

Bruce Thordarson

1948 - 2018

Bruce Thordarson championed cooperatives across Canada and around the globe. His work has helped popularize and strengthen the feasibility of business organizations owned and operated by its members.

Born in 1948 in Mozart, Saskatchewan, Bruce moved to Saskatoon for undergraduate studies at the University of Saskatchewan. He moved to Ottawa for graduate studies at Carleton University, obtaining his degree in 1971. His thesis and published books on federal policymaking under the Pearson and Trudeau administrations gained him a job as a special assistant at Canada's Parliamentary Centre for Foreign Affairs from 1972 to 1974, and as a policy advisor at the Department of Manpower and Immigration from 1974 to 1976.

Bruce began his career in cooperatives in 1976, when he became Director of Government Affairs at the Canadian Co-operative Credit Society. In 1979, he took up the position of Executive Director at the Cooperative Union of Canada. In 1985, he moved to the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), which, to this day, is one of the largest non-governmental organizations in the world, representing "1 billion cooperative members on the planet". In 1988, he was promoted to Director General of the ICA, a role he held until 2001.

He helped transform the ICA into a driving force for cooperatives around the world. In 1995, he drafted two documents that would forever revolutionize cooperatives. The first was his article *Cooperatives and Sustainable Human Development*, which inspired the United Nations General Assembly to establish a special International Credit Union Day. The second, which he co-drafted with colleagues, was the ICA's Statement on the Cooperative Identity. The latter document engaged consultations with over 10,000 people through regular international and regional meetings in order to craft a lasting legacy for



cooperatives. The document sets "the minimum common denominator for all cooperatives in all sectors and all regions" through "a definition, 10 values and 7 operational principles". Under his direction, the ICA also underwent a structural reconfiguration to accord full equality of status to the Global South.

Although Bruce left the ICA in 2001, he remained active in the cooperative movement until his death, including assistance to cooperatives in Indonesia and Vietnam. From 2012 to 2015, he also served on the Board of Directors of the Funeral Co-operative of Ottawa. He died in April 2018 at the age of 69.