

## Introduction: a transnational approach to co-operative history

Co-operation means many different things. In its most basic sense of working together it is as old as humanity. Since the early nineteenth century, the term has been used more specifically to refer to economic organisations that variously process and sell agricultural products, supply banking and credit, manufacture different commodities and distribute essential goods to consumers. It is this last form of distributive or consumer co-operation – specifically in relation to the international co-operative movement during the decades either side of the First World War – that is the focus of this book.

By 1939 consumer co-operation had become a mass movement. The co-operative store, or ‘Co-op’, was an essential part of everyday life for millions across Europe and beyond. It had become the main source of staples such as bread, tea, coffee, milk and potatoes. Although some co-operators tried to argue that the consumers’ movement was the only true form of co-operation, this view was always contested and in many respects it is impossible to consider consumer co-operation in isolation from other types of co-operative, whether producer, agricultural or credit. This is especially relevant in relation to the fundamental questions with which this book is concerned: what was co-operation? Was it an economic system or a social movement? Did it aspire to challenge capitalism or to reform it? Did it contain at its heart a political vision for the transformation of society, or was it simply a practical guide for organising a business?

Most co-operatives define themselves by the organisational principles that they have in common. Co-operatives differ from other forms of economic enterprise, such as the limited joint stock company, in several fundamental ways. The most important of these are the commitment to member ownership and control, and a mechanism for redistributing the trading surplus among the members in proportion to patronage, rather than paying it as a return on capital investment.<sup>1</sup> Beyond these basic principles, however, co-operation itself was often hard to define. Lacking its own political programme, the co-operative movement has been open to varying and sometimes even contradictory interpretations. It has been seen as a radical alternative to capitalism and a means to make

capitalism function more effectively; as a tool of working-class emancipation and an elite strategy to soothe revolutionary tensions and promote social harmony; as a practical business model and a utopian vision. At different times co-operation has been aligned with political visions on both the left and the right. And it has provoked varying responses from political elites in different places, ranging from outright repression, to indifference, to official recognition and incorporation in government policy.

The history of co-operation can be approached in many different ways. From a business history perspective studying co-operatives can illuminate important changes in retailing and commerce, while for social historians co-operation is relevant to the history of consumption and consumerism. My own interest in co-operation arose from a local study of popular politics in the southern English naval city of Plymouth during the early twentieth century. Here, the labour movement, organised around the politics of production, was relatively weak, but there was a very large and vibrant co-operative society. During the First World War this society was at the centre of local struggles over food rationing and price control and it played an important, though contested, role in the emergence of a Labour challenge to established political alignments in Plymouth.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent comparative work indicated how these struggles were not confined to Plymouth, but were repeated across Europe, even in non-belligerent countries such as Sweden.<sup>3</sup> This was apparent to contemporary co-operators as well, and after 1918 they devoted much time to the question of how to apply co-operative principles to the re-organisation of trade, not only locally and nationally but also internationally.

This book is concerned with the transnational history of co-operation, an area which has hitherto been relatively little researched.<sup>4</sup> From its beginnings co-operation was shaped by the transfer and exchange of ideas across national boundaries, and from 1895 it also had its own international organisation, the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA). The book focuses on co-operation in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden – where the movement has often been perceived as unusually strong by contemporary observers and historians alike. Representatives of the Nordic co-operative organisations played an active role within the ICA and sometimes worked together to adopt common positions on matters of co-operative policy.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1930s co-operation became part of emerging ideas of the Scandinavian ‘middle way’, most famously in the work of Marquis Childs. Studying it can therefore offer a new perspective on the roots of the Scandinavian or Nordic model.<sup>6</sup> But the politics of co-operation in the region could also be deeply controversial. An examination of the debates and conflicts over co-operation, both at home and abroad, casts further light on the social and political history of a turbulent period.

### Co-operative history

Until recently consumer co-operation was not well served by academic historians, at least in comparison to other social movements such as the labour movement.<sup>7</sup> Its relative neglect was all the more remarkable given the importance of co-operation in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. By 1940 membership of the British consumers' co-operative movement, the largest in Europe, amounted to over 8.7 million, or about 18 per cent of the population.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, co-operation has often been ignored by labour historians, who were more interested in conflicts in the sphere of production and the organisations that emerged from these such as trade unions and socialist labour parties. They were often quite dismissive of the co-operative movement, which they regarded as being devoid of ideological aspirations and undermining class consciousness.<sup>9</sup> In Britain, for example, the emergence of consumer co-operative societies during the 1840s and after was seen as symptomatic of the defeat of working-class radicalism in the mid-nineteenth century, marking a gulf between the utopian and community-building aspirations of earlier co-operation and the more prosaic emphasis on shopkeeping and the dividend after 1844.<sup>10</sup>

The relationship between co-operation and the organised labour movement was complicated, however, and fluctuated in different times and places. Worker or producer co-operatives formed part of the challenge to capitalism in France during the 1830s and 1840s, in the form of workshops organised by small groups of skilled artisans.<sup>11</sup> Similar associations were also found in Britain, but according to Peter Gurney they gradually lost their distinctively working-class character from the 1870s, and what became known as co-partnership was regarded with derision by many within the labour movement.<sup>12</sup> But the idea of the workers' producer co-operative never disappeared completely.<sup>13</sup> It was debated widely within the Finnish labour movement, for example, and also in Denmark where the ambition to form producer co-operatives was part of the first social democratic party programme agreed in 1876.<sup>14</sup>

Labour movement attitudes towards consumer co-operation were also sceptical. Like many of its counterparts, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was initially hostile to co-operation, influenced by Lassalle's theory of the iron law of wages.<sup>15</sup> During the debate on revisionism during the 1890s this stance began to shift, and in 1910 the Second International agreed a resolution formally recognising the role of consumer co-operation in improving the living standards of the working class. The success of the socialist co-operative Vooruit in Ghent was also influential in persuading many socialists to overcome their suspicions and acknowledge co-operation as a 'third pillar' of the working-class movement alongside trade unions and socialist parties, even though for many it remained a subordinate pillar.<sup>16</sup> Although most consumer co-operatives were reluctant to commit themselves

to formal political alliances, in the early twentieth century they were widely perceived to be part of the labour movement. Indeed, in some cases they can be argued to have had a decisive impact on the consolidation of the reformist social democratic wing of the labour movement after the First World War.<sup>17</sup>

The growth of interest in the history of consumption and consumer politics since the late 1980s triggered a re-examination of co-operative history, emphasising the continuities from earlier nineteenth-century radicalism.<sup>18</sup> To name a few examples: Peter Gurney's influential study portrayed British co-operation as a movement with its own distinctive ideology and culture, which offered its followers an alternative to mass capitalist consumption during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth.<sup>19</sup> Ellen Furlough examined French co-operation against the background of changes in capitalist retailing and the emergence of a modern consumer society in the second half of the nineteenth century, while also drawing attention to the continuities between the earlier associations and later consumer co-operatives.<sup>20</sup> Peder Aléx explored how the Swedish co-operative union educated consumer-citizens in rational consumption as part of the development of the welfare state during the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Similar perspectives also shaped Ellen Furlough and Carl Strikwerda's collection of essays on co-operative history in Europe, North America and Japan, which showed how studies in the history of co-operation could also shed light on the evolution of capitalist consumption and especially the ways in which it was gendered.<sup>22</sup>

Despite their emphasis on the radical roots of co-operation, these studies often expressed scepticism about the ability of the co-operative movement to sustain its opposition to capitalist consumerism. By the 1990s once-powerful co-operative businesses appeared to be in decline in most of the global north, experiencing loss of market share or even collapse in the cases of Germany and Austria.<sup>23</sup> The hegemony of neo-liberalism and the decline of the industrial working-class communities in which co-operation was often rooted all served to undermine interest in the movement and meant that in a long-term perspective it was invariably viewed through the pessimistic lens of decline.<sup>24</sup> Furlough suggests that even during the 1920s French co-operators were already imitating the commercial strategies of their capitalist competitors rather than challenging them.<sup>25</sup> The main problems came after 1950, however, as consumer co-operatives struggled to respond to new trends in mass consumption and the related changes in retailing.<sup>26</sup>

Since the turn of the millennium there have been some signs of revival, both in the fortunes of co-operative businesses and in scholarly interest. The United Nations proclaimed 2012 to be International Year of Co-operatives, in recognition of the sector's resilience to the global financial crisis that began in 2007 and of its importance especially in the global south.<sup>27</sup> New historical studies of co-operative organisations have also been inspired by milestones

such as centenaries or other anniversaries.<sup>28</sup> As Anthony Webster and John K. Walton pointed out in the introduction to a special themed issue of *Business History* on co-operatives, the challenge is now to ‘mainstream’ co-operative history and to place it in a wider context.<sup>29</sup>

As Lawrence Black and Nicole Robertson note in their introduction to a collection of essays on the British co-operative movement, ‘taking stock’ of co-operative history can help to illuminate many other aspects of twentieth-century social and economic history.<sup>30</sup> The distinctive management and commercial strategies of co-operatives are of interest to business historians. In many countries co-operatives led the way in the introduction of new forms of retailing, in the organisation of wholesale and production, in the design of their brands and buildings, and in their practical and theoretical attempts to link production, distribution and consumption.<sup>31</sup> As Robertson’s research has shown, larger co-operative societies often provided extensive educational and leisure activities for their members, contributing to the development of distinctive working-class cultures.<sup>32</sup> They were also widely discussed as a potential solution to the ‘social question’ in the early twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> In many parts of Europe co-operatives mobilised the working-class women who formed the majority of their customers, and the Women’s Co-operative Guild became one of the largest and most radical women’s organisations in early twentieth-century Britain, campaigning on issues such as suffrage, divorce reform and peace.<sup>34</sup>

Studying the consumer co-operative movement can also shed light on the political conflicts that have arisen over consumption. These conflicts were not confined within national boundaries. Frank Trentmann’s research on the politics of free trade in nineteenth-century Britain shows that working-class consumers were well aware of their dependence on the global food trade and willing to take action in support of free trade.<sup>35</sup> This awareness was further heightened by the disruptions to international trade during the First World War, when serious food shortages caused political unrest across Europe.<sup>36</sup> Trentmann shows that the concept of fair trade is not a recent phenomenon, but one which has historical roots, for example in the ‘buying for Empire’ campaigns in Britain of the 1920s and 1930s which mobilised housewives in support of imperial trade.<sup>37</sup>

Many co-operators could be described as liberal internationalists, motivated by the conviction that the re-organisation of international trade according to co-operative principles would also help to secure peace. Such convictions were never purely theoretical, as from the early 1920s the ICA sought to co-ordinate trade between the co-operative wholesale societies of different countries and assist its members in securing access to imported goods at favourable prices.<sup>38</sup> Trying to establish the extent to which these co-operative moral economies permeated to the members every time they ‘opened the larder

door', in Gurney's phrase, is notoriously difficult of course. But the ordinary material goods that the co-operative stores supplied could have a powerful symbolic message. As this book will try to show, the story of international co-operation was as much about commodities such as coffee, raisins, matches and lightbulbs as it was about political resolutions and sophisticated analyses of international political economy.

Finally, examining these struggles within the co-operative movement can help to suggest a more integrated approach to the history of consumption, which recognises the relationship between consumption and production rather than seeing them as oppositional categories.<sup>39</sup> The ICA was never exclusively an organisation of consumers, despite the aspirations of some of its members to make it so. The early years of the Alliance were shaped by struggles between the French and British supporters of profit-sharing producer co-operatives on the one hand, and powerful consumer co-operatives on the other. The domination of the latter group was consolidated in 1904 when the representatives of the German agricultural and credit co-operatives withdrew, but membership of the Alliance remained open to all types of co-operative.<sup>40</sup> The struggles over food shortages in many countries during the First World War strengthened the position of the consumer co-operatives, but their dominance was never complete. The mixed agricultural and rural consumer co-operative unions of Finland and Denmark were prominent members of the ICA during the interwar period, and the expansion of the Alliance beyond Europe led to the admission of many more producer co-operatives. From the early 1930s co-operators were increasingly likely to speak of the mutually dependent interests of producers and consumers, and how co-operation could help to promote these.

### **Transnational history and internationalism**

Interest in transnational history – also under designations including global history, world history, entangled history and *histoire croisée* – grew enormously during the 1990s and afterwards, as demonstrated by the number of conferences and special journal issues devoted to this theme.<sup>41</sup> The twin trends of globalisation and (in Europe) a new dynamic phase of European integration during the early 1990s stimulated a heightened awareness of the interconnected and entangled nature of the world in which we live, which in turn generated new interest in exploring the historical roots of these connections.<sup>42</sup> Some scholars have pointed out that transnational history is not so very new. The term itself has a nineteenth-century pedigree and generations of historians have written transnational studies without necessarily acknowledging them as such.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the current boom has been stimulated

by contemporary developments in communications technology and academic mobility, and in many cases it has been connected to an explicit agenda of internationalisation promoted by universities and research councils.<sup>44</sup>

There are as many ways to write transnational history as there are historians seeking to do so.<sup>45</sup> The field is broad, and criticisms of imprecision in the ways in which the term 'transnational' is used are probably justified.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, most historians would probably agree that transnational history is not a distinctive method so much as a perspective: a 'way of seeing'.<sup>47</sup> What seems to define transnational history, above all, is scepticism towards the nation state as the dominant frame for historical enquiry: 'the conviction that historical and social processes cannot be apprehended and understood exclusively within customary, delineated spaces or containers, might they be states, nations, empires or regions'.<sup>48</sup> Transnational historians, therefore, are interested in links, flows and connections; 'contacts, coalitions and inter-actions across state boundaries'; people and communities 'in between' nation states.<sup>49</sup> These connections may be studied in many different ways and using different methods as appropriate to the phenomenon under study. Studies of the transfer of people, ideas or things between two national contexts need not necessarily be incompatible with comparisons of the same phenomenon in two or more nations; indeed, transnational history often rests on a fruitful combination of both approaches.<sup>50</sup>

As noted above, the boom in transnational history is connected to an awareness of the impact of globalisation on our own times, even though historians disagree about the novelty of late twentieth-century transnationalism.<sup>51</sup> However, most scholars accept that certain periods have witnessed an intensification of transnational activity, and that one such period was the second half of the nineteenth century. The hegemony of economic liberalism in the most powerful European state of the era (Britain) stimulated global flows of capital, goods and labour, and led to what is often described as the 'first era of globalisation'. This was accompanied by an 'extraordinarily rapid growth' in the number of international organisations, made possible by revolutionary developments in transport and communications.<sup>52</sup>

The new international organisations concerned themselves with tasks such as the collection and sharing of information and the agreement of standard values, definitions, weights and measures. Many also espoused an explicit commitment to internationalism, defined in Magaly Rodríguez García's words as:

all types of initiatives (both formal and informal) that transcended (or aimed to transcend) national borders, for example the promotion of 'universal' values and calls for free trade, conferences involving individuals of different nationalities for the promotion of international law and peace, and the establishment of international organizations.<sup>53</sup>

Writing of the international women's movement, Leila Rupp suggests that internationalism was 'a spirit rather than a formal ideology'; a description that seems apt.<sup>54</sup> It was not necessarily opposed to nationalism but rather stimulated by its rise. Internationalists aspired to transcend national borders, but their thinking was usually influenced by national categories and the desire to forge a new internationalist 'imagined community' out of the 'notion of [national] differences'.<sup>55</sup> For this reason, Kevin Callahan has suggested that the term 'inter-nationalism' more accurately captures the ideology and practices of the Socialist International, a designation that would certainly apply to many other international organisations of the early twentieth century.<sup>56</sup>

As this suggests, and as many have been quick to point out, transnational history does not necessarily imply an outright rejection of the nation state as an irrelevance. On the contrary, it is acknowledged that nations and nation states have been immensely important in shaping how we have understood the world.<sup>57</sup> No nation developed in a vacuum but nation states were themselves shaped by transnational historical processes.<sup>58</sup> Transnational history is thus not associated with any particular spatial scale; rather it requires historians to think carefully about space and scale. It implies, to use Jürgen Osterhammel's term, a 'polycentric' analysis which requires the historian to 'begin from both ends at the same time', combining micro and macro levels of enquiry.<sup>59</sup> A further dimension is added by a focus on a particular historical meso-region or *Geschichtsregion*, such as *Norden* or Scandinavia, which is the focus of this book.<sup>60</sup> As Philipp Ther has pointed out, such studies may offer a particularly fruitful means to move beyond national histories and contribute to a new understanding of Europe 'as a space of communication and interaction' rather than as an inflexible 'territorial container'.<sup>61</sup> The porous borders and shared linguistic, legal, social and cultural traditions of such regions demand but also facilitate a transnational approach. For citizens of the Nordic countries the most important contacts and connections have often been those with their closest neighbours, though these could never be taken for granted and were also sometimes sources of tension.<sup>62</sup>

This study is guided, therefore, by a multi-layered approach in its ambition to examine the connections and transfers that shaped the development of the co-operative movement in a number of different countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The co-operative movement was international – and indeed internationalist – from its beginnings.<sup>63</sup> The ICA, founded in London in 1895, was in many ways typical of the international organisations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It grew out of networks of personal and informal contacts established between mostly British and French co-operators in the 1870s and 1880s, and during its early years it was dominated by the representatives of a few key national organisations, principally those of Britain.<sup>64</sup> Although it aspired from its foundation to be a



truly global organisation – the opening congress was attended by delegates from Australia, India, Argentina and the USA – it remained dominated by Europeans throughout the interwar period and did not develop non-European regional sub-organisations until after the Second World War.<sup>65</sup>

As with other international organisations, the original aims of the ICA included the sharing of information between members and the standardisation of co-operative principles. There was also an aspiration to establish commercial relations between members.<sup>66</sup> By the outbreak of the First World War it had established the bureaucratic structures to enable it to do this. Delegates at its 1913 congress also agreed a resolution articulating their commitment to pacifism and expressing the hope that ‘the reasons for ... international conflicts will disappear as the social and economic life of every nation becomes organised according to co-operative principles’.<sup>67</sup> Their idealism soon turned to bitter disappointment, of course, but recent research has shown that the First World War should not be seen as a defeat for internationalist aspirations. Rather, as Daniel Gorman has argued, internationalism ‘came of age’ in the 1920s, stimulated not only by reactions to the horrors of the war but also the new possibilities created by the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>68</sup>

In 1929 the League of Nations listed the existence of 478 international organisations.<sup>69</sup> Again the ICA was in many ways typical of these, claiming by 1930 to represent the interests of 100 million co-operators in Europe, the Americas and Asia. It had acquired most of the trappings of the internationalist ‘imagined community’ with its flag, its trilingual publications, its International Co-operative Day and the performances and rituals associated with the triennial congress, held in a succession of different European cities until 1937. During the 1920s and 1930s it also took concrete steps to develop an internationalist co-operative ideology and strategy.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the size of its membership, the ICA is largely conspicuous by its absence from the histories of interwar internationalism.<sup>71</sup> Nor has it been studied in any detail by historians of the co-operative movement, who have more usually focused on co-operation in one country. Two book-length accounts of the ICA’s history do exist, both based on sources from the ICA’s own archives. The first, from 1970, was written by former ICA director W. P. Watkins. It has the status of an official history and is more descriptive than analytical, but it is also empirically detailed and forms a useful supplement to the primary sources that were available for the present study.<sup>72</sup> The same level of detail also characterises Rita Rhodes’ book on the ICA during the period 1910–50, which was published by the Alliance as part of its centenary celebrations in 1995.<sup>73</sup> Rhodes argues that the ICA was a remarkable institution, for, unlike other international organisations such as the Second International, it avoided splitting into social democratic and communist camps after 1917 and retained the membership of the USSR even into the Cold War period. Rhodes attributes

this to the flexibility of the ICA's ideology and organisation, while arguing that its constitution provided a solid basis for cohesion. Like Watkins, Rhodes' perspective is that of an insider and is largely celebratory in tone, though again the book is a useful source of empirical detail.

Rhodes suggests that the ICA's 'co-operative spirit' meant that it was also less prone to fractures along national lines than other organisations, though she argues that the dominant influence on its development, at least during the first half of the twentieth century, came from Britain. This can be challenged on two counts. First, I have argued elsewhere that debates on co-operative principles during the 1930s did indeed split the Alliance into informal internal blocs: a social democratic group including Britain, Belgium and Austria, which saw co-operation as the 'third pillar' of the labour movement; and another group insisting on the political neutrality and social inclusiveness of co-operation. This latter group came increasingly to be dominated by the Nordic co-operative movements.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, there were the consumer co-operative movements that were incorporated into authoritarian regimes in Italy and Germany, which ceased to be members of the Alliance from 1926 and 1934, respectively. Second, although the powerful British consumer co-operatives were indeed influential in terms of membership and resources, they could not take this position for granted. The balance of power within the Alliance was shaped by many factors and was constantly in flux. British resources were undoubtedly important to the ICA, but their dominance could also act as a brake on the development of international co-operation. This was to be especially relevant in the efforts to develop international trade, which are examined further in chapter 4 of this book.

### **Nordic co-operation and the ICA**

This book examines the development of co-operative internationalism in the ICA and some of its member organisations during the late nineteenth century and the interwar period. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive history of the ICA. The study is broader in that it is concerned not only with the ICA as an organisation, but that it attempts to adopt a transnational approach to the history of the ICA and the links and connections that shaped it and its member organisations.<sup>75</sup> It seeks to compare co-operative theories and practices in different national contexts and to understand how these were shaped by transnational transfers, contacts and exchanges, between individuals and between organisations. It also seeks to understand how co-operators conceived of their movement as an international one, how they tried to theorise internationalism and to put it into practice in the crisis-ridden years of the 1920s and 1930s.

The study is also narrower than would be required for a history of the ICA, as it focuses on the co-operative movement in one region of Europe only, namely

the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. There are several reasons why this apparently rather small and peripheral part of Europe is extremely interesting and illuminating in the context of the international co-operative movement. Firstly, co-operation was very strong in the region. The co-operative movement grew very rapidly from the establishment of the first permanent societies in the 1890s (earlier in Denmark), and by the 1920s its importance in terms of both membership and trade was widely acknowledged.<sup>76</sup> This meant that the influence of the Nordic co-operative organisations within the ICA was as great as or even greater than that of many more populous countries. Secondly, some of the leaders of these movements – such as Anders Örne and Albin Johansson – played an active and prominent role in international debates. From 1920 the Swedes held one of the positions on the ICA's Executive Committee, and from 1927 the Alliance's president was the Finn Väinö Tanner.

Thirdly, the book aims to shed further light on the reputation of the small Nordic countries for transnational regional co-operation and internationalism. Daniel Gorman reminds us that internationalism was never monolithic, but that international institutions were shaped by different national traditions: Anglo-American influences on the League of Nations, for example, French influences on the International Labour Organization (ILO) or Soviet internationalism in the Comintern.<sup>77</sup> As Daniel Laqua points out, it is important to look beyond the larger states. Participation in international organisations was an important strategy for small, neutral countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland.<sup>78</sup> The Nordic countries were not French-speaking – as Switzerland and Belgium were – nor were they situated at the heart of the European railway network, which Laqua notes as being significant for the decision to locate international organisations in Belgium.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, Norbert Götz has pointed to the emergence of a distinctively Nordic tradition of internationalism during the early twentieth century, motivated by a small-state consciousness and expressed in the development of joint Nordic initiatives at the League of Nations.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, international organisations such as the League of Nations also became important forums for the development of Nordic regional co-operation, though this is an area which has been little researched until recently.<sup>81</sup>

This book argues for the importance of a distinctively Nordic contribution to the shaping of international co-operation and the ICA, while at the same time also examining the ICA itself as a site for Nordic regional co-operation. Rita Rhodes, as noted, has argued that the dominant influence in the ICA was the British consumer co-operative movement. The British never had it all their own way, however, and during the interwar period they were challenged on a number of issues by representatives of the Nordic co-operative organisations, who were moreover also prepared to collaborate with one another to present a

joint position. Indeed, Rhodes suggests that the Nordic delegates' joint action to secure the election of Väinö Tanner as ICA president in 1927 marks the emergence of 'the first geographical pressure group within the ICA'.<sup>82</sup>

Co-operation has certainly become a part of the national 'story' of the four Nordic nations, albeit in slightly different ways in each case. During the first half of the twentieth century the Nordic co-operative movements also attracted favourable international attention, as examples of the region's successful economic modernisation and its resistance to political extremism. At the turn of the twentieth century the Danish agricultural co-operative societies were already attracting praise from international commentators as a model for the successful organisation of agriculture.<sup>83</sup> By the 1930s attention had shifted towards Sweden, where the co-operative movement's successful struggles against monopoly capitalism was famously extolled by the American journalist Marquis Childs and helped persuade President Roosevelt to commission a study of European co-operation as part of his plans for the New Deal.<sup>84</sup> Childs and other writers saw the co-operative emphasis on social harmony and the reconciliation of the interests of producers and consumers as a distinctive Nordic 'middle way' between communism and capitalism, a characterisation which has become very influential in shaping images of the Nordic region during the twentieth century. Studying the Nordic co-operative movements in a transnational perspective may thus help shed further light on the roots of the Nordic model during the first half of the twentieth century.

### **Outline of the book**

The book is organised chronologically, starting with the introduction of co-operative ideas to the Nordic countries and the establishment of co-operative organisations. Particular attention is paid to the importance of transnational and inter-regional networks, and the transfer and exchange of co-operative ideas. The foundation and early history of co-operation in the Nordic region is compared in chapter 1. As discussed there, the development of co-operation did not take place in a vacuum, but was shaped by contemporary European debates and the transfer of ideas from other contexts. An important reference point for all the Nordic countries was the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, founded in northern England in 1844, but this was never the only source of co-operative ideas: equally significant were influences from other European countries, including Germany and France. Chapter 1 also outlines the organisation of the consumer co-operative movement in each of the Nordic countries, acknowledging its diversity and the range of relationships between different types of co-operative society.

In chapter 2 the focus switches to the formalisation of these transnational contacts through the ICA, from its establishment in 1895 until the 1920s.

The chapter asks how the ICA functioned and evolved as an international organisation: what did 'internationalism' mean and how was this practised? Chapter 3 follows the debates within the ICA through the difficult years of the 1920s and 1930s, examining how co-operators sought to respond to political and economic crises, and their attempts to establish a coherent ideology for the movement. Again, the emphasis is on the particular contributions of the Nordic representatives, and indeed on the emergence of this group as a distinctive bloc within the ICA, despite its diversity. Chapter 4 deals with attempts to develop structures for international co-operative trade, and considers the reasons for the rather modest achievements of the International Co-operative Wholesale Society (ICWS) in contrast to the success of the Nordic co-operative wholesale Nordisk Andelsforbund (NAF). Finally, in chapter 5 the focus is on international interest in the Nordic co-operative movements in the context of the region's emerging image as a beacon of stability and modernity in the late 1930s.

The bulk of the source material for the interwar period is drawn from the ICA papers preserved in the Finnish Labour Archives in Helsinki. It seems likely that these were Väinö Tanner's personal papers, since they correspond to his time as president of the Alliance, and they also occasionally include his handwritten notes on the meetings that he chaired. Where there are gaps, these have been supplemented by ICA materials from Kooperativa Förbundet's archive in Stockholm and reports on meetings from national co-operative journals. I have also consulted the published ICA congress reports and the ICA's official journal, *International Co-operative Bulletin* (from the 1928 *Review of International Co-operation*), which are available in the UK National Co-operative Archives in Manchester. The ICA was a tri-lingual organisation and produced all its materials in English, French and German; most, though not all, of the ICA material I have used is in English. I have only rarely had the opportunity to compare different versions of the texts, which would possibly be interesting as there were occasionally semantic discussions arising from disagreements over translation. Many of the Executive and Central Committee meetings were not only minuted but also transcribed more or less verbatim, and these records give an extremely detailed and valuable account of the proceedings.

It has not been possible to undertake a systematic examination of archive records for the co-operative organisations of all four Nordic countries within the scope of this study. However, I have consulted the co-operative press in each case, especially with reference to international contacts. I have also referred to the published writings of the region's leading co-operators, and some unpublished correspondence, especially that of Hannes Gebhard, deposited in the Finnish National Archives in Helsinki. As far as the ICWS is concerned I have used sources, mostly minutes, from both Helsinki and Stockholm. The bulk of the NAF archive is held by the Danish National Archives, but this

is mostly made up of commercial correspondence, and the board meeting minutes do not seem to have survived. The sections on the NAF are thus drawn together from a variety of sources, including correspondence in the archives of both Sweden's KF and the Finnish wholesale OTK, and also the archive of the Norwegian co-operative union NKL, held in the Norwegian National Archives.

### Notes

- 1 The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) lists seven fundamental principles of co-operation, as follows: voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, a commitment to education and training, a commitment to work with other co-operatives and a concern for community. These principles were agreed in 1995 but were based on earlier formulations adopted in 1966 and 1937. See: ICA, 'Co-operative Identity, Values and Principles', available at <http://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>, accessed 29 January 2016. See also: J. Birchall, *People-Centred Businesses: Co-operatives, Mutuals and the Idea of Membership* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 3–9; E. Furlough and C. Strikwerda, 'Economics, Consumer Culture and Gender: An Introduction to the Politics of Consumer Co-operation', in E. Furlough and C. Strikwerda (eds), *Consumers against Capitalism? Consumer Co-operation in Europe, North America and Japan, 1840–1990* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), p. 27. For a discussion of co-operation in a broader sense, see: R. Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Co-operation* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).
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- 6 K. Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model: Images of Progress in the Era of Modernisation* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2002), esp. pp. 196–201; M. Hilson, 'Consumer Co-operation and Economic Crisis: The 1936 Roosevelt

- Inquiry on Co-operative Enterprise and the Emergence of the Nordic “Middle Way”’, *Contemporary European History*, 22:2 (2013), 181–98.
- 7 See: E. Furlough, *Consumer Cooperation in France: The Politics of Consumption 1834–1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), pp. 7–8; C. Wrigley, ‘The Co-operative Movement’, *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 27 (2002), 103–16; L. Black and N. Robertson, ‘Taking Stock: An Introduction’, in L. Black and N. Robertson (eds), *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History: Taking Stock* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 1.
  - 8 A. Bonner, *British Co-operation: The History, Principles and Organisation of the British Co-operative Movement* (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1961), p. 160.
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  - 11 Furlough, *Consumer Cooperation in France*, pp. 15–16.
  - 12 Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, pp. 148–50.
  - 13 For an overview of producer co-operatives, see: M. van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Towards a Global Labour History* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), ch. 8.
  - 14 On Finland, see: H. Stenius, *Frivilligt, jämlikt, samfällt: Föreningsväsendets utveckling i Finland fram till 1900-talets början med speciell hänsyn till mas-organisationsprincipens genombrott* (Helsinki: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1987), pp. 320–7; J. von Schoultz, *Bidrag till belysande av Finlands socialdemokratiska partis history, del 1: Tiden före representationsreformen år 1906* (Helsinki: Söderström, 1924), pp. 194–5. For an example of worker co-operatives in Finland, see: T. Bergholm, ‘Masculinity, Violence and Disunity: Waterfront Strikes and Strikebreakers in Finnish Ports in the 1920s and 1930s’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 8:1 (1996), 23–42: 26–8. On Denmark, see: H. Grelle, *Det kooperative alternativ: Arbejderkooperationen i Danmark 1852–2012* (Copenhagen: Arbejdermuseet/ABA, 2012), pp. 41–2.
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  - 16 On the influence of Vooruit, see: H. Defoort, ‘The Strongest Socialist Party in the World? The Influence of Belgian Social Democracy in International Socialism prior to 1914 as a Means to Study the Relations between Socialism and Co-operation’, in P. Verbruggen and L. Soubry (eds), *Consumerism versus Capitalism? Co-operatives Seen from an International Comparative Perspective* (Ghent: Amsab-Institute of Social History, 2003).

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- 19 Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*.
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- 21 P. Aléx, *Den rationella konsumenten. KF som folkuppfostrare 1899–1939* (Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion, 1994).
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- 23 For a comparative perspective on co-operative problems in Europe in the 1980s, see: J. Brazda and R. Schediwy (eds), *A Time of Crises: Consumer Co-operatives and Their Problems Around 1990* (Vienna: Fachbereich für Genossenschaftswesen, Universität Wien, 2011; first published 1989), available at <https://genos.univie.ac.at/veroeffentlichungen/>, accessed 10 August 2016. See also: Hilson, Neunsinger and Patmore (eds), *Global History*, esp. section 3.
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  - 36 A. Nützenadel and F. Trentmann, ‘Introduction: Mapping Food and Globalization’, in A. Nützenadel and F. Trentmann (eds), *Food and Globalization: Consumption, Markets and Politics in the Modern World* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), p. 11.
  - 37 F. Trentmann, ‘Before Fair Trade: Empire, Free Trade and the Moral Economies of Food in the Modern World’, in Nützenadel and Trentmann (eds), *Food and Globalization*.
  - 38 See chapter 4; also: K. Friberg, ‘A Co-operative Take on Free Trade – International Ambitions and Regional Initiatives in International Co-operative Trade’, in Hilson, Neunsinger and Patmore (eds), *Global History*.
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  - 40 On the early history of the ICA, see: W. P. Watkins, *The International Co-operative Alliance 1895–1970* (London: ICA, 1970).
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  - 42 Bayly et al., ‘AHR Conversation’, 1442; P. Ther, ‘Comparisons, Cultural Transfers and the Study of Networks: Toward a Transnational History of Europe’, in J. Kocka and H.-G. Haupt (eds), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 209–10; M. G. Müller and C. Torp, ‘Conceptualising Transnational Spaces in History’, *European Review of History*, 16:5 (2009), 609–17: 610; B. Struck, K. Ferris and J. Revel, ‘Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History’, *International History Review*, 33:4 (2011), 573–84: 574–5.
  - 43 P.-Y. Saunier, ‘Learning by Doing: Notes about the Making of the *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 6:2 (2008), 159–72: 159–162; Struck, Ferris and Revel, ‘Introduction’, 573. Others