Call for Papers – Special Issue of Organization

Worker’ Cooperatives as an organizational alternative: Challenges, achievements and promise in organizational governance and ownership

Deadline 28th February 2013

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Within the context of the present crisis, there is great interest in experimentation with alternative organizational forms which can both respond to the challenges of today’s economy and restore equilibrium through a renewed call to social values. In particular, worker ownership and governance are gaining attention in a variety of forms and regions. Worker-owned-and-governed cooperatives typically pursue both economic viability and strong forms of participation; further, they are closely tied to community economic and social development.

Seeing these multiple objectives as intertwined, compatible, and in fact necessary is central to the call for the 2012 United Nations’ International Year of the Cooperative, which seeks to highlight the contribution of cooperatives to social and economic development through generating employment, reducing poverty, and fostering social integration.

Perhaps the most famous contemporary case of worker cooperative organization which achieves the multiple goals described above is the Mondragon Cooperative Group (MCG), one of the largest, long-lived, and successful examples of workers’ owned organizations in the entire world. Mondragon has a remarkable record of financial success and the provision of sound and stable labour conditions. Founded in 1956, the Basque cooperatives now employ almost 100,000 members, are represented in more than a dozen countries, and are the focus of ongoing scrutiny, praise, and critique. While the well-known wage differential has grown somewhat over the years within the system, it remains quite narrow by almost any comparison, even when a number of top-level salaries that are pegged to the market are taken into account. Amidst the current economic downturn which has resulted in over 20% unemployment in Spain and approximately 13% in the Basque Country, the Mondragon co-ops have relied on their historic principles of democracy, equality, solidarity, and participation as fundamental parts of their management strategy. While 24% of Spanish companies have closed down during this severe recession, the MCG only had to close down one of the 120 cooperatives which form the group, and relocate the 35 workers into other companies. In fact, there is significant evidence of increased democratization in the FAGOR Group, the original industrial cooperatives and the heart of the system. For all these reasons,
now is an important moment for attention to the distinctive characteristics of these cooperatives as well as their lessons for other socially inspired management, organizational, and market models. The MCG represents but one case; however, given its rich history, diverse characteristics, encounters with globalization, and experimentation in new forms of participation now underway, it provides an extremely important point of reference in any comprehensive examination of worker cooperatives today.

This call for papers is open to research contributions and critical-theoretical analyses of alternative organizations and especially worker cooperatives. We are especially interested in nuanced assessments of the methodological, philosophical, socio-political and organizational principles and challenges of workers cooperatives within the broader context of so-called alternative organizations. This means that sound empirical and interpretive investigations in the pursuit of important critical questions are encouraged. Such assessments may include attention to the activities, performance, and extensions of this kind of alternative organizations. We welcome multidisciplinary contributions and those that take on different perspectives that seek to bridge case-level detail with broader socio-economic trends. In addition, papers presenting theoretical reflections and analyses of specific worker owned cooperatives worldwide (such as Mondragon) should manifest a comparative perspective even if they do not fully examine multiple cases. Analyses that seek to apply recent developments in democratic theory and in alternative economics are certainly appropriate. Overall, the set of papers in the special issue will illuminate the complexities and changes in worker cooperatives, as they face challenges and opportunities.

Examples of key themes include:

1. The organizational resources, structures, and dynamics allowing for social as well as economic resilience in worker cooperatives;

2. The changing roles of leadership in worker cooperatives: considering for example the interplay of various forms of leadership from charismatic to collaborative or group-based;

3. The capacity of and obstacles to the reinvention of democracy within cooperatives, including means to manage and solve conflicts between different goals, sectors, and constituencies (for example, concerning the relationship between worker-member-owners and temporary workers);

4. The relationships between cooperatives and organized labour, the State, and the larger financial system;

5. Maintaining cooperative values while facing crises of participation, identity, and shared ownership and decision making within a system undergoing international expansion.

Submission: Papers must be submitted electronically by 28th February 2013 to SAGETrack at http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/organization
Papers should be no more than 8,000 words, excluding references, and will be blind reviewed following the journal’s standard review process. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the guidelines published in *Organization* and on the journal’s website:

http://www.sagepub.com/journalsProdDesc.nav?level1=600&currTree=Subjects&catLevel1=&prodId=Journal200981

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