

**ICA CCR GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CONFERENCE**

Innovating in cooperative governance  
Governing cooperative innovation

10-13 July 2023, Leuven, Belgium

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**KU LEUVEN**

 **International  
Cooperative Alliance**  
Committee on Cooperative Research

 **HEC LIÈGE**  
Management School - Liège Université

**International Cooperative Alliance Committee on Cooperative Research  
Global and European Research Conference  
Call for abstracts and panel proposals**

The 2023 International Cooperative Alliance Committee on Cooperative Research (ICA CCR) Global and European Research Conference will deepen the link between innovation and cooperative governance.

Governance is one of the strong distinctive markers in the cooperative identity. As member-owned, democratically controlled and member-benefitting organizations, cooperatives are governed in a fundamentally different way than nonprofits, foundations or corporations: the users or beneficiaries from the cooperative operations decide on how to allocate and deploy resources as well as to use the production factors.

Member centrality in cooperative governance is also a strong trigger for both social and technological innovation. As they strive to answer the shared needs of their members, cooperatives must often adapt their activities to remain relevant. They also strive to find innovative ways to stimulate members' use of the cooperative and add value.

## Conference themes

### 1. Innovations in cooperative governance

Democratic governance is a key characteristic of cooperatives and a strong element in their identity. However, there is no single way to implement and practice democracy: member engagement, selection method of representatives, decision-making processes, etc. can vary greatly across cooperatives. Cooperatives are typically laboratories for social innovation (Novkovic, 2008) intending to stimulate democracy, such as by means of sociocracy (Zaunseder, 2022) or sortition as a selection method of representatives (Pek, 2021). Examples of research questions include: What are social innovations in cooperative governance? How do governance innovations contribute to cooperatives' economic and social performance? Do they improve the quality of decision-making? How do they influence the extent and forms of member participation? How do they ensure gender equality and better inclusiveness of non-dominant people or cultures in the governance of cooperatives? What are the organizational and institutional conditions for governance innovations to arise and be established? How can governance innovations be sustained throughout time and challenges? How do governance innovations question the statement on cooperative identity?

### 2. New technologies and cooperative governance

The use of new technologies in cooperatives can be a challenge and/or an opportunity for cooperatives (e.g., Bruque & Moyano, 2007; Giagnocavo et al., 2017). For instance, the Covid-related lock-down experienced around the world prevented members of cooperatives to gather physically and forced cooperatives to let the democratic governance live digitally (e.g., Arregi et al., 2022). While such information technology can reduce the participation cost for members, it also lowers the potential interaction among them and raises questions including: What impact did technology have on member engagement in governance? How does it influence the psychological ownership by members? How does the adoption of such information technology in governance influence the local anchoring of cooperatives?

### 3. New forms of cooperativism

Although the cooperative model is hundreds of years old, it keeps on reinventing itself to adjust to communities of persons' unmet needs (Whyman, 2012; Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010). Platform cooperatives and data cooperatives have emerged as new forms of cooperatives (Hartjono & Pentland, 2019; Schneider, 2018) among others to address shortcomings and negative effects of the changing nature of work (gig economy, digital nomadism, etc.) or imbalances in some sectors (such as agriculture) stemming from the way technologies have affected knowledge flows and power relations. The upsurge of multi-stakeholder cooperatives also reinvent cooperativism to conciliate diverging needs and expectations in favour of common good (e.g. uniting local farmers and consumers in food cooperatives). Questions for this theme include:

What are the contextual and institutional conditions that facilitate the emergence and the success of new cooperative forms? How are innovative cooperative forms governed and do they face specific challenges regarding governance? How does the cooperative movement and traditional cooperatives make sense of new forms of cooperativism, in particular regarding the cooperative identity statement and governance?

#### **4. Cooperatives innovating towards ecological sustainability**

The seventh cooperative principle of concern for community, introduced in 1995, has recently taken on much importance in the face of the needed changes to tackle sustainability issues such as climate change and the safeguarding of biodiversity. Cooperatives are often pioneering communities of practice that strive to fulfill their economic needs while internalizing externalities (Novkovic, 2008), resulting in lower environmental impact. In addition, their user-oriented governance lends itself to implementing sufficiency innovations in addition to the efficiency focus of traditional businesses (Pönkä, 2019). We have also seen the emergence of cooperatives to address the ecological preferences of citizens (e.g. renewable energy cooperatives, see Boon & Dieperinck, 2014). Potential questions raised by this theme include: How do cooperatives differ from corporations in innovating for sustainability? To what extent can cooperative governance act as a lever for sustainability? Which externalities do cooperatives internalize and how do they do so?

#### **5. Cooperatives, social innovation and civic wealth creation**

While cooperatives have traditionally focused on value creation for their members, an increasing number of cooperatives are (also) aiming for general interest and value for the common good, or civic wealth creation (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019), through social innovation (Bauwens & Defourny, 2017). This is reflected, for example, in cooperatives' contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (Diaz-Sarachaga & Ariza-Montes, 2022), including poverty alleviation and food security. Next to sustainability (see theme 4), previous research has also shown their positive impact on the creation of social capital in their environment (Saz-Gil et al., 2021) and on democracy (Carter, 2006), among other. How social innovation can be implemented and governed is also of particular importance for the Global South if SDG targets are to be attained (Tracey & Stott, 2017). This theme will cover questions such as: How do cooperatives trigger institutional change by developing and implementing social innovation? What are the enabling and constraining institutional factors in implementing social innovation and creating civic wealth? How can the impact of cooperatives be measured beyond member satisfaction? What social practices do cooperatives implement to create value and/or generate social change? How can cooperative governance facilitate civic wealth creation? How does context, in particular regarding the Global South, influence cooperative governance of social innovation?

#### **6. Resilience, crisis and innovations**

Cooperatives have been shown to be generally more resilient in times of crisis (Billiet et al., 2021; Birchall & Ketilson, 2009), thanks to their specific governance and focus on members. Cooperatives have also been found to emerge in response to certain crises, by offering an alternative to the system in crisis (Conill et al., 2012). As our world is facing an increasing number of crises that emerge at an increasing pace (housing, Covid, migration, climate change, food security, energy production and consumption, war, etc.), the potential role of cooperatives in addressing these crises is yet to be fully discovered. Questions dealt within this theme include: How are cooperatives affected by specific crises (e.g. Covid)? How are cooperatives initiating pioneering ways to address a crisis (e.g. housing, migration)? How do cooperatives transform a crisis into a window of opportunity? How can cooperatives participate in peacebuilding? Do these processes differ in the Global South, which often experiences crises in a more intense way or within a different institutional and/or cultural context?

## **7. Cooperatives in new sectors and developments in traditional sectors**

Cooperatives continue to be active in their ‘traditional’ sectors such as agriculture and food, housing, retail, or banking and insurance, sometimes embracing new challenges (e.g., smart agriculture, sustainable value-chains and short-supply chains, green and sustainable finance). In these sectors, we also observe the emergence of new, often multi-stakeholder, cooperatives that engage in a transition toward post-capitalism (Spicer & Kay, 2022). We also observe the rise of cooperative initiatives in traditionally non-profit sectors such as healthcare and social services (e.g. children day care centres, housing for people with disabilities, nursing homes for elderly) (Defourny & Nyssens, 2013). The ecological transition also generates new sectors such as circular economy, which seems to lend themselves to the development of cooperatives (Buch et al., 2021). While traditional cooperatives are often looking for ways to avoid mission drift and regain or strengthen their cooperative identity, many newly emerging are faced with economic struggles. Questions for this theme include: How do traditional or growing cooperatives readjust their cooperative identity and governance? Which innovative cooperative initiatives emerge in new sectors, and what are their challenges?

## **8. Innovations in cooperative law**

Cooperative law is not engraved in stone. It needs to adapt to the new developments in cooperativism and related concepts (Hagen, 2018). For instance, the legal identity of cooperatives is currently being challenged by the development of social (and solidarity) economy and social enterprises in legal corpus (Hiez, 2022). Also, there have been recent evolutions in international legislation on cooperatives (for example, at the EU level, at the ILO), sometimes targeting cooperatives directly (such as the International Labour Conference conclusions on Decent work and Social and solidarity economy adopted in 2022) or indirectly (e.g. in the discussion on Energy communities in the EU). Questions to be addressed in this theme include: How can legislation facilitate innovation in cooperative governance? How can we make sense of diverging legislation provisions at the international and national levels?

## 9. Cooperative education and training

While cooperatives have disappeared from economics textbooks in the second half of the twentieth century (Kalmi, 2007), we now observe a resurgence of courses dedicated to cooperatives. Teaching cooperatives have been suggested to participate in reinventing economics education to be more inclusive of racially marginalized communities (Dozono, 2022). Also, teaching the cooperative model has been demonstrated to offer a high pedagogical value for management education in that it can foster paradoxical thinking (Audebrand et al., 2016). Research questions in this theme include: What are innovative ways to teach cooperatives at various levels (from primary to higher education)? How do they fit in the current education offer, including initiatives such as service learning? What competences does cooperative education and training require and develop?

**While these themes constitute the backbone of the conference, they are not limiting, and we welcome other research-related cooperative-related topics.**

Abstracts and session proposals should be submitted on the platform that is accessible through the Conference website: <https://ica-ccr2023.com/>

The format of the **abstract** is the following:

- Title (maximum 20 words)
- Body of the abstract (maximum 1000 words, including references) that should follow the following structure: Background, Aims, Methods, Results and discussion, Contributions and implications, Key references
- Keywords (1 to 5)
- Theme(s) (select at most 2 themes)

The authors of the selected abstracts will be invited to develop them in full papers (maximum of 10,000 words, including references).

The format of **session proposals** is the following:

- Title of the proposed session (maximum 20 words)
- Description of the proposed session (maximum 1000 words) that should follow the following structure: Name and affiliation of the participants, Motivation for the session, Content of the session, Proposed format.
- Keywords (1 to 5)
- Theme(s) (select at most 2 themes)

We welcome session proposals taking the traditional form of panels but also encourage innovative session designs.

**Language:** English is the default language of the conference. Written content (abstract, session proposals, full papers, slides) must be in English.

**Important dates:**

Abstract and panel proposals submission period: 1 December 2022 - 31 January 2023

Notification of acceptance: 28 February 2023

Early-bird registration period: 1 February 2023 - 30 April 2023

Registration deadline: 31 May 2023

Full paper deadline: 15 June 2023

Young Scholar Event: 10 July 2023

Conference: 10-13 July 2023



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