



MWI GASTVORTRAG

A GLOBAL COOPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH? THE GLOBAL DIFFUSION OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT SINCE 1800

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Abstract: Prior to the emergence of national welfare states and their near universal global diffusion, decentralized cooperative welfare institutions based on the principles of self-help, voluntary participation, and democratic governance began to address the welfare gap left by the dismantling of guilds in the early nineteenth century. While much has been written about their numerical decline in the West, this paper investigates the factors behind their successful global diffusion. Drawing on existing historiography and unique event-history datasets from the ILOs, this article illustrates how cooperative welfare, having been pioneered in its modern form in the United Kingdom, spread worldwide, reaching virtually all countries by the end of the twentieth century. We find that cooperatives arose primarily from economic necessity. Both welfare states and cooperatives thrived in democratic environments and tended to flourish under non-left governments. Common law countries and those with a British colonial legacy were more likely to introduce consumer cooperatives earlier, while Scandinavian and German law jurisdictions were pioneers for housing, banking, and farming cooperatives (and their respective federations). Although transnational movements culminated in the foundation of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) in 1895, our findings show that cooperatives expanded functionally from one sector to another rather than necessarily geographically from one neighboring country to another. Our findings regarding cooperative welfare run counter several expectations from conventional welfare approaches and are particularly relevant in the context of the twenty-first century revival of cooperative thought and practice.