the United Kingdom and Mondragon. It examines the reasons for establishing co-operatives and identifies the factors which have led to their failure and to their success. It also analyses the factors that have hindered cooperative development and canvases the means of overcoming them.

Italian cooperatives have succeeded by integrating their operations within the wider economy and by representing their interests to the State. This has involved organising different levels of support structures which improved their economic competitiveness. Dealing with the State was assisted by acting through La Lega and by tapping the support of political parties. This brought public support, favourable legislation and access to a variety of public resources. The specific fragmented character of the Italian State will be examined and an explanation will be given to explain its support of cooperatives.

In Italy La Lega's cooperatives have managed to succeed by identifying and capitalising on the opportunities offered by the market and the specific character of the Italian State.
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**

Aims and Significance  
Hypothesis and Approach  
The Research  
Chapter Outline

**Chapter 1 The Failed Alternative?**

What is a Co-operative?  
The Six Principles of the International Co-operative Alliance  
Forms of Co-operatives  
Comparison with Private Enterprises  
Britain and Mondragon: A Comparative Analysis  
The British Experience  
The Case of Mondragon  
Comparison Between Mondragon and Britain  
Co-operative Development in the Rest of the Western World  
Plywood Co-operatives  
Worker Capitalism  
Summary

**Chapter 2 Co-operative Development: Problems and Solutions**

Problems of Co-operative Development  
Co-operative Formation - The Entrepreneurial Problem  
Finance  
Management  
Internal Limits to Growth  
Place of Co-operatives in the Economy  
Constraints on Takeovers
Discrimination

Limits and Validity of the Discussion on Problems Faced by Co-operatives

Conclusion

Chapter 3  La Lega, an Historical Account: 1850-1992

The Birth of Co-operatives 1850-1900

    Early Years
    Ideologies and Co-operatives
    The Birth of La Lega Nazionale delle Co-operative

The Golden Years 1900-1920

    A New Political Climate
    The Triple Alliance
    Co-operative Legislation
    Growth and Divisions Within the Co-operative Movement

The Dark Years: Fascist Italy 1921-1943

    Economic and Political Crisis and the Rise of Fascism
    Fascism and Co-operatives
    Violence
    Fascist Control
    Degeneration and Limitations Faced by Co-operatives
    Co-operatives as a Form of Consent and Interest Group Support.
    Surviving in a Totalitarian State

Rebirth of Co-operatives 1943-1947

    La Lega: Politics, Organisation and Size.
    Legal Recognition: “Article 45” and the Basevi Law.

The Cold War: Surviving Without Growth 1948-1962

    The Cold War and La Lega
    The Strategy of La Lega
    The Organisational Structure
    Problems Faced by Co-operatives
La Lega’s New Strategy  
114  
116  
Cultural Adaptation  
118  
Continuous Growth  
The State and Co-operatives  
124  
The Strategy, Organisational Structure and Culture of La Lega  
126  
Restructuring and Growth  
The Response by the State to Co-operative’s Needs  
136  
Conclusion  
143  
Chapter 4  La Lega: The Central Association  
146  
The Central Association  
147  
Territorial Structures  
147  
Sectoral Association  
160  
Conclusion  
162  
Chapter 5  The Consortia Network  
165  
What is a Consortium?  
A Consortia Typology  
Case Studies  
Case Study 1: Giglio - Local Enterprise Consortium  
Giglio’s Strategy in the 80s.  
Organisational Structure  
Recent Developments  
Is this a Form of Degeneration?  
Giglio, La Lega and the State  
Concluding Remarks  
Case Study 2: ACAM - A National Service Consortium  
ACAM in the 80s  
170  
171  
173  
174  
175  
177  
178
Finec
Banec
Local Co-operative Financial Institutions
Local Finance Companies
Sectoral Financial Companies
Local Banks
Conclusion
Relations with La Lega
Relations with the State
Overcoming the Problems

Chapter 7 Managing Change: Co-operatives and the Market

Methodology

Case Study 1: CMB, A Construction Co-operative

Strategy
Organisational Structure
Culture
Economic Evaluation of the Business Strategy
CMB, La Lega and the State
Summary

Case Study 2: Coop Emilia Veneto, A Consumer Co-operative

Strategy
Organisational Structure
Culture
Coop Emilia Veneto, La Lega and the State

Case Study 3: SACMI, an Industrial Co-operative

Strategy: Competition on a Global Scale
Organisational Structure
Culture
Sacmi, La Lega and the State
Summary

Case Study 4: Spepcoop, A Coop from the Health Sector

Strategy: Innovation and Diversification

Organisational Structure

Enterprise Culture

Spepcoop, La Lega and the State

Summary

Conclusion

A Comparative Analysis of the Case Studies

Co-operatives and La Lega

Co-operatives and the State

Overcoming Co-operative Problems

Chapter 8 The State and the Co-operative Sector

General Characteristics of the Italian State

Form of the State

Function of the State

Specific Characteristics of the Italian State

The Republican Constitution

Interventionist State

Political Parties and their Control of the State

The Decentralised State: the Regions and the Local Councils.

Summary on the Italian State

State - Co-operative Relation: 1945-1992

The Creation of a New State 1945-1947

The Cold War and a Hostile State: 1948-1962


Conclusion
Chapter 9 La Lega: a Solution to Co-operative Problems

The Main Features of La Lega

La Lega's System of Authority: Directors and Political Parties

Defining La Lega: a Movement, a System or a Network?

Limits Faced by La Lega

Recent Developments: Overcoming the Problems

Conclusion: La Lega in Perspective

Conclusion

Summary of the Thesis

Factors Contributing to the Success of La Lega

1. Legislation

2. La Lega’s Central Association: Territorial and Sectoral Associations

3. Consortia

4. Intersectoral Trade and Collaboration

5. Financial Support

6. Policy of Alliances

7. Large Co-operatives

8. Managing Change

9. The State

10. Culture

11. Political Factors

Original Contribution to the Field of Co-operative Studies

Implications for other Co-operative Movements

Wider Societal Implications

Concluding Remark

Glossary

Appendix

Appendix A

Information on Case Studies
Appendix B 387
Interviews 387
Appendix C 389
Registered Co-operatives in Italy 389
Appendix D 392
Exchange Rates 392

Bibliography 393
Primary Sources 393
Secondary Sources 400