

PREFACE

This book represents an idea that has been put into practice and a gamble that has paid off. It is the result of an exchange of ideas that took place between Professor Monni and me when I was President of the Italian Co-operative Alliance and it uses the ‘traditional’ structure of a dictionary to present a series of ‘keywords’, with the aim of helping us to gain a greater understanding of co-operative enterprises. It has two aims: one is to present co-operation to a wide audience by clearly explaining its main characteristics and the other is to provide those who are already familiar with and interested in co-operation with new ways of interpreting and understanding a phenomenon that over a period of 170 years has spread to numerous different countries and fields.

In order to meet these aims, academics from various countries, representatives of international institutions, and members of the co-operative world have come together as a collective authorship. The array of themes explored reveals the very distinctive nature of the co-operative, leading us through the co-operative business model, its social and economic impact, its organizational structure, and its system of values. If we glance through the entries that represent co-operative enterprises – ranging from work and participation to safety and well-being, workers’ buyouts, control and governance, rural development and co-operative quality – we are confronted with an expressive and complex system whose key principle is yet refreshingly simple: that people play a central role.

The co-operative, as shown by both its historical evolution and by more recent developments, which have seen the model spreading to new areas of activity and organization, is at root a social infrastructure, a tool that allows people to find responses to their needs within a framework of shared responsibility, solidarity, and active participation. Co-operatives are a vital tool for implementing and affirming the socially important role of citizens as a fundamental part of economic and social growth. Such growth, especially given events and experiences of recent years, should no longer be the prerogative of two institutions – the state and the market – who, in a traditional approach, were chiefly, if not exclusively, assigned this task. Challenging this model and tradition, co-operatives are an opportunity for all those who want to play an active part in shaping the future of their own community.



This book is an important contribution to reflecting on and understanding co-operatives. It warrants our gratitude and attention and I hope you, as I have, enjoy reading it.

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