

The Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives

Working for a Co-operative Economy

Occupy Workplace Democracy

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Working for a Co-operative Economy • www.valleyworker.org



Outline

- Brief Context of Co-op Movement
- Questions facing us
- The Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives
- Resources



The Co-operative Identity

Shared among all co-operatives

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

International Co-operative Alliance, 1995 • www.ica.coop



Co-operative Principles

Shared among all co-operatives

- Voluntary & Open Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Member Economic Participation
- Autonomy & Independence
- Education, Training & Information
- Co-operation Among Co-operatives
- Concern for Community



Co-operative Values

Shared among all co-operatives

- Self-Help
- Self-Responsibility
- Democracy
- Equality
- Equity

- Solidarity
- Honesty
- Openness
- Social Responsibility
- Caring for Others



Questions Facing Us

Why are co-ops useful models for OWS moving forward?

Why organize co-operatives into larger, meso-level, co-operative support organizations?





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Why are co-ops useful models for OWS moving forward?

- Co-ops root capital and employment in their communities
- Worker Co-ops emancipate labor
- Co-ops as multigenerational asset
- Co-ops apply a sustainable, democratically/consensus driven economic model for sustainable movements



A different economic model: serving members not profit, based on one member, one vote decision making

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Questions Facing Our Movement

Why organize co-operatives into larger, meso-level, co-operative support organizations?





What is a 'meso-level' organization?

intermediate level between micro-level units (co-ops) and macro-level institutions (government, parliament, central bank, international organizations, etc.), providing intermediation of interests and fulfilling a series of functional roles toward specific micro-level units...*

Roles including:

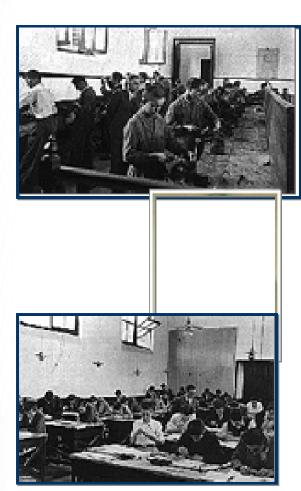
Development
Public policy
Promotion
Mutual trust
Democratic
conrol*

*From Bruno Roelants, Worker Co-operatives and Socio-Economic

Development: The Role of Meso-Level Institutions

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Model a) Mondragón Co-operative Corporation



- Located in Basque region, Spain
- Started in 1950s
- First co-op in 1956 (Started with 5 employees, now has 8,000)
- Premised on Import substitution and social entrepreneurship
- Started co-op bank with entrepreneurial division (1959)
- Utilized internal capital accounts for development and retirement
- \$22 Billion in sales, 103,700 workers, 264 co-ops in 2009



Model b) The Region of Emilia Romagna







- 4 million people
- 7,500+ co-ops (2/3 are worker co-ops)
- 30-40% of GDP
- 2 out 3 are members of co-ops
- Most co-ops per capita
- 10% employed by co-ops
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Co-op written law 3% of surplus of all co-ops paid to co-op development
- High standard of living



What can we learn from successful Co-op Complexes?

Shared Characteristics of International Co-operatives







- Clear co-op identity
- Co-op led movement
- Integrated investment in co-op development
- Focus on innovation, education & co-opreneurship
- Vision of a co-operative economy
- Co-op enterprise seen as a multigenerational asset



Valley Alliance of Worker Co-ops

Beginnings and Background





- Started in 2005 to continue energy and development of Eastern Conference for Workplace Democracy
- Part of a new generation of intercooperative leaders
- Poses interco-operation as necessary to answer these larger questions
- Vision and focus on cross sector co-op collaboration

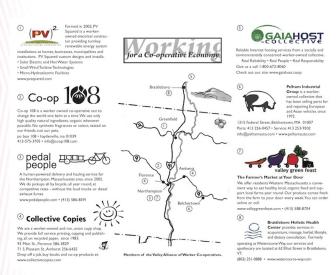


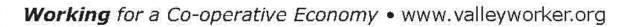
VAWC Region Characteristics

Worker Co-operation in western Massachusetts and southern Vermont



- VAWC: 8 member worker co-operatives
- Tradition of collective management
- 65+ worker members, 10+ apprentices
- \$7.1 million revenue (2010)
- VAWC system has increased in revenue and membership annually for the last three years
- Linked to/founded from social justice and/or environmental movements







VAWC Co-operative Development A Co-op driven Model

- Member Co-ops direct, fund and hold staff accountable
- Co-ops are founded with support from a system not expected to perform/grow while isolated
- 5% of Member Co-op's surplus paid to a development fund directed by VAWC members for co-op expansion or new co-ops
- Shared knowledge and resources save time, energy and funds: Model bylaws and articles of incorporation; legal, lending, accounting, training and process support, etc.
- Development, support and funding is based on long term goals



VAWC Co-operative Development

Recent outcomes

- Completed two successful conversions, working on third
- Co-createdCertificate in Cooperative Enterprise, at UMASS, Amherst (www.umasscec.org)
- Developed and initiated VAWCCo-operative Development Fund
- On-going ad and PR campaign:
 Working for a Co-op Economy
- Co-founded Valley Co-operative
 Business Association, a cross
 sector organization in our region



Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives Membership Agreement

Version 1.0, Approved 4/28/10

Preamble

The Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives (VAWC) is rooted in the ideals of co-operation, mutuality and solidarity. VAWC is itself an expression of co-operative principles — a "co-op of co-ops" that have come together as a means of strengthening the efforts of our individual co-ops to develop their businesses, serve their members, and contribute to the wider co-operative economy. Our core goal is to provide ourselves with the resources and support we need to advance our co-operatives, empower our members, and benefit more people in our communities. In joining with VAWC, our co-ops commit to solidarity as expressed by the following provisions of membership:

Vision					
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Northampton Hostel Co-operative, INC.

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT BYLAWS, v1.0. 3/21/10

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Mission statement

Our Mission Statement

The Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives is dedicated to building a sustainable local economy by facilitating the growth and development of worker co-operatives. To realize this we provide support for our members, develop new worker co-operatives and promote worker co-operatives by educating and developing community awareness.







Why organize worker co-operatives into larger, meso-level, co-operative support organizations?

- Gather resources oftentimes scarce to achieve vision
- Develop particular voice of worker co-operative sector
- Effectively communicate and partner with other sectors and likeminded organizations
- Promote, educate and develop as a model
- Remove strain from individual co-ops, calling all interested coops to the table, and managing demand of support and outreach as a system



Organizational Partners

- Neighboring Food Co-op Association
- Green Field's Market (a co-managed 2 store food co-op)
- Valley Co-operative Business Association
- United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives
- Co-operative Fund of New England
- UMASS, Amherst Economics Department









Franklin Community Coop

is a cooperative selling quality goods to promote health and build a sustainable local economy.





Summary

Co-ops provide a useful model for firms as multigenerational economic entities rooting capital and employment, returning investment on behalf of community members

Meso-level organizations, co-operatively structured, allow for effective organization and communication of needs creating a 'virtuous cycle' between co-ops and their support systems.

Continuing dialog among co-ops and OWS provides resources, tools, and mission driven operations



Resources

Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives www.valleyworker.org
US Federation of Worker Co-operatives www.usworker.coop
International Co-operative Alliance www.ica.coop

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