



# CASC

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
STUDIES IN CO-OPERATION

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L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR  
LES ÉTUDES SUR LA COOPÉRATION

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## CASC NEWS

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Welcome to the Fall 2008 edition of the CASC Newsletter! This edition includes information on the CASC conference, an update from the CASC Board, and news from our members.

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### CONFERENCE UPDATE

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**Call for Papers** ► Submissions for the CASC call for papers are due on **January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009**. We invite English or French submissions from researchers, students, practitioners, and policy makers. Abstracts can be sent by email to [casc\\_pres@coopresearch.coop](mailto:casc_pres@coopresearch.coop) or by fax to 306-966-8517. This year's conference will be at Carleton University in Ottawa from May 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009. We will be celebrating our twenty-fifth anniversary as well as the hundredth anniversary of the Canadian Co-operative Association. For more information on the call for papers, go to [www.coopresearch.coop](http://www.coopresearch.coop).

**Invited Speakers** ► We are very pleased to announce that George Melnyk, Associate Professor at the University of Calgary and author of *The Search for Community: From Utopia to Cooperative Society*, will be delivering the CASC keynote address. This is scheduled to take place at our wine and cheese reception on May 27<sup>th</sup>. We are also delighted to announce that Carol Hunter, Executive Director of the Canadian Co-operative Association, will be speaking at our joint banquet with the Association for Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSER) on May 28<sup>th</sup>.

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### NEWS FROM THE BOARD

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**The CASC Secretariat** ► At the CASC AGM in June, Lou Hammond Ketilson from the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives offered to have the Centre underwrite the cost of a Secretariat for CASC. A formal proposal was made to the CASC board of directors in September, which was unanimously approved. The goal of the Secretariat is to maintain the organization's stability as board members change. It is responsible for tasks such as managing the member list, creating and maintaining a list of CASC friends, depositing member fees, keeping financial records up-to-date, and helping with the newsletter. This year, the Secretariat will also prepare a brief manual to help future program chairs plan the annual conference.

**Welcome, Zhao** ► Zhao Jun, a doctoral student at the University of Saskatchewan, has been hired to work for the CASC Secretariat. Zhao has a B.A. in agricultural economics from Nanjing Agricultural University, China, and a Master's in Public Policy from the National University of Singapore. He has also worked as a rural development specialist for projects funded by the World Bank, the EU, and CIDA. Zhao's doctoral research is on farmers' co-operatives in China.

## NEWS FROM THE BOARD (con't)

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**Board Committees ►** The board has divided up this year's CASC work so that it can be done by two different committees. The first is the **membership and dissemination committee**, chaired by Luc Thériault from the University of New Brunswick. This committee is working on ways to enhance communication among CASC members — the newsletter is one example, and the committee is currently testing a listserve. The committee will also present a proposal to CASC members at our 2009 annual meeting on other ways we can disseminate co-operative research and tools that our members have developed. Suggestions made at the 2008 conference session on “Who Are We and Where We Are Going” included a mid-year learning event, regional tele-learning events, a Canadian journal (possibly in collaboration with other societies), and a publication that bridges co-operative research with practice. The committee is exploring the strengths and weaknesses of all options, and will present a shortlist of possibilities for your feedback at the AGM.

The second committee is responsible for **conference planning**. This committee is chaired by Catherine Leviten-Reid at the University of Saskatchewan; Tanya Gracie at the Canadian Co-operative Association is this year's local arrangements co-ordinator.

**Joining CASC ►** Following an amendment made at our last AGM, individuals and institutions may now join CASC at any time of the year. The membership form is available on our web site at [coopresearch.coop](http://coopresearch.coop). Current benefits include receiving a subscription to the *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, a copy of our bi-annual newsletter, and announcements of interest (about conferences, new co-operative resources or initiatives, scholarships etc.) through the CASC e-mail list.



*CASC members at a wine and cheese reception at the meetings in Vancouver, June 2008. Photo courtesy Robin Puga and BC Institute of Co-operative Studies.*

## NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

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**New Book about Co-operatives and Workers Coming Soon ►** Papers presented at the Master of Management — Co-operatives and Credit Unions Symposium called *The Co-operative and Its Workers* will be soon published as a book by Fernwood Press. The Symposium was held in June 2006. The papers presented will be chapters in the book and the authors are a mix of academics and practitioners exploring the application of co-operative values and principles to the issues and practice of people management and development in co-operative businesses.

**New Book about the History of Co-operative Youth Education ►** Co-operative education has been important in the development of youth across Saskatchewan since the early 1920s. The first official Co-op School, held in 1928, laid the foundation for an incredibly successful series of co-operative education initiatives, which evolved into the Saskatchewan Co-operative Youth Program in 1970. This book celebrates eighty years of co-operative youth education in Saskatchewan, capturing the essence of the program and documenting its history, development, and achievements through archival research,

personal interviews, and information gleaned from internal SCA documents never before made public. This book is a collaborative project of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives (CSC) and the Saskatchewan Co-operative Association (SCA); authors are Chassidy Puchala and Breeann Heggie. The book includes seventy-five photographs, first-hand accounts from numerous personal interviews, and appendices of rare historical documents. It will soon be available for sale from the SCA (phone 306-244-3702), on loan from the CSC Library (phone 306-966-7917), or downloadable from the SCA and CSC websites ([www.sask.coop](http://www.sask.coop) or [www.usaskstudies.coop](http://www.usaskstudies.coop)).

**New Virtual Student Group on the Social Economy** ► A new virtual student group called the Social Economy Student Network (SESN) has been created and is attracting student members from across the country. This network developed out of the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships (CSERP) and is co-ordinated through the Canadian Social Economy Hub (CSEHub).

The SESN is for graduate, undergraduate and college students currently involved in, or interested in undertaking, research and/or study in the social economy. It is also for students who volunteer with and/or foresee future employment within the social economy. The goals and objectives of the SESN are to: foster a “global” informal learning, knowledge mobilization and information-sharing network; provide a setting in which to highlight and advance the diverse research of graduate, undergraduate and college students; showcase student-led initiatives in schools or the broader community; increase the visibility of the social economy in the academy; promote awareness of the social economy; and generate new knowledge, highlight creative ideas and stimulate broad dialogue regarding new areas of inquiry on the social economy.

Students interested in joining the SESN must visit the website and provide a university or college email address. The website is <http://socialeconomy.info>.

**Co-operatives in China** ► One of CASC’s student members is doing research on co-operatives in China. Zhao Jun describes this newly-formed co-op sector as follows: China’s *Farmers Professional Co-operative Law* was passed by the People’s Congress in November 2006 and came into effect in July 2007. Data shows that there are 80,000 of these co-operatives, which suggests that the model is popular, but the figures need to be interpreted with caution. A large number of them exist only on paper, which can be explained by the strong presence of government in forming co-ops in China. And there is an active debate in the country on what co-operative principles should be adhered to and promoted in order to distinguish co-operatives from investor-oriented firms (IOF). The co-op law allows leading enterprises to be members of farmers’ co-operatives; this means that many IOFs take a leading role in initiating and dominating farmers’ co-operatives so they can ensure an adequate supply of raw materials and maintain their power in the supply chain.



CASC members enjoying a seminar presentation at the meetings in Saskatoon, May 2007. Photo courtesy Robin Puga and BC Institute of Co-operative Studies.

### **ICA Research Committee SWOT Analysis**

► The ICA Research Committee is in the process of identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they relate to co-operative research and is interested in your thoughts on the research topics that should receive particular focus in future ICA research conferences. If you have any feedback you would like to provide, please contact Lou Hammond Ketilson, Committee Chair, at [hammondk@edwards.usask.ca](mailto:hammondk@edwards.usask.ca).

**New Study Offers a Portrait of Co-ops and Credit Unions in Atlantic Canada** ► The survey was administered in 2007 and yielded 296 usable responses across the region.

Overall, 80% of organizations responded to the English version of the questionnaire and 20% responded to the French version. Financial co-operatives (credit unions and *caisses populaires*) accounted for about 21% percent of responding organizations, housing co-operatives accounted for about 13%, and the remaining 66% was composed of a wide variety of “other co-operatives.”

It was found that the average “age-in-business” for these co-operatives was nearly 33 years. Generally, they are members of one or two federations or associations. The Nova Scotia Co-op Council and Co-op Atlantic in particular are among the dominant umbrella organizations for the sector in the region.

Co-operatives in Atlantic Canada have cumulatively well over half a million “members,” although some of these members are counted more than once as an individual can be a member in several co-operatives. Financial co-operatives tend to have the largest number of individual members.

Co-operatives in Atlantic Canada generally hold one AGM per year, plus at least one other meeting. The typical Board of Directors overseeing these organizations is composed of nine

or seven members. The Board of Directors typically meets 10 times a year. In about 24% of co-operatives, Board Members receive some form of compensation for their participation on the board. The use of volunteers (aside from board members) is found in about 55% of responding organizations.

The financial picture of the co-operatives in Atlantic Canada is extremely diversified and thus difficult to summarize. Using the median values, a “typical” co-operative in the region has revenues of about \$437,000 and expenditures of around \$343,000. But these figures are only aggregates and the ranges found for both revenues and expenditures are astounding. The number of paid employees also varies widely between co-operatives as the mode is 0, the median value is 3, and the average is 23.6! More interestingly, the cumulative number of employees (part-time and full-time) employed by the co-operatives responding to this survey totals more than 6,800.

Roughly between 40% and 60% of co-operatives are found to make voluntary contributions (the proportion varies with the type of contribution) to their local community. Collaborations with other co-operatives (i.e., within the co-op sector) is perhaps not as extensive as expected (22% of co-operatives report doing “a lot” of it and 26% report none of it) and the potential barriers preventing collaborations remain to be explored. As for the organization’s internal capacity (for things like planning, administration and IT), financial co-operatives were found to have a greater amount.

The survey shows that the internationally acknowledged Co-operative Principles are relatively well known in the sector (two thirds of co-operatives say that they are aware or very aware of them) but educating the public (as opposed to members) is probably one of the areas (with participation in public policy



development) where responding organizations are the least likely to fully live by these principles.

Finally, reporting practices of organizations are now extending relatively frequently into the reporting of social impacts (39%) but still relatively rarely into the reporting of environmental impacts (18%).

The conclusion stresses the importance for governments to pay increasing attention to the activities of co-operatives and to institute policies and regulations that are adapted to and helpful for the co-op sector in the region.

This study was done by Luc Thériault, Ron Skibbens, and Leslie Brown. It has been published as a working paper of the Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network and can be ordered from [seproject@msvu.ca](mailto:seproject@msvu.ca) for \$12.00.

It is also available electronically at <http://www.msvu.ca/socialeconomyatlantic/English/SN1E.asp>.

**Next Newsletter Deadline ►** The CASC newsletter is published twice a year. The next deadline is **March 1, 2009**. Submissions can be sent to [junzhao59@hotmail.com](mailto:junzhao59@hotmail.com).

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