

### **Towards a mutualistic economic theory: Profit vs. mutual surplus**

*Luc Bonet*

Standard economic theory forces us to think of economics solely in terms of seeking profit, which refers to maximising an individual advantage. However, all economic activity involves a mutual advantage. In the absence of an accurate economic model, this advantage is underplayed in the theory even though it is possible to quantify mutual surplus. Using this objective criterion, we can understand profit in its critical dimension as the result of the reduction of this surplus in economic activity, which in the final analysis depends on the forms of ownership of firms as institutional systems for supplying goods and services. An economic optimum can be defined as a situation where the individual benefit of parties to the transaction is maximised for a maximum mutual surplus and not under the totally unrealistic assumption of “pure and perfect” competition. The economic analysis of mutual advantage opens the way for a mutualistic economic theory as an alternative to standard economic theory.

### **The governance of work-integration social enterprises in the Autonomous Basque Community and the French Basque Country: The missing debate about the market**

*Jean-Jacques Manterola*

Work-integration social enterprises, a sector that is part of the social and solidarity economy, have hybrid forms of governance. Our comparative study of the Autonomous Basque Community and the French Basque Country reveals two distinct regional models. The Autonomous Basque Community has a concentrated institutional model based on competition and exposed to market fluctuations. In contrast, the French Basque Country's model is decentralised and largely depends on the public authorities, who demand greater market involvement. The study shows that the impact of the market, whether chosen or imposed, undermines the economic

viability and social aims of these enterprises. The absence of a debate makes this sector a counter example of the social construction of regional confidence, which has been found in other parts of the social and solidarity economy in the Basque Country.

### **The cooperative advantage: Stability and experience**

*Marius Chevallier*

The current strategy of businesses in the cooperative and mutual movement is based on asserting their alternative values. This strategy has a weakness in that it is hard to measure the impact of those values in the main cooperative and mutual sectors (the food industry and farming, wholesale distribution, banking, insurance). Looking at the origins of the cooperative movement, it could be argued that the specificity of these businesses has more to do with their internal rules that act as a safeguard against market forces. While the market values adaptability and skilled workers, cooperatives and mutuals tend to be stable and create and utilise tacit informal skills suited to their particular environments. This market-centric thinking forms the dominant analytical framework, including for cooperative stakeholders. Individuals have a “natural” tendency to draw their own solutions from the market paradigm, and it is therefore necessary to have safeguards that protect against the paradigm. Analysing cooperatives thus requires breaking out of the dominant analytical framework rather than drawing on solutions that hasten the drive towards the mainstream.

### **A unique alliance of the cooperative and mutual movements:**

#### **The Saint-Claude School**

*Stève Desgré*

In the history of the social economy, the Saint-Claude School exemplifies a cooperative movement with a social mission. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, activist co-operators from the Jura's manufacturing sector became involved in the

mutual movement. The Fraternelle cooperative and the Maison du Peuple mutual-aid society worked hand in hand. Although this regional phenomenon was not replicated elsewhere in the country, it deserves more study. Why haven't the cooperative and mutual movements, the sister movements of the social economy, formed alliances more often? We need to examine the

theoretical, historical and legal factors that they have in common and that separate them so that we can better understand this unique case. The socialist leaders of the Fraternelle food cooperative in Saint-Claude became active in health and social welfare in the Haut-Jura and founded a mutual-aid society. The legal factor played a pivotal role in this development. ●