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Co-operatives as a resource in the Finnish rural areas
from the beginning of the 20th century up today

Co-operatives have had an international history and character as an economic and social movement, and, concerning the country's size, co-operative activity has been essential in Finland during the 20th century. Traditionally, co-operatives have been divided in two categories: producers' co-ops in the countryside and those of consumers' in the towns and the cities. Despite of similarity in the ideology, the two types of co-operatives have had hard conflicts while in the pursuit of their individual goals. Nowadays, because of the large social-economic changes, the strife has diminished, and during the past two decades there has been a rise of so called neo co-ops and work based co-ops to create new jobs in countryside, too.

In this article, we draw a large scale picture of the co-operatives in the Finnish rural areas, from temporary peasant working unions to raw water co-ops building the infrastructure in the countryside of EU-Finland. The context of the research will be the changes in agriculture and rural life between 1900 and 2010. Interpreting the pre-existing statistics, we figure the number of the co-ops and cast a view on the fields they have operated on. We also estimate the size of the rural population the co-ops dealt with. Finally, we study how the co-operatives coped with the economic-social circumstances and the crucial changes in them.

Also, we will bring up some themes of discussion connected with the co-operatives: When talking of co-operatives, do we talk mainly of economic activity or peoples' social movement? Was it ideology or productivity that mattered? What has been the role of the co-operative movement in the social crises? And, finally, can we consider the co-operative form of activity as an underused resource in the Finnish countryside today?