

The co-op identity – a timeline

By Alice
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1844 – Establishment of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in the UK

Many of the Rochdale Pioneers were weavers who, seeing their communities facing the mechanisation of the Industrial Revolution, unemployment, low pay and dangerous workplaces, came together to sell food items they could not otherwise afford – forming a democratic institution at a time when most people did not have the vote.

The opening of this consumer co-op has come to symbolise the birth of the modern co-operative movement, although it is acknowledged that the Pioneers based their model on the examples of other societies that had come before, including the Fenwick Weavers' in Scotland, which was formed in 1761.

1860 – List of Rochdale Principles published



PHOTOGRAPH OF THIRTEEN OF THE ORIGINAL MEMBERS
ROCHDALE EQUITABLE PIONEERS' SOCIETY.

The Pioneers published an Almanac (a calendar for members) which included an article for those wishing to set up a society. The contents of this article began to be called the Rochdale Principles and were used by other societies to guide their work.

This was an important historical landmark towards the

development of the co-operative principles, though it can be placed in a wider global history of co-operative practice and ideas. As a quote displayed at the Rochdale Pioneers Museum in England states: "The co-operative ideal is as old as human society."

The Rochdale Principles:

1. Open membership
2. Democratic control (one member, one vote)
3. Distribution of surplus in proportion to trade
4. Payment of limited interest on capital
5. Political and religious neutrality
6. Selling of pure and unadulterated goods
7. Cash trading
8. Promotion of education

1895 – ICA is formed

The International Cooperative Alliance was formed at the first International Cooperative Congress in London, taking on the task of consolidating and expanding the co-operative movement, and refining the co-operative principles inspired by the Rochdale Pioneers.

1937 – ICA's first formal declaration of the Co-operative Principles

At the 15th Cooperative Congress in Paris, the ICA formally adopted four essential principles, making the list more applicable to different types of co-ops across all sectors. Three more principles were deemed "while undoubtedly part of the Rochdale System, and successfully operated by the Co-operative Movement in

the different countries ... not a condition for membership of the I.C.A."

If an organisation wanted to join the Alliance, it now had to show that it kept to these principles. The advent of fascist regimes and the onset of World War II meant that countries such as Germany, Austria and Italy were excluded for some time.

1937 – ICA Essential Co-operative Principles:

1. Open membership
2. Democratic control (one member, one vote)
3. Distribution of the surplus to the members in proportion to their transactions
4. Limited interest on capital

Additional, Non-essential Principles

5. Political and religious neutrality
6. Cash trading
7. Promotion of education

The Rochdale Principle of 'Selling of pure and unadulterated goods' was not included in the ICA's list of Rochdale Principles, as its historical analysis did not suggest this principle was "essential and of permanent value" to the work of the Pioneers.

1966 – Second review of the principles

The principles were reviewed again at the 23rd ICA Congress in Vienna, with the addition of two more essential principles: provision for education and co-operation among co-ops. The principle of open membership was also amended to require open and voluntary membership.

At the previous Congress in Bournemouth, 1963, the ICA had agreed to form a Commission to reformulate the fundamental principles of

co-operation under current conditions. This process took place against a backdrop of the Cold War and decolonisation, leading to more non-European organisations becoming affiliated with the ICA.

1966 – ICA Co-operative Principles:

1. Open and voluntary membership
2. Democratic control (one member, one vote)
3. Distribution of the surplus to the members in proportion to their transactions
4. Limited interest on capital
5. Promotion of education
6. Co-operation between co-ops

1995 – ICA adopts Statement on the Co-operative Identity, Values and Principles

The Statement on the Co-operative Identity, Values and Principles was adopted at the ICA's Centennial Congress and General Assembly in Manchester. The statement includes a definition, a set of values and a modified set of seven principles, and has remained unchanged since its adoption in 1995.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc, continuing globalisation, an economic crash and the emergence of new technologies had led many co-ops around the world to examine how they would survive in these new circumstances.

Prof Ian MacPherson led a lengthy consultation process with thousands of co-operators around the world to produce the statement, and in its background paper he describes the periodic revisions of the principles as a "source of strength" for the co-op movement.

But Prof MacPherson also explained in his speech to the 1995 Congress that the Statement on the Cooperative Identity is indivisible, where the deletion of any element would make it collapse.

1844

Establishment of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in the UK (above)

1895

ICA is formed



1966

ICA's second review of the co-operative principles



1995

ICA adopts the Statement on the Co-operative Identity, Values and Principles

1860

A list of Rochdale Principles are published

1937

ICA's first formal declaration of the co-operative principles

2002

ILO Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation



2012

Blueprint for a Co-op Decade is published

2015

ICA approves Guidance Notes on the Cooperative Principles

2021

33rd World Congress looks at how to put the Identity into practice

2011

ICA Americas propose amendment to seventh co-operative principle



2013

Launch of Cooperative Marque (right)



2021

deitalks.com is launched

