

Theorizing “Producer-led” versus “Investor led” Dairy Cooperatives: A Regulationist Perspective

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Abstract

Agricultural producer cooperatives, especially dairy cooperatives, have been dominant in the agri-food sector, especially in Northern Europe. Recently there has been significant concentration and internationalization amongst dairy cooperatives as many have been transformed into large international growth orientated organizations. In this article, the development of dairy cooperatives in Ireland and Denmark is explored from a regulationist perspective. In particular, the Mode of Social Regulation (MSR) is explored using empirical evidence from the Irish and Danish processing industries. Marden’s (1992) understanding of the MSR – based on five interrelated elements (monetary and credit relationships, the type of competition, the wage-labor relation, the mode of adhesion to the global regime, and the form of state intervention) – is employed. The research has found that the type of accumulation has a significant influence on national MSRs and a distinction is drawn between producer-led accumulation and investor-led accumulation in the dairy processing industry. As the national MSRs have evolved, hegemony has shifted from a group or coalition of national organizations and dairy processing companies to globally-orientated and integrated companies. There is evidence of increasing global adhesion in the MSRs of both national industries, although the changing MSRs do not represent a clean break with the past. Rather, contemporary MSRs build upon and are contingent on past MSRs; indeed elements of past MSRs co-exist alongside elements of new MSRs.