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## **The Cooperative Paradigm:**

### **Moving towards a Renewed Educational Path...**

#### **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

“The greatest and most difficult problem that can face human beings is that of education: because judgement relies on education, and education, in turn, relies on judgement.” (Emmanuel Kant)

Many thinkers, philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists consider with mistrust the influence of the prevailing culture of our times. They recognize the harmful and, at times, perverse effects of unbridled consumption. They increasingly decry the marked influence of this particular model on our lifestyle, our way of doing things, and even on our way of looking at the world and ourselves. If we accept that the present social paradigm is first and foremost economical, utilitarian, and industrial, that it offers a materialistic, individualistic and narcissistic view of human beings, that it determines our values and conditions our thoughts, is it not of the utmost urgency that cooperatism ponder its own philosophical foundations, so as to present itself as a viable and necessary alternative to the world, today shaken by new and major crises? To reconsider the philosophical bases of cooperatism would allow us to better renew its foundations that put forth a particular view of humanity with its values, principles and aims. Would not the renewal of its paradigm allow today's cooperatives to take back the public standing they deserve and submit a new societal project to our cultures? To answer these questions requires we delve into the very heart of cooperative education. If we hope to see it spark a transformation in people, taking into account its historical and cultural continuity, it must be submitted to critical scrutiny and philosophical consideration: its democratic credentials demand it. Consequently, my reflections today are of a basically interrogative nature.

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<sup>1</sup> NB: The use of the masculine (Man) serves solely to lighten the text.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION

My participation in this seminar results from an important preoccupation we have entertained, for quite some time, at the *Institut de recherche et d'éducation pour les coopératives et les mutuelles de l'Université de Sherbrooke* (IRECUS). My research colleagues at the Institute and I are currently looking into a reality that somewhat eludes us, that is to say, the problems stemming from a fundamental and philosophical reflection on cooperatism. Specifically, we are questioning the cooperative paradigm. With no specific answers to offer at this time, I nonetheless would like to share with you some of the questions that have been raised. My presentation would then invite you to push forward, with us, the theoretical and philosophical consideration of the cooperative paradigm, as it relates to the fundamental question of education.

Let us begin with a bit of historical and statistical data regarding Quebec. The history of Quebec was and remains shaped by cooperation and the power of the cooperative movement. A modern and strong Quebec is difficult to imagine without the *Mouvement des caisses Desjardins*. It must be pointed out that agricultural cooperatives are the lynchpin of our regional development. It must also be stated that the price of funerals has plunged 50% since the arrival on the scene of funeral cooperatives. Neither the public nor the capitalist private sectors can, nor could have, achieved as much. Still today, there are over 3,000 cooperatives and 39 mutual associations comprising 5 million members. In short, as seen from the outside, we could easily be tempted into believing that Quebec is a nation of cooperators, and that Quebec is a cooperative model. But when considered from within, the facts must be realigned. The vast majority of members have chosen to join a cooperative either by default or by a desire to save, or because of historical precedent, without truly understanding what being a member of a cooperative means, nor what a cooperative basically is. How can such an overlapping of categories be explained? Despite having proven itself these past 150 years in Quebec, as well as elsewhere, this alternative path still seems difficult to bring to the fore, alongside the other two major players: the public sector and the capitalist private one. At this time of globalization, Quebec seems at a loss of ideas in regard to its own social and economical development. To summarize, we feel we have reached a deadlock, but also feel an urgent need to act. How then can the cooperative movement position itself in a setting of globalized uncertainties?

To answer this question, the cooperative world must stand ready to take up two major challenges. To master effective management tools, it must necessarily renew its ties with its philosophy, so as to be in a position to more readily justify to itself, as well as to the world, its choices and its distinct nature. It must rediscover its intrinsic unity, that is to say, its basic view of humanity and of the values it incorporates into its management and particular organizational and financial governance. Such unity rediscovered can only serve as an inspiration to our collective future. In this way, the cooperative will become a model and a force capable of influencing societal opinions and choices. Secondly, cooperative leaders will be better able to bear witness to the efficiency of the association of people who collectively assume their responsibilities and destinies, originating from a

deeply human preoccupation within a particular managerial framework. It falls to the cooperative movement to don the mantle of the visionary, occupy the public platform it deserves, and offer up concrete alternatives. To do so, cooperative education remains the motor that will drive us to take up these two challenges.

Much as they have before, cooperators must position themselves in relation to the markets, today globalized, and impose their logic, anthropology, values and aims, in a nutshell, their philosophy. If the present ideology favours, out of all proportion, short-term economics, cooperatism for its part favours people in the long-term. Consequently, in order to properly join in the current debate, the cooperative movement must consolidate its foundations by rediscovering its original view of human beings. It must launch this renewal within its own structure, and recognize the richness of its philosophical tradition, a tradition stemming from the Enlightenment. The cooperative movement has, to a certain extent, the moral duty to concretely make its presence felt in the public arena because it continues to harbor a sense of community, and has not forgotten the people “on the field”. In the context of market globalization, to better define oneself fundamentally and, in this way, better assume the role of a major player in the national and international decisional process, therein perhaps lies the new and necessary task of cooperative education.

Let us not forget that the cooperative is not solely an original economic organization. It is more importantly a humanistic and humanizing school that must contribute to elevating the cooperator as a person and as a citizen of a world damaged by the new ignorance of what it is to be human. Such humanism, trumpeted publicly, cannot help but awaken public consciousness, bear testimony to possibilities yet to be created, and thus become the vehicle for a new societal project. Let us send a clear signal to our respective communities and to the community of Man in general that cooperation and its paradigm are paths that must be offered and implemented in answer to the many uncertainties of the today’s world.

## **THE PARADIGM CONCEPT**

At this stage of our reflection, let us define a few terms. What is a paradigm? According to T.S. Kuhn (Kuhn, 1983), a paradigm is the founding and exemplary myth of any given community. Exemplary, not because it corrected a past difficulty, but rather more because it is the promise of a present and future solution. To my eyes, as a scientist, a rationally stated paradigm sets in motion the creation of a tradition and culture of seeking. The community that seeks, in turn, defines itself by the adoption by its members of this tradition within an educational framework. We could define the paradigm as being an exemplary, implicitly or explicitly rational model that attempts to answer fundamental questions, proposing or imposing a specific view, as well as its corresponding values, of human beings within a given global cultural and historical context. It is the search for, the affirmation and comprehension of these principles that serve to delineate and warrant the development of knowledge and way of thinking that justify individual and communal actions.

The paradigm fits into a philosophical reflection on the aims directing the creation of a system that could be organized politically. As such, the paradigm is a basis, an idea or an essential form for a model of reality depicting an accepted or imposed human view that thus determines a particular social or communal system.

From an epistemological standpoint, the paradigm is a prevailing concept that, for a specific period of time, sets the appropriate manner by which to present and solve problems. It sets a form of intelligibility and gives purpose to action. It is the guiding principle of association, elimination and selection of ideas, creating a rational framework for individual and collective action. It is the rational constitution of a model toward which humanity must strive. To speak of the cooperative paradigm is to explicitly refer to the cooperative ideal, as it pertains to values and principles, principles akin to those that have guided our western democracies to fruition, since the XVII<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>.

Cooperatism's recent history clearly indicates that this paradigm was borne and bred in a balanced coming-and-going between the pursuit of an ideal and its practical application. Thus does balance become the key concept by virtue of its necessity in distinguishing utopia from action, and creative inspiration from practical needs. The ideal is pure abstraction, reducing the project to speechifying with no empirical intent. And a practice devoid of ideal is one forever in search of itself, forever borrowing, left and right, ideals that are not its own. Balance is necessary: practice and ideal, feeding off one another. When balance is lost, the movement itself withers, or morphs into pure abstraction tainted by complex ideological discourse, or loses its basic sense of purpose and action.

It is perhaps modern man's misfortune that he unintentionally contributes to breaking this basic equilibrium, a break brought about by the prevailing and narcissistic culture that leads us to believe that the individual has no need of ideals, other than to believe himself such an ideal (Chevrier, 2005, p 51). Thus deprived of the fundamental markers of a moral ideal, the individual falls prey to unmitigated conformism maximized by publicity, the markets, fashion and the media. In the words of Chevrier:

“Ideals acquire meaning and illuminate our existence only when great evocations succeed to embody them by the exemplarity of their actions. Intellectuals will not be content to stir the surface of the world with concepts; what use is speechifying, if we cannot bear witness by our very existence, in our very bones, of the truth we defend. To build a world, we must first know how to ourselves become its platform.” (2005, p. 70)

And so, it remains vital that organizations reestablish and maintain this balance by renewing ties with their philosophy so as to better throw light upon and substantiate its actions. And so is it with the cooperative. The strength of cooperatives resides in this measured balance between its philosophy and praxis. The hither-and-yon movement

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<sup>2</sup> The cooperative paradigm stems from an important philosophical tradition, implicitly inspired by the Enlightenment, that defends ideals dear to modern democracies. Unavoidably, cooperatism is far from the folkloric prejudices with which some have accredited it in attempts to discredit it...

bears a name: Education. Without this educational continuity between ideals or ideology and practices, the cooperative movement is threatened from within. To reinforce the basic premises of cooperatism (i.e. the open, liberating and critical reflection on Man, his values and purposes) in order to attain forever more authentic expertise through formal and informal cooperative education. Therein lies the required opportunity that will allow us to better understand and experience a democracy shaken by globalization. The cooperative paradigm is one that must identify and indicate the markers of what we must become. This premise builds on the fundamental values as expressed through the principles that set the guidelines that allow cooperatives to put their values into action. The cooperative paradigm must recognize the position the cooperative ideal is meant to occupy in direct line with its practices. And this educational movement is permanent: the ideal feeds the practices; the practices clarify the ideal.

To summarize: paradigms in general (as with the cooperative paradigm in particular) are philosophical reflections on the aims, much as the system is the practical and compliant establishment of the means. One sets the principles and the basic values in line with an anthropological definition and gives deep-rooted purpose to the activities; the other deals with the means to be used and methods to be adopted to build the organization in accordance to its ideal. One addresses the why; the other, the how.

In view of the numerous challenges, upheavals and uncertainties facing countries today, the cooperative movement is called upon to abandon the status quo and its conformism, and to take a stand in the public and democratic arena. This arena has need of listening to voices other than those of privatization and state control. The call for cooperative intuition and conscience must now be heard in the social debates and join the cries for greater humanization of the planet. The cooperative discourse must be heard, because the political decisions made today entail important consequences on human beings and on nature. The cooperative model will unavoidably jostle the prevailing model that is already proclaiming loud and clear and imposing its own paradigm, by presenting itself in the public arena, without modesty, proud of its heritage of sharing and of its potential for realization. To speak of real alternatives that can act as an important counterweight to the current economic dogmas, and implicitly but effectively regulate our lives, has become a dire necessity.

It appears increasingly urgent that the cooperative movement renews and announces to the world its own paradigm, as its founding principles are rooted in a humanism to be rediscovered. To aid our reflection on the paradigm, let us refer to Emmanuel Kant, German philosopher of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who, still today, invites us to consider three basic questions, universal questions that culturally emblazon the march of Man. Who are we basically at this, the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (defining Man)? What do we want to do (values and principles)? What do we hope to attain (existential aims)? Answering these three questions already cautiously sets the boundaries of the cooperative paradigm that will, in turn, serve as the basis for the development of an education in accordance with its vision. Answering these philosophical questions allows cooperatism, whose inspirational

source flows from the thinkers of the Enlightenment<sup>3</sup>, to more readily face, much as it earlier did, the social and economic organizations that increasingly destabilize the world's fragile balance<sup>4</sup>.

## **THE FOUNDATIONS AND CORRESPONDING SYSTEM**

According to present-day sociology, every organization and all human cultures are governed by a prevailing ideology. Every ideology expounds, at a given time and location, a philosophical synthesis, a paradigm that organizes itself in accordance to the three elements raised earlier: a particular definition of the human being, its corresponding values, and ultimate existential aims in line with the proposed anthropological definition. Consequently, philosophical reflection is required to better understand the paradigms or foundations supporting a given cultural, social and economical system. In other words, each individual culture holds deep within it the anthropological, ethical and teleological foundations that build, support and harmonize it throughout its people's or organization's history. It is from such philosophical synthesis that a specific social system is created.

By social system we mean a coordinated collection of individuals, material and financial resources coming together with goals, regulations and procedures with the common objective of completing a united, specific and complex mission. In fact, a viable social system is the best means of promoting a paradigm, or an accepted or imposed foundation. The development of a social system has value or power only to the extent that its corresponding philosophical foundations are sound. In this way, foundations are to a reflection on the view of human beings, as the system is to the practical means of realizing them.

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<sup>3</sup> "The Lights" believed in independent autonomous human reason. Have the courage to use your own understanding, begged Kant...to discover, develop and put into practice the laws of nature, moral and social laws. One objective: to increasingly humanize the world. As human nature is not unchanging, rather more a reality to be "fashioned", perfected, the philosophy of the Enlightenment elected the path of great social and educational changes. Only a veritable education, one that allows Man to think for himself, could lead us to a new, rational and virtuous Man. "Everything can be achieved through education", stated Helvetius. Education must contribute to the overall improvement of Man, to his transformation, to the extent that he imposes on himself and universally the norms that freely guide him. It is from such effervescent and philanthropic intellectual context that emerged Robert Owen and the notion of cooperatism (S. Dupuis, 1991), himself implicitly influenced by J.J. Rousseau (1712-1778) and his theses on social contract, democracy, civil liberty and education (J.J. Rousseau, 1964). Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) with his philosophy of moral duty and categorical imperatives (E. Kant, 1998) must also be mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the prevailing, increasingly globalizing, economic paradigm proposes or imposes (a subject of some debate today) a clear vision of Man, a series of values and principles in line with this vision, and a specific existential purpose. Here is a fine example of the power of American and Western think tanks. The current educational systems often this outlook as it is in fact the prevailing paradigm. Thus does education become a global issue, leading us to believe that it will be one of the great challenges of the third millennium. It progressively filters into the thinking of international economic markets (IMF, WTO, OECD, to name but a few). UNESCO and UNICEF propose more humanistic approaches. (OECD, 1994. International Commission on Education in the 21st Century, 1996 and C. Laval and L. Weber, 2001). Where does the cooperative fit in?

Generally, members of a community or organization unconsciously adhere to an anthropological, ethical and teleological philosophy, because the system in which they live promotes it by way of its overall educational system. Socially and culturally, the values advanced are accepted in the practices and decisions that typify social interaction. In light of our history, we can assume that a culture temporarily withdraws into a determinism that conveys a particular view of Man. Temporarily because the determinism of a paradigm is never absolute, despite the efforts of certain totalitarian and doctrinaire regimes of the past and, more notably of the 20th century, to convince us of the contrary by imposing their own human model considered the ultimate end of history (Arendt, 1990). The possibility of modifying or transcending this determinism by keeping close watch on society is altogether possible but, admittedly, complicated. In a democracy, prevailing ideologies must submit to the dialectic pressures of alternative groups that promote a new vision of human beings, lending them a different historical and existential meaning. Despite the unevenness of the forces, these groups can still become extraordinary and effective vehicles for social change, because the fundamental beliefs they defend continue to progress ideologically and culturally<sup>5</sup>.

In all modern democracies, it then becomes vital, more than ever, to be aware of the overall current social project that defines us. Society must always cast a critical glance over the product and direction of the project or risk becoming enslaved to it. As outlined by the Quebec philosopher, Thomas De Koninck: “To the extent to which I do not have a critical awareness of what I do, to which I fail to question its bases, my state of being altogether resembles, quite truly, that of sleepwalking, not even that of lucid dreaming” (De Koninck, 2000, p. 49). The former general director of Unesco, Frederico Mayor, agrees, describing the world of today as a drunken ship without a course nor project, battered by globalization devoid of meaning, abandoned to the “vestiges of a masterless technology, driving us blindly to a cruel destiny.” (Mayor, 1999, p. 23-24). According to current thinkers, we live, despite our academic achievements, without basically questioning ourselves nor the philosophical foundations that guide our lives. That is perhaps what is most lacking in Quebec cooperatives, no matter how sound the technical structure. Therein perhaps lies the basic and urgent task that must be completed by education, even though this task may seem vain and unproductive in view of the current paradigm... (De Koninck, 2004).

Whether our times seem determined to have us believe in the utter futility of looking back and reflecting on the philosophical foundations of our cultures and organizations, cooperative education must resist falling headlong into a race forward with no time for a reflective backward glance. Edgar Morin teaches us that education must allow for long-term reflection on the entirety of human development and search for the meaning of our collective actions, failing which, it is no longer educational, but solely formative. (Morin, 2000, p. 49-67).

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<sup>5</sup> We can assume that a cultural change is initially provoked by a change of paradigm. Thus was it with the Quiet Revolution in Quebec in the 1960s, with the passing of a religious paradigm to a more economical and corporate one.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In such a context, forever more encompassing, education becomes key. Let us not forget that education is the set of all processes and procedures that allow children to progressively access their own culture, and that of humans in general (Legendre, 1993). Education is the apex of human experiences because it questions the very essence of human beings, their values and purposes, recalling past greatness in order to better understand the present while transcending that which is to come. It is the initial and ultimate action that, while confronting the great existential and ethical questions, elevates humanity toward sound judgement and liberty<sup>6</sup>. It makes possible convincing others, without exclusion, to walk in enlightenment the paths of their culture with its values and customs, while looking yet further, that is to say, towards new paths for humanity. We can then synthesize and claim that education is an authentically human and total experience that raises our awareness of self, of things, and of the world. And all democratic contexts must permit it.

Education holds a dual characteristic: it is restrictive by reason of its culture, but transcendental by reason of its humanity. The level of elevation is limited by the social framework we occupy. A culture can never promote the definitive definition of Man, but only a specific definition. Thus is education a set of processes and procedures that bring an individual, a group or a society to the realization of its culture, while simultaneously offering itself the possibilities and openness to go beyond the model, bringing itself closer to humanity, hence its transcendence. In its own environment, education promotes certain human values, all the while invited by humanity itself, to go still further in its search to be. We are who we are, because education defines our culture. But this same education also demands that we be amazed by the richness of humanity that, in turn, demands differences and an ever greater humanity. To me, education seems a quite singular culture, and a particularly human one. Education thus forms part of a necessary dialectic movement between a view of local culture and an overall view of human dignity. It is never static nor absolute. If education closets itself into a framework that allows solely the reproduction of the prevailing model, it can then be termed propaganda and indoctrination.

In short, it is the ultimate humanizing act in line with set cultural perspectives. Education is a permanent and universal process in its principles, but diversified in its means. The educational experience manifests itself in many ways: family, work, social organization, media, the world... It raises children, simultaneously fashioning them, towards a chosen and embodied humanity. We implicitly want children to walk along the paths of their civilization with its values and customs, looking forever further, that is to say, towards an ideal of humanity. To close, we could again synthesize and claim that education is an

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<sup>6</sup> It is the initial and ultimate action that can elevate humanity and allow it to see its richness in its entirety, and thus, to better free itself. Much as a child in a crowd with an adult : holding the adult's hand, it sees only the limit imposed on it by those surrounding it. It frees itself from the limit when it is elevated and sits upon the shoulders of the adult who holds it firmly but can no longer stop it from seeing what it wants...Education elevates the child, society, humanity.



authentically human and total experience that raises our awareness of self, of things, and of the world.

In order to better understand the sense of the word “education”, let us define another term linked closely to the current human domain, namely, “training”. Today, training is often confused with the concept of education. Training can be defined as a set of specific notions, theories, and practices acquired in a given field. We therefore speak of training that is technical, professional, specialized, scientific, university... Training is know-how, attitudes, behaviours and skills developed by an individual within the framework of a program of studies with an eye to a given choice or to professional development. Training is a specific field necessary to the technical comprehension and transmission of a culture’s knowledge. But let us not forget that training is but a part of the overall educational experience. If education is the action of “bringing out” an individual’s potentialities, training is the action of “putting in” specific knowledge for voluntary assimilation. Training is to acquired technique what education is to life considered and valued.

So where does education stand now, at the onset of the 21st century? Are we an educated or a trained society? Are we a society that educates, or one that trains? There is a fundamental difference between a school, an organization or a society that offers knowledge of a philosophical AND technical nature and another that neglects the fundamental contribution and strictly favours specific aspects of knowledge. One awakens to the essence of being, the other inculcates skills; one prepares its subjects for civilization, the other for work; one opens, the other closes; one rediscovers lost treasures, the other hides them; one is priceless, the other speaks only of prices; one heightens awareness, the other stifles criticism; one brings about changes within, the other follows the rhythm without; one focuses on history to better look to the future, the other freezes us in the present; one integrates, the other disseminates; one proposes a humanistic project, the other imposes a mechanistic model... And so, how is it with our cooperatives as organizations and schools?

## **COOPERATIVE EDUCATION**

To speak of cooperative education is to refer directly to the fifth principle of the ICA (1995)<sup>7</sup>, which defines it as follows : “Cooperatives offer their members, their executives, their managers and their employees the education and training required to enable them to contribute effectively to the development of their cooperative. They inform the public at large, especially the young and those who lead public opinion, on the nature and advantages of cooperation.” Does understanding this principle correspond to the goals set by the founding proponents of cooperatism? Does it also allow us to confront the new issues of globalization? Let us cast a brief glance on history to better interpret the present, in an attempt at making it empirically pertinent and philosophically founded. One

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<sup>7</sup> DÉCLARATION APPROUVÉE PAR L'ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE DE L'ACI LORS DU CONGRÈS DE MANCHESTER - novembre-décembre 1995, « Déclaration sur l'identité coopérative », *Réseau coop*, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 11.

historical fact remains: initially, cooperative education did not occupy itself solely with the economic problems of its members. Encompassing basic apprenticeships and sound training, it favoured first and foremost the education of people. To the initial proponents of cooperatism, the proposed paradigm was the basis for all action. In his book, titled “The Cooperative Doctrine”, Paul Lambert states:

« (...) the cooperative movement, from its very beginning, aspires to a total transformation of the world and of Man. Moral preoccupations are what moves these initiators: they see within cooperation much more than the solution to a partial and passing problem; they see a formula capable of overhauling the entire economic and social system and of elevating Man to a moral behaviour comprising nobility and disinterestedness.” (Lambert, 1964, p. 41)

To this author, there is absolutely no doubt that cooperative education goes well beyond the simple training of its managers. “Serving our members consists in far more than simply elevating their lifestyle, it is contributing to their training as human beings. The educational task, the aspiration to moral nobility, is part and parcel of the essence of cooperation.” (Lambert, 1964, p. 251). These pioneers entertained huge dreams<sup>8</sup>: to seek out the true profound meaning of humanity in the legitimate ambition of improving their members’ knowledge of subjects as varied as citizenship and life. In short, they wanted to transform people and the world of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the cooperative experience. In 1884, the constitution of the Rochdale principles was composed. These principles laid the foundations of a new vision of human beings and their ways. These works are unanimous: a cooperative is not only an original economic organization, but rather more a profoundly humanizing and humanistic school, if the cooperative contributes to elevating the awareness of the cooperator as a person and as a citizen. As J.K. Galbraith reminds us (Galbraith, 2005, p. 24), does it not become vital, in an increasingly anonymous society, that the cooperative philosophically reiterate its own paradigm, so as to better position itself within, and declare it to an outside world short of ideals?

Here we see cooperative education take on the sense that cooperation attributes to it. Thus must it not only present itself as a prerequisite condition to cooperative action, but as a basically constituent and permanent condition. Two authors offer us summaries of the importance of cooperative education as a principle. W.P. Watkins reminds us that cooperative education is a principle indispensable to the existence of the cooperative, because it affords us a philosophical, technical (management and pedagogical tools) and practical comprehension of all remaining principles, the application of each demanding the manifestation of a developed cooperative spirit (Watkins, 1986, p. 123-138). Professor P.R. Duhashi, in his book, *Principles and philosophy of co-operation*, goes yet further, stating that education is the principle of all principles because it teaches other principles and because it transcends the cooperative itself (Dubhashi, 1970, p.72). It is the

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<sup>8</sup> The word “dream” takes on greater importance here: the notion of dream and utopia, a notion perhaps absent from cooperatism today, has value only to the extent that the foundations are renewed and specified in a particular context and period. We can dream of a fairer and more convivial society as offered by cooperatism, only if the paradigm has been declared and experienced, as intended by its pioneers.

royal pathway between theory and experience. Cooperatism cannot busy itself solely with its training tools, always at risk of becoming fragile if not supported and coloured by a reflection on cooperative philosophy that states that cooperatism identifies itself exclusively to human beings: it is from human beings that it stems, by human beings that it is realized, unfolded and fit into the scheme of things, and for human beings that it is developed.

Deprived of the basic markers of a cooperative ideal in line with the roots of its pragmatic heritage, cooperators run the risk of falling into an overlapping of categories. We suspect just such a reality affects the Quebec cooperative movement. Thus are we losing the very essence of cooperative education by limiting our actions strictly to the training of our managers. We deal with the immediate praxis, entirely leaving the formal in the informal, that is to say, the very basis of our action, the cooperative ideal.

We crassly ignore that which justifies and anchors the actions of the organization. In this way, we look upon the cooperative as simply a distinct economic entity. We forget that it must be a school that formally educates in matters of cooperation and democracy, therefore, of humanism. Its paradigm demands it: to not educate is to explicitly distance ourselves from the source that feeds and constitutes cooperatism itself, that is to say, human beings.

To educate in matters of liberty, equality and the dignity of men and women today is to accept the rules and regulations of democracy, as well as the many responsibilities that entails. Education in regard to the cooperative paradigm should allow for the development of virtues considered vital to the advent of a healthy democracy, that is to say, the sufficient and necessary knowledge to limit ignorance, the desired autonomy to reduce dependence, the confidence to overcome fear, and openness of mind so indispensable to eliminating indifference. In this sense, the essence of cooperative education is therefore the very essence of cooperative democracy.

The cooperative movement offers the possibility of rallying together themes as important to humanity as autonomy and liberty in fragile balance with the principle of the equality and explicit recognition of Man within a democratic framework. It serves as a counterweight to the alienating social pressure that currently makes people instrumentally and economically effective, but increasingly devoid of meaning. It must allow the young to recognize the importance of its values and principles, moving from simple monotonous litany to greater philosophical comprehension and justification, so as to better determine its actions and testify to them. The young hunger for values, such as liberty, equality, solidarity, fairness, democracy... (Nadeau, 2004). They must, however, become aware of the meaning, credibility, pertinence and adequateness of such values as experienced and embodied in the organization we call a cooperative. To mechanically recite cooperative values and principles without understanding their philosophical content, links and richness is proof of a form of ignorance that cooperative education must transcend. Thus can we show that there is nothing folkloric about cooperatives. The essence and rightful place of the cooperative paradigm must be rediscovered to counter the harmful influence of a currently prevailing system that brutalizes the citizenry, ferociously imposing its

logic, its vision of Man, its reductionist values and its purposes. We are witnessing, somewhat impassively, the dehumanization of the individual, because it is rarely found at the heart of the major preoccupations of our world.

Remember, the cooperative is not only an original economic organization, it is predominantly a humanistic school, if and only when it contributes to the realization and elevation of cooperators as human beings and citizens of a world damaged by a new ignorance on the subject of human beings (De Koninck, 2000). This viewpoint brings us to consider the cooperative model as an organizational and formative place that favours the understanding and promotion of its paradigm by re-establishing the links between its philosophy and its praxis. Such humanism, newfound and declared to society at large, cannot but awaken consciousness, bear witness to others yet to be invented, and therefore be the vehicle of a new societal project to confront the uncertainties of increasingly globalized contemporary issues, in which human beings are forgotten (Morin, 2000, p. 87-102).

## **CONCLUSION**

The cooperative must urgently commit itself to the people of our modern world and to the situation that surrounds them in the short-term. To do so, it must redefine itself internally, as well as it can, by taking to heart forever more fervently the richness of its humanity and values. Thus will it be able to take a stand on new, increasingly subtle societal needs, such as education. Therein lies one of its educational tasks today: to be an inspirational intention that injects much sought after meaning into the major local, national and international democratic debates. Cooperatives must reveal to the world their paradigm. They must continue to participate in building a better humanity, more aware and fairer, by proposing their clearly understood values for our times and by indicating new paths to follow. They must unashamedly show themselves to the world as an original organization sustained by an original philosophy. Ultimately, the cooperative bears a moral and educational responsibility to humanity itself. It bears a humanitarian duty, as coined by Kant.

Not unlike the builders of cathedrals in the Middle Ages, cooperators find themselves before a colossal task. These builder-dreamers of ages past worked daily and untiringly, plan in hand, knowing full well that they would never see nor enjoy the finished product. They knew, however, that their hard labour would result, at some later date, in the creation of a work of art that would benefit humanity... Precisely to this, are cooperators today invited. Precisely with this, must cooperative education deal: to draw up the precise plan for the construction of a major social undertaking that many believe attainable for the good of humanity.

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