

Spear Abstract ICA CCR EU ATHENS 2022

Paper Submission to Coop Governance Session

Governance of a strong regional consumer cooperative

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LL Cooperative Society was originally registered as an Industrial and Provident Society, when founded 160 years ago in 1861. By the end of its first quarter of trading there were 74 members. Currently there are about 290,000 members, with 220 outlets, concentrated in Lincoln, but spread over the whole of Lincolnshire, and 2870 staff (termed colleagues), with dividend payments amounting to £3.8 million, on turnover of £355 million. They operate in food, primarily local stores, including a bakery, pharmacies, travel, funerals (including their own crematoria), post offices. They are regarded as a strong regional society, with a strategic focus on local food stores (urban and rural), so not directly competing with large supermarkets. The keys to LL's success are: firstly, sound financial and business strategies (including strategic investments (of profits) into property for many years), good management and corporate governance, an emphasis on quality regarding both customers and staff and since the 1990s, and a strong emphasis on the value of membership, and finally investing in the local communities and civil society; they also benefit from being relatively isolated as a city and county.

Structure of the paper: The paper researches how governance takes place and addresses consumer coop challenges in a case of a strong regional cooperative. It begins with review of various governance theories, building up to humanistic governance, and leading onto the identification of major challenges facing consumer cooperatives. It goes on to discuss ways in which these challenges can be addressed, including institutional measures of networked/polycentric developments that are particularly relevant to the UK cooperative scene. Next it examines the governance system of LL Cooperative Society, exploring the extent to which networked governance systems played a role. Finally, it reflects on the analysis, and draws conclusions. The paper is based on secondary sources, participant observation of an AGM, and email exchanges with key figures in the cooperative.

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