

Marie Curie-UNIKE PhD Fellow's recent Meeting with the Chief Minister of Assam, India, on a Heterodox University Model

On 18 February 2015 UNIKE Ph.D. Fellow Catherine Butcher met with Shri Tarun Gogoi, Assam Chief Minister and Dr. Rafiqz Zaman, IAS (Rtd), Vice Chancellor, Assam Rajiv Gandhi University of Co-operative Management in Assam, Sivasagar, India to discuss heterodox forms of university ownership/control, governance, financing and organisation structure; the topic of Catherine's PhD research.



The subject of their conversation was the Assam Rajiv Gandhi University of Cooperative Management (ARGUCOM) which was established by an Act of Parliament in 2010, and began operations in Assam in 2013. ARGUCOM functions as any other university, offering a variety of courses. However, the main purpose for its formation is to provide education in cooperative management and to educate and strengthen the cooperative movement in Assam in an attempt to develop Assam's economy.

ARGUCOM is not itself a co-operative. This means that faculty and students do not own the assets, they do not share in the profits and they are not part of the governing body except for the Vice Chancellor. It was established by the government of Assam and thus is publicly owned and financed by the government through the Office of Registrar of Cooperatives.

Because this university is still in its infancy its successes are yet to be realised and the extent to which students and faculty are able to work cooperatively in a non-cooperative structure would be an interesting development to monitor. However, when the question was posed to the Chief Minister: "why a cooperative university?" he responded:

"...that the decision taken was to allow for a university that would provide for the masses rather than one in which only a few persons stood to benefit as is the growing trend around the world today. Improving the livelihood of the common man and addressing social justice issues was at the centre of the decision making process, according to the Chief Minister, and a cooperative management university provided the best option because the co-operative ethos addresses these challenges."

Catherine is looking for "resources of hope" from existing literature, and scouting the world for "spaces of hope" that may assist in identifying a heterodox university model with the potential to offer a different educational experience for students in terms of access to higher education for all, lower tuition fees, and improvement in the pedagogy and curriculum design, more relevant to local societal needs.

More information about Catherine and her research can be accessed on the University of Roehampton website and at <http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/Research-Centres/Centre-for-Organisational-Research/Research-staff/>