



# **La Lega: The Making of a Successful Network of Co-operatives**

by

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June 1994

*A thesis submitted for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Politics at  
the University of Adelaide*

Awarded 1995

# Abstract

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This is a study of the Italian co-operative enterprises associated to La Lega Nazionale delle Co-operative e Mutue (National League of Co-operatives and Mutual Aid Societies), with particular attention devoted to studying the co-operatives established in the region of Emilia Romagna where La Lega is most developed. The major objective is to examine how these co-operatives have managed to flourish despite the poor survival record in other countries with a market economy, proving that a form of enterprise different to capitalist and State enterprises can survive and grow in a market economy which operates under a Liberal Democratic State.

A historical overview of the co-operative movement in the western world is presented together with a comparative study of the co-operative sector in the United Kingdom and Mondragon. It examines the reasons for establishing co-operatives and identifies the factors which have led to their failure and to their success. It also analyses the factors that have hindered cooperative development and canvasses the means of overcoming them.

Italian cooperatives have succeeded by integrating their operations within the wider economy and by representing their interests to the State. This has involved organising different levels of support structures which improved their economic competitiveness. Dealing with the State was assisted by acting through La Lega and by tapping the support of political parties. This brought public support, favourable legislation and access to a variety of public resources. The specific fragmented character of the Italian State will be examined and an explanation will be given to explain its support of cooperatives.

In Italy La Lega's cooperatives have managed to succeed by identifying and capitalising on the opportunities offered by the market and the specific character of the Italian State.

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