

Feature interview

ICA Board member Felice Scalvini is this month's interviewee

This month the **Digest** talks to Felice Scalvini, one of Europe's most experienced and dedicated champions of social co-operation. Felice reflects on his long-standing career in the co-operative field, what has inspired and challenged him, his contribution to legislative reform and co-operative development, and how he sees all forms of co-operation between co-operatives, at all levels, as essential in the third millennium.

Digest: *How did you become involved in the co-operative movement?*

FS: I started my career in the co-operative movement



Felice Scalvini

in 1975 as a volunteer promoting a social co-operative with a group of friends who were managing a community of children with serious family difficulties.

After six years in the heart of Milan's financial world, I returned to my home city of Brescia in 1981 to collaborate with the local structure of Confcooperative. I was soon involved in the start up of workers' co-operatives and, in particular,

"I am committed to bringing the ICA closer to members' needs through strengthening of regional structures..."

Felice Scalvini

those co-operatives which fell into the category of "social".

This new incarnation of the co-operative formula, although integrated into an ultra-centennial history, had distinctive features that didn't correspond with the existing laws. As so often happens, social needs and responses preceded the drawing up and consolidation of legal frameworks. To get suitable recognition for social co-operatives.

I drafted new legislation in 1981 that after lengthy and complex discussions was finally approved on 8 November 1991. The resulting legislation has worked well and had positive effects, proving itself capable of meeting the needs of development and transformation for which it was originally conceived. Accordingly, social co-operation shifted from the pioneering, experimental phase and transformed itself into one of the most vital sectors of the co-operative movement.

In 1996, thanks to my experience in the co-operative movement and, in particular, the workers and social co-operatives sector, I was elected to the chair of CECOP.

In 1998 I joined the Council of ICA Europe (now *Co-operatives Europe*) with the aim of offering my experience for the development of the European co-operative movement.

In this latter context I feel I have made a significant contribution to the evolution of the representative structure of the European co-operative movement as approved by the Assembly of Manchester in November 2006.

Digest: *What does your current work in the co-operative movement involve?*

FS: Having founded and chaired the initial phase of the Confcooperative Federation and national consortium for social co-operatives, and serving one term as Vice-President of Confcooperative, I am currently involved in national level financing activities as President of CFI, a private equity society dealing with the financing of worker and social co-operatives.

At the local level, as Vice-President of Confcooperative Brescia, I am involved with training new co-operative managers and leaders.

At the European level, I am President of CECOP and a council member of Co-operatives Europe (the ICA regional organisation for Europe).

At the international level, I am Vice-President of CI-COPA, and as an ICA Board member, I am committed to bringing the organisation

Felice Scalvini interview...continued

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closer to members' needs through strengthening of regional structures.

Digest: *In your view, what are the main challenges for the co-operative movement globally?*

FS: As I see it, the greatest challenge of the third millennium is dealing with the ICA's sixth co-operative principle (co-operation between co-operatives) at all levels and in every conceivable form.

A local challenge for communities, cities and territories, it is also a challenge at the national, European and global levels.

To bring this to fruition, we must overcome sectoral barriers and create co-operative networks that offer citizens global opportunities at the local level (consumption, jobs, housing, savings, and welfare).

At national, regional and global levels, I see that it is crucial to promote an envi-

through specific legal tools.

In this regard, the Italian experience of large inter-sectoral organisations is proof-positive that it is possible to generate strong co-operative development.

At the global level, in my opinion, ICA should actively work towards the development of such intersectoral organisations in every country and region of the globe, buoyed by the experience of *Cooperatives Europe* and consolidation processes of regional organisations.

Digest: *You are involved with many peak bodies in the co-operative sector (Concooperative Bresica, ICA Europe, CECOP and CICOPA to name a few).*

In your view what are some of the main benefits of social enterprise, social co-operation and the third sec-



Felice Scalvini addressing a recent meeting

tor for the communities they serve?

FS: First social co-operation represents "the entrepreneurial soul" of the entire non-profit universe that is already developing in every part of the world.

This is of a great importance because the development of non-profit economic activity is the only way to meet the welfare needs of citizens vis-à-vis the failures of the market and the limits of public sector intervention.

The fact that co-operatives take the leadership of this vital dynamic guarantees a democratic, "hands-on" management at all levels.

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A social co-operative in Italy where disadvantaged people make wooden products

ronment, where all forms of co-operation are recognized, promoted and supported,

"hands-on" management at all levels.