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Constructing the Co-operative Imaginary: Journalism's Past, Present, and Emerging Contributions

Linking Theory and Practice

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Guest Editorial

Constructing the Co-operative Imaginary: Journalism's Past, Present, and Emerging Contributions

Mitch Diamantopoulos, Alex Bird, and Andrew Bibby with Siôn Whellens and Rebecca Harvey

This special edition of the *Journal of Co-operative Studies* celebrates the sesquicentennial of *Co-op News* (founded as *The Co-operative News* in 1871) by focusing on the co-operative movement's complicated relationship with the media. Against the systemic bias and neglect of the establishment press, challengers such as *Co-op News* have repeatedly arisen. Although this continuing tug-of-war for media power is epochal, multi-faceted, and consequential, it remains under-theorised and under-researched. While this collection can only scratch the surface of this topic, its contributors cast important new light at a moment of unprecedented media-saturation. Indeed, ambient news increasingly pervades our lives. As the "primary sense-making process of modernity" (Hartley, 1996, p. 12), journalism thus largely defines and distorts co-operation in the popular imaginary. Co-operators therefore neglect the evolving and ubiquitous power of the press at their peril.

It is for this reason that this special issue responds to both the news industry's contemporary crisis and to the question of why we should care about co-operative journalism. As the UK *Cairncross Review* reported, news sector shrinkage reflects rapid technological innovation and results in increasingly precarious employment (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2019). Pandemic shocks have since further eroded quality, sustainable journalism. Instead, cost-cutting and debt reduction are the watchwords of the age. However, the implications of this protracted decline reach far beyond the news industry. As Cairncross reported, holding private and public power to account is central to a properly functioning democracy and society. Conversely, journalism's crisis serves as a preface to democratic dysfunction and social breakdown. Moreover, constricting democracy's oxygen supply poses particular menace for co-operation — which is premised on strong democratic governance and values. Nevertheless, as an alternative way to meet members' needs for news or news-work, the crisis of the investors' business model also represents an opportunity for co-operative innovation. The cases of *The Bristol Cable* (est. 2014) and Glasgow's *The Ferret* (est. 2015) are just two recent British successes. Several fascinating case studies of news co-operation — spanning the Canadian province of Québec, France, Greece, Spain, and the U.K. — thus wrap-up this issue on a cautiously optimistic note.

Movement Journalism and Early Co-operation: Entwined Histories

Early British co-operation was intimately bound up with movement journalism. Contributions to this special issue clearly illustrate this fact. Beginning with the Owenist press, Mitch Diamantopoulos demonstrates that press activism both preceded the *Co-operative News* and created the conditions for that venture's success. Applying Gramsci's dictum that "every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas", Diamantopoulos outlines how several waves of dissenting journalism laid co-operation's cultural foundations.

Anthony Webster's review of the early British movement press picks up where Diamantopoulos leaves off, focusing mostly on the *Co-operative News*' legacy. Once a weekly newspaper dominated by English consumer co-operatives, Webster's short paper follows its evolution up to its present forms as a monthly magazine and global news website. Along the way, he addresses the re-launch of *The Co-operator* by Henry Pitman in 1861 and the impetus his controversial views lent toward a movement-owned alternative. Also highlighted are the wider stable of publications launched by the sector, including the important case of *Reynolds News* — the national weekly newspaper purchased by the Co-operative Press in 1929. By including illustrations from various co-operative titles, Webster helps us better glimpse the spirit of the age.

Christopher Olewicz's close reading of the *Sheffield Co-operator*'s agitations from 1922 to 1939 is similarly fascinating. In contrast with the efforts of *Co-operative News* and *Reynolds News* to reach country-wide audiences, this study highlights the importance of a local press. As the Co-operative Party's vehicle, Olewicz shows how this newspaper both countered co-operation's adversaries and promoted its interests and outlook in political debates. Spotlighting the role of the *Sheffield Co-operator* in developing a parliamentary wing thus offers valuable insight into Britain's unique movement-media-state nexus. Olewicz's work also encourages greater attention to movement journalism's role in contesting political power elsewhere.

Taken together, these three contributions serve as important reminders of movement journalism's vital historical importance — in building co-operative identity, movement culture, and development momentum. Focused on early British co-operation, these examples should also encourage future investigations of the role played by the movement press across the wider world of co-operative enterprise. As Webster suggests, the archives of co-operative movement publications offer a 'treasure trove' of material for a new generation of historians.

Establishment Media Coverage: A Story of Neglect and Bias

Contrasting sharply with these reflections on the residual cultural inheritance bequeathed by movement journalism, contributions from Anita Mangan and Anu Puusa and Sanna Saastamoinen focus on the dominant culture today fostered by the investor-owned daily press, and how it informs (and misinforms) public perceptions of co-operation. Mangan's study of co-operatives' coverage across U.K. national newspapers in 2020 finds that co-operatives were virtually invisible. Even when co-operation was mentioned it was not explained; it was associated with 'other' people outside British 'mainstream' society; and co-operation was politicised in a way that capitalist enterprise was not. This paper thus points to the media's enduring importance in the cultural reproduction of the investor-owned firm's hegemony on the one hand and co-operation's marginality on the other. It importantly also underlines the movement's need to break out of this symbolic marginalisation if it is to become more than a marginal player in the British economy. Those considering studies of the press and co-operation elsewhere will find Mangan's work a useful reference.

Puusa and Saastamoinen also analyse co-operation's press coverage. This study considers two daily newspapers' treatment of a Finnish consumer retailer's aggressive price-cutting strategy in 2015. Like Mangan, Puusa and Saastamoinen find a news bias that fails to account for co-operatives' distinctive character. In this case, the press favoured private ownership, competitive values, and profit-maximisation as businesses' primary purpose. The authors urge journalism education reform but note the co-operative federation also framed its actions as a simple 'price war'. Puusa and Saastamoinen's double-edged research thus offers an important reminder that sector communications also need to continually reinforce co-operation's identity.

Co-operative News Innovations: Comparing Contemporary Exemplars

The news about contemporary co-operation's relationship with the press is not all bad, as three case study-based contributions finally illustrate. Anca Voinea compares the U.K.'s *New*

Internationalist (est. 1973), France's *Alternatives Économiques* (est. 1980), and Spain's *Alternativas Económicas* (est. 2013). All multi-stakeholder co-operatives, they pool the resources of news-workers, readers, and often other social economy supporters. A valuable reconnaissance of these influential and long-standing co-operatives, Voinea's findings provide measured encouragement for future sector prospects. The study also makes the case for further research — on these and other news co-operatives.

Similarly, Michael Fefes provides a case study of worker-led news co-operation from Greece. Semi-structured interviews with the editor of daily newspaper *Efimerida ton Syntakton* (EfSyn — the *Journalists' Newspaper*) illuminate how news-workers formed this 'phoenix co-operative' from the ashes of *Eleftherotypia* (Free Press). This innovation saved members' jobs, sustained journalistic quality, and — like the *New Internationalist*, *Alternatives Économique, and Alternativas Económicas* — preserved an independent and progressive editorial voice. The additional fact that *EfSyn* emerged from the context of business failure, Greece's protracted economic crisis, and the pandemic shocks that followed makes this case a uniquely important addition to this collection. Born of crisis, *EfSyn* did not benefit from a period of relative stability to build-up its reserves or resilience. Like Argentina newsrooms also recuperated by their workers, *EfSyn*'s decade of sustained publication thus offers important hope to insecure news-workers elsewhere.

Étienne Fouquet, Myriam Michaud, Luc Audebrand and Claude-André Guillotte offer a similar case of collective resilience in the face of profound crisis from the Canadian province of Québec — a contemporary world leader in social economy and co-operative innovations. Their article presents the case of CN2i, a co-operative regional media group that — like *EfSyn* — is a 'phoenix co-op'. Launched on the eve of the global pandemic, it emerged from the bankruptcy of an investor-owned group of six regional dailies. Paradoxically, the added complexity posed by simultaneously converting a group of newspapers created new opportunities for creative resource mobilisation. In this case, each publication was reorganised as a multi-stakeholder co-operative to enlist audience support. Central services for the group were also centralised as a second-tier co-operative, held by the member co-operatives. This expertly facilitated conversion both reflects the unique supports afforded by Québec's co-operative development system and offers a valuable model for worker-led conversions elsewhere in this period of protracted crisis for the news industry. This team's research findings are a must-read, both for practitioners and students of news co-operation.

While these cases' unique circumstances limit generalisation, such co-operative media alternatives illustrate that news-workers, their audience-communities, and social economy allies are already playing important roles in re-inventing journalism for the 21st century. However, this emerging sector faces strong economic and industry headwinds — without investors' deep pockets. There is thus no guarantee of their continued success. Nevertheless, these cases also suggest a movement long neglected and misrepresented by establishment journalism can regenerate itself by meeting communities' pressing need for quality, independent news. While no time for foolhardy ventures in this destabilised sector, the historical moment does call out for further research on successful innovations, instructive setbacks, and sector expansion opportunities. Certainly, inattention implies opportunity costs. Moreover, failing to support such efforts may even reinforce regressive tendencies inside and outside co-operation — as democratic values are increasingly threatened by misinformation and an unchecked authoritarian populism. Against such a toxic brew of conspiracy theories, reaction, racism, and xenophobia, one things is clear: journalists' democratic mission to seek the truth and empower the public remains a vital resource for a more equitable, sustainable, and co-operative future.

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Guest Editors

Mitch Diamantopoulos is associate professor in the School of Journalism, University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. He is a founder of *Planet S* and *Prairie Dog* magazines, published by Hullabaloo Publishing Workers Co-operative Ltd where Mitch worked for 15 years before moving into academia. Alex Bird is a co-operative researcher and activist. He co-founded a printing co-operative in Cardiff specialising in work for labour movement, and voluntary, charitable and campaigning organisations, during which time Alex founded and edited a Trades Union newspaper (*Union Eyes*), which became the highest circulation left of centre publication in Wales. Andrew Bibby is a professional writer and journalist. As a successful freelance journalist championing the co-operative movement in *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Observer*, Andrew has now left journalism to be able to spend more time on book-writing.

The editors would like to thank Siôn Whellans and Rebecca Harvey for their input into the development of this special issue. Siôn joined Calverts – a worker-owned creative design studio and print shop, in 1985. He also serves as a member of CECOP, the European confederation of industrial and service co-operatives. Rebecca is executive editor of *Co-operative News*, having joined the *News* as deputy editor in 2013. She is the fifteenth named executive editor (appointed in 2018) in the organisation's 150 year history and only the second woman to hold the most senior post.

Holyoake's Ghost: Remembering Press Activism's Role in the Invention, Cultural Empowerment, and Social Mobilisation of Britain's Co-operative Movement, 1821-1871

Mitch Diamantopoulos

This study spotlights alternative journalism's contributions to the British co-operative movement's take-off in the nineteenth century. It shows five waves of press activism that powered movement expansion: the Owenist agitations, the Brighton wave, the socialist turn (including the radical unstamped), the Rochdale moment, and the establishment of a movement-owned press. This historical sociology of co-operators' press activism demonstrates that alternative media innovation was central to advancing literacy, intellectual and press freedoms, and the early British movement's advance. Indeed, co-operative news-work — from street-hawking to the activist journalism of movement intellectuals such as Robert Owen, Dr. William King, Henry Hetherington, and George Jacob Holyoake — drove the democratic broadening-out and working class cultural empowerment upon which movement gains depended. From 1821's *The Economist* to the 1871 launch of *The Co-operative News* (later *Co-op News*), the analysis thus shows that alternative media fostered co-operation's emergent culture. The analysis concludes by assessing co-operative press history's implications for contemporary co-operative theory and movement strategy. It reveals the continuing importance of media innovation — to develop alternative media, the emerging sector of news co-operatives, and an alternative public sphere in which the co-operative movement's counter-hegemonic values flourish.

Introduction: Accounting for the 'Subjective Factor' in British Co-operation's Ascent

> If men (sic) in a movement knew the value of a good paper representing it, guiding it, defending it, they would certainly provide to have one. A co-operative society without intelligence, or an industrial movement without an organ, is like a steam boat without a propeller. It is all vapour and clatter without progress (Holyoake, 1875, p. 375).

What propelled nineteenth century British co-operation's progress? The objective failure of an industrialising capitalism to meet many popular needs certainly created a "crisis of authority" for the established economic order (Polanyi, 1944/2001). However, this was a necessary but insufficient condition for movement advance. This article shows that informal, popular education — including the journalistic airing of iconoclastic views and civil disobedience against press controls — steadily eroded traditional fealty to clerical, state and bourgeois authorities (Hollis, 1970; Royle, 1974; Thompson, 1966). Moreover, the alternative press sparked and kindled co-operative ideas and experiments. In prefiguring co-operative alternatives to the capitalist firm and ethos, this insurgent press created mental preparedness for change — much as Gramsci suggested Enlightenment *philosophes* had paved the French Revolution's symbolic path. He famously argued "the bayonets of Napoleon's armies found their road already smoothed by an invisible army of books and pamphlets that had swarmed out of Paris from the first half of the eighteenth century and had prepared both men (sic) and institutions for the necessary renewal" (1917/1977, p. 12). Similarly, an army of periodicals accompanied the British movement's earliest incarnation under the aegis of Owenism. This intellectual-cultural ferment had equally profound implications for mutualism's subsequent rise. Indeed, nineteenth century champions of British co-operation such as Robert Owen, Dr. William King, Henry Hetherington, and George Jacob Holyoake were media activists as well as co-operators; their publications were key to their effectiveness in articulating co-operation as an *idée force*. Much as Enlightenment intellectuals created the revolutionary press and cultural conditions for the French Revolution, radical newspapers, books and pamphlets swarmed across Britain through the nineteenth century. This cultural mobilisation was an important part of the emergence of working class consciousness and their maturing co-operative movement (Holyoake, 1879; Thompson, 1966). From driving Owenism's rapid expansion to its subsequent metamorphosis into a consumer co-operative movement, British press activism prepared both people and institutions for the necessary renewal.

Educational innovation and press activism defined co-operation's emerging counter-hegemony in nineteenth century Britain: "writing and reading seem to have been an essential part of its practice," argues Yeo (2017a, p. 11). One testament to popular learning's importance was the Rochdale Pioneers' educational fund; 2.5 % of their annual surplus stocked reading rooms with newspapers and journals, expanded their library, and supported wide-ranging lectures. The Pioneers proposed devoting ten per cent to education but were disallowed by the Registrar (Woodin, 2012, p. 80). Nevertheless, by 1875, the Pioneers boasted 11,000 books, eleven reading rooms, and a full-time librarian (Woodin, 2012). Co-operative shops were thus centres of 'news' and 'intelligence' as well as distribution depots for household supplies (Yeo, 2017a, p. 44). Like pubs and coffee houses, which drew patrons by subscribing to publications, these stores circulated 'associational intelligence' and 'associational communications' as well as the products on their shelves (p. 90). This trade in news made shops important nodes in the counter-hegemonic apparatus which produced and circulated co-operative values, ideas, and attitudes. MacPherson (2007) similarly claims co-operation's extraordinary growth through the twentieth century reflected "extensive educational activities by publishing newspapers, pamphlets, journals and books" (p. 223). Both Yeo and MacPherson thus echo Gramsci's oft-quoted dictum: "every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas" (1917/1977, p. 12). They suggest the revolution in economic life that gave rise to British co-operation was preceded by a symbolic revolution — in which reporters, editors, printers, booksellers, publicans, and street hawkers all played important roles.

By examining press activism's prefigurative role in powering co-operation's take-off, this article reinforces recent emphases on adult education's importance in British movement life (Shaw, 2012; Woodin, 2012), including alternative journalism's contributions to co-operation's 'emergent culture' (Durr, 2017; Gurney, 2017; Legette, 2017; Thornes, 2017; Yeo, 2017b). Moreover, by historicising and problematising a monopolistic, investor-owned media sector, this work also resists media history's devaluation as the "neglected grandparent of media studies" (Curran, 1993, p. 27) and counters alternative media's marginalisation across the social sciences (Fuchs, 2010). Finally, a Gramscian approach resists a reductive economic determinism that discounts the cultural; instead, this analysis follows Raymond Williams' precept that "what we call society is not simply a network of political and economic arrangements, but also a process of learning and communication" (1962, p. 11). Clearly, without successfully waging popular struggles to learn and communicate about co-operation there could be no co-operative movement. Against reductive and ahistorical approaches, hegemony analysis thus offers a more interdisciplinary, complete, and proportional understanding of the movement's historical sociology and animating spirit—with theoretical and strategic significance for contemporary practice.

Co-op News' 150th anniversary in 2021 reminds us of news-workers' historic contributions to movement-building. Of course, abstracting their efforts from the wider field of social forces would yield an overly simplistic media-determinism. Yet the evidence below shows the fights for a free press and co-operative alternatives were closely related through this half-century of the British movement's birth. The war of words staged in the radical, working class, and co-operative press inspired a widening constituency for co-operation. These editorial agitations shaped an increasingly coherent social project and cohesive historical bloc. Conversely, without careful attention to alternative media institution-building and continuous journalistic intervention, many 'great men' of co-operative history would lack their present-day notoriety and historical relevance. Without these decisive interventions in public opinion formation, mutualism's development would have been significantly hampered, circumscribed and delayed. As the account below illustrates, five waves of press agitation drove the evolving movement.

The First Wave: Robert Owen, the Owenist Press, and the Modern Dawn of the Co-operative Ideal, 1821-1845

Although experiments in co-operation long predate Robert Owen (1771-1858), his writings, press activism, and achievements in social reform spawned an expanding social movement that took his name and legitimated the early co-operative cause. He led campaigns to reduce the work week and establish trade unionism (Harrison, 2009; Podmore, 2019; Pollard & Salt, 1971). Owen also pioneered practical reforms to improve conditions at his cotton mill and model industrial community, New Lanark; its achievements inspired social change across Europe and established his early authority as Britain's leading voice for reform (Engels, 1880). For example, 20,000 signed the New Lanark guest book from 1815 to 1820 (Royle, 1974).

Owen's most revolutionary idea was that people were shaped by circumstances; improving workers' quality of life would thus extend the Enlightenment promise of self-realisation beyond bourgeois ranks (Owen, 1813). The humanist moral imperative to support 'self-improvement' through education was at Owenism's heart. As Polanyi (1944/2001) argues, Owen's existential focus on popular human potential "enabled the roots of the movement to penetrate into that deeper layer where personality itself is formed" (p. 176). Some Owenites therefore followed their champion with messianic fervour. Like Fourier and St. Simon, Owen's utopian focus was fixed on creating decent working, learning, and living conditions in 'villages of co-operation'.

Owen was an enthusiastic propagandist for this co-operative conception of society; his reformist zeal was tidily summed up in a movement periodical's title, *New Moral World*. Against the immoral inequities of the Old World, he articulated his atheistic new religion in newspaper articles, essays, reports, and books. Harrison (2009) estimates he published about 130 titles. In 1813, Owen's *New View of Society* imagined a humane alternative to industrial capitalism. Replacing Christianity's other-worldly focus, his 'Rational Religion' inducted cadres of 'social missionaries' to build the reform movement. Apart from his short-lived *Mirror of Truth* of 1817, the first newspaper to use the term "Owenite" was the *Economist*, debuting in 1821 (Royle, 1974). Published by London's Co-operative and Economical Society, mostly comprised of printers, it was edited by George Mudie. It would be but one battalion in the army of periodicals soon dedicated to scaling-up this campaign. Popular enthusiasm for Owenism's promise of a better life was matched only by detractors' reactions, such as the fury unleashed against his atheism when he arrived in Bristol to open a local Hall of Science. His books were burned, rioters damaged the Hall, and Owen was forced to make a hasty retreat to London.

Much as the Voltairean mood transformed eighteenth century French culture, early nineteenth century Owenist literature would dominate Britons' utopian imaginations. It popularised co-operative villages but also laid the intellectual and moral foundations for the trade union, co-operative, and socialist movements. Central Owenist newspapers from 1820 to 1860 included *Co-operative Magazine*, *New Harmony Gazette*, *Crisis*, *New Moral World* and *Reasoner* (Harrison, 2009). In fact, over a hundred periodicals either dedicated substantial space to Owenism or were devoted to Owenism. Each week branch reports and missionaries' lectures were published, connecting local believers to the wider cause. These journals thus advanced working class Owenism, bringing intellectual coherence, cultural dynamism, and social cohesion to the expanding movement.

At its height, Owenism's 'Rational Religion' enlisted a hundred thousand workers with substantial influence over a million (McCabe, 1922). Propaganda's potential as a hinge of history was thus not lost on Owen. The British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge (BAPCK) was founded in 1829, an information clearing house for Britain's 300 co-operative societies. It staged lectures, circulated pamphlets, and coordinated the missionary network (Harrison, 2009). Radical co-operator William Carpenter's *The Weekly Free Press* would be its voice, a role later assumed by his *Political Letters* and other unstamped papers in the early thirties (Hollis, 1970).

Owen used his money, religious networks, and volunteers to get the good word out. He bought up to 30,000 copies of a newspaper containing one of his addresses (Pankhurst, 1991). These he would post to clergy. In two months, he spent as much as £4,000 on promoting his ideas. By the end of the 1830s, 1,000 pamphlets were circulated in Manchester every Sunday. Every year another 40,000 were handed out in London. In total, two and a half million tracts were circulated from 1839-1841 (Royle, 1974). The circulation of *New Moral World* meanwhile doubled from October 1838 to June 1840.

Over roughly three decades, the Owenist press thus increased its reach, frequency, variety, and popular appeal; this created important ideological and cultural conditions for the maturing movement's subsequent developments. As Friedrich Engels wrote, "every real advance in England on behalf of workers links itself to the name of Robert Owen" (1880, p. 11). Certainly, it is hard to explain Owenism's emergent counter-hegemony without accounting for the relentless agitations of the many newspapers sworn to its cause. In fact, while conducting research for *The Condition of the Working Class in England* from 1844 to 1845 in Manchester, Engels both contributed to Marx's *Rheinische Zeitung* and Owens' *New Moral World*. In Engels' view, the co-operatives inspired by Owenism gave "practical proof that the merchant and the manufacturer are socially quite unnecessary" (1880, p. 50).

The nineteenth century periodicals of Owenism thus strengthened Britain's gathering movement much as the Enlightenment climate of eighteenth century France had tilled its cultural terrain for political revolution. Owenism's radical humanism had defined the organic new popular ideology of this emergent historical bloc, with co-operation assuming a prominent role. Contributors to the Owenist press would extend co-operators' reach, articulating a sense of movement belonging — and alternative possibilities — across a broadening geographic expanse. Without the war of words waged by its early press, Owenism would have lacked crucial artillery for its cultural expansion. Similarly, co-operation's progress would have been denied an important beachhead.

The Second Wave: Dr. William King, the Brighton Press Boom and Working Class Leadership, 1828-1830

While the early Owenist agitations focused on forming villages of co-operation, Dr. William King's penny monthly *The Co-operator* helped drive the 'Brighton wave' of worker co-operative shops in the late 1820s. This represented an important discursive shift toward the working class in cultural politics as well as effective control. Against the utopian socialists' tendency toward high-minded abstractions, King pooled practical advice from those experiments' failures and successes. This cleared a cultural hurdle for the emerging movement: "very few manual workers were at first able to understand how (the London Co-operative Society's) fine philosophical principles could be reduced to daily practice" (Mercer, 1922/2012, p. xxii).

Published from 1 May 1828 to 1 August 1830, King disdained what Mercer called "metaphysical fogs and foolish speculations" (p. xxii). Instead, he addressed workers in language easily understood. For example, in the inaugural issue King implores: "We must go to a shop every day to buy food and necessaries — why then should we not go to our own shop?" (King, 1828/2012, p. 3). *The Co-operative Magazine*'s editor applauded this self-consciously democratic register, declaring that King's "publication has become a sort of textbook to co-operators" (p. xxv). Expanding the audience for co-operative ideas marked an important turn toward popular leadership of the evolving movement.

King's contempt for the learned gentlemen's vernacular thus recognised that economic democratisation must proceed hand in hand with cultural democratisation. Indeed, combatting ignorance was a banner theme in *The Co-operator*: "The first step … toward Cooperation, and the first and last step to make it successful, is to remove this ignorance by every means in our power. We must take this thick veil from our eyes …" (King, 1828/2012 p. 4). However, King battled for hearts as well as minds. He fostered an associative and self-reliant ethos as the movement's guiding light. Surely, co-operation required workers to *think* differently and learn more? However, it also required they *feel* differently about the economy and their place in it. This affective politics placed a positive charge on working class fraternity: "Co-operation means, literally, 'working together' … But before the many can work, they must join hand in hand; they must know their object, and feel a common interest and a common tie" (King, 1828/2012, p. 2). Of course, within this call for class solidarity was an implicitly anti-capitalist antagonism: "At present we work one against another — when one of us gets work, another loses it; and we seem natural enemies to each other. The plain reason of this is, because we work for others, not for ourselves." The resolution was clear: "Let us therefore begin to work for OURSELVES and not entirely for others" (p. 2, emphasis in original).

Such agitations were not appreciated by Brighton's Establishment. For example, a local reverend alleged King's "motives were 'wicked', that his principles were 'horrid', and that he himself was 'an infidel'" (Mercer, 1922/2012 p. xxvi). As a physician, these attacks threatened King's ability to support his family. Like formal press controls (such as taxes and seditious libel statutes), such informal sanctions also threatened press freedom and movement advance. By August 1830, King decided to issue no more editions of *The Co-operator*. He nevertheless claimed it had sown the seeds for 300 societies. While Durr (2017) notes the doubtless hyperbole at work: "King has been given a leading role partly because he claimed one and had a journal in which he could write himself into the story …" (p. 23), among his readers were workers who would later found the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. He may have conceded his battle, but mutualism's position had been advanced.

Unlike the dependence on bourgeois patrons fostered by Owen's large-scale plans for villages of co-operation, King's brief agitation strengthened the cause of working class self-help within the movement. The locus of activity shifted from co-operative communities to co-operatives in the community. Although Brighton's co-operative shops ended in failure (as would Owen's communes), King's campaign helped seed "an extraordinary flowering of working class, radical and co-operative journalism" (Durr, 2017, p. 11). The *Associate* and *The British Co-operator* launched in 1829. *The Cooperative Miscellany*, *The Chester Co-operator*, *The United Trades Cooperative Journal* and *The Herald to the Trades Advocate* commenced publication in 1830. This was followed by what Hollis describes as "a small army of co-operative chronicles, magazines and miscellanies in the midlands and north" (1970, p. 101). Workers would not only act for themselves by setting up co-operative shops; they would increasingly think, publish and debate amongst themselves in the pages of their own alternative press. Just as shops brought co-operation within workers' financial reach, this booming movement press helped labourers overcome their sense of cultural inferiority and cognitive dependence on their 'social betters'. Rather than await rescue by the grand philanthropic projects of well-meaning, wealthy gentlemen, this new wave of press activism further broadened, educated and emboldened the movement base for direct action.

The Third Wave: William Thompson, the Critique of Exploitation, and the Rise of the Pauper Press, 1830-1836

Brighton co-operators were not alone in championing working class leadership. Over fifty socialist newspapers circulated between 1820 and 1840 in England, reaching an estimated half million socialists out of a population of about 16 million (Pankhurst, 1991). Paradoxically, the press that gave early voice to Owenism now sowed seeds for its transcendence. The friendship between Anna Wheeler and Irish radical William Thompson exemplifies co-operative socialism's emergence from Owen's shadow. A frequent contributor to co-operative periodicals, Wheeler shared many of Thompson's socialist-feminist views and helped form them. An influence on Marx, the co-operator from Cork first coined the term 'socialism' to distinguish his working class vision from the early movement's dependence on Owen, wealthy benefactors, and the bourgeois state. During Owen's American interregnum from 1824 to 1829, when he unsuccessfully sought to establish a model community at New Harmony in Indiana, working class leaders increasingly came under Thompson's influence. By 1830 his writings "placed him, rather than Owen, in the forefront of the Movement" (Pankhurst, 1991, p. 110). Thompson appears to have helped found the *Co-operative Magazine*, contributing the inaugural editorial. As the battle for intellectual leadership advanced, a section of the movement press also broke away from orthodox Owenism.

Militant workers grown weary of Owen's calls for harmony between the classes strove instead for working class unity between trade unionists and co-operators. This movement overlap was evident even in trade union journals' titles such as *The United Trades' Co-operative Journal* and *The Union Pilot and Cooperative Intelligencer*. This struggle for control continued into the 1840s. In fact, Owen faced down editorial mutinies by James Morrison of the trade unions' *Pioneer* and James 'Shepard' Smith of the *Crisis*. Failing to regain control of the *Pioneer*, he launched *The Official Gazette of the Executive Council*. As for the *Crisis*, he folded it in favour of his new title *New Moral World* (Thornes, 2017). Indicative of Owen's view, he declared in an 1837 issue that "Whenever the working classes has attempted any complicated, important measure that required unity, patience, and perseverance …, they have failed in every instance …" (cited in Mercer, 1922/2012, p. 135).

However, the tide was turning toward the democratic, socialist wing. On the one hand, this reflected popular discomfort with the movement's dependence on bourgeois benevolence and control — including its own patriarch's authoritarian style. On the other hand, it reflected the working class's growing sense of its own power to take collective action. Largely played out in the pages of the alternative press, this evolution both built on Thompson's radicalism and the Brighton agitation's working class turn of the late 1820s.

The spark that ignited co-operators' role in the next wave of press activism was the suppression of *The United Trades Cooperative Journal* in 1830 (Hollis, 1970). Other co-operative publications tended to be local in focus, provincial in outlook, and limited in scope; they were therefore allowed to publish unstamped. By contrast, this publication carried a wider spectrum of news and opinion; it was suppressed as a threat to public order. Outraged, co-operator William Carpenter launched the unstamped *Political Letters* to test the law. A prominent Thompson ally at Co-operative Congresses, Carpenter had edited the *Trades Newspaper* and *Weekly Free Press* — the main voice of BAPCK — for the previous two years. Most recently he had edited the *Magazine of Useful Knowledge and Cooperative Miscellany*. His challenge earned him an eight-month jail sentence; it also opened a new chapter in British press history, with other co-operators joining the fray.

First to follow was fellow co-operator Henry Hetherington. He launched the unstamped *Penny Papers*; it would later become the *Poor Man's Guardian*, the most important of the radical unstamped. Hetherington had joined London's first printing co-operative in 1821 and was then also part of Mudie's discussion circle. He joined the first London Co-operative Trading Association, which would become the BAPCK. Altogether, Hetherington published six titles. His agitations landed him in jail three times; he served a total of a year and a half. Similarly, Alexander Campbell, co-operative leader in Glasgow and Orbiston community manager, would be imprisoned in 1833 for his role in the unstamped. He would later publish *Spirit of the Age* (Royle, 1974).

Co-operator William Benbow was a radical bookseller and publisher who edited three publications, ran a coffee house, and later ran a meeting place for co-operators (Hollis, 1970) including the Female Society which, allied to the National Union of Working Classes, campaigned for the unstamped press (Rogers, 2017). He was imprisoned for 16 months for seditious language. Fellow co-operator Richard Lee printed Benbow's *Tribune* and was sentenced to six months for editing and printing the unstamped *Man*. James Watson was twice jailed for selling the unstamped, serving over a year in jail altogether. A bookseller, printer, and co-operative store manager, he would work with George Jacob Holyoake in the 1840s and 1850s. Selling him his publishing business in 1853, Watson thus tutored Holyoake in the tradition of the dissident press.

These were only among the most prominent co-operators engaged in the unstamped's fight for press freedom. As Hollis (1970) recounts, nearly 750 men, women and children in London alone served jail time for selling the radical unstamped between 1831 and 1836. By joining this popular cause, co-operators defended their right to maintain their channels of communication. In the early 1800s when around one per cent of Britons read daily or Sunday newspapers (Williams, 2013), they also reached out to potential new recruits priced out of the legal news market. Figures like Carpenter and Hetherington staged high profile demonstrations of civic courage, raising co-operation's prestige amongst working class militants. Their determined resistance earned respect and trust; it also inspired others to take their ideas seriously, or even follow their audacious example. The champions of the unstamped also demonstrated workers' ability to create networks of solidarity — from staffing interned comrades' operations, to the Society for the Protection of Booksellers, to the Victims' Fund for detained street-hawkers. Indeed, for six years the defiance of the unstamped sent an important message to the working class: you can fight oppressors through your own agency, collective economic action, and mutual aid.

On many levels, this press activism encouraged working class co-operation. In fact, this evolving network of popular dissent was a movement unto itself. The alternative press relied on the labour of thousands: to write, edit, print, publish, distribute, and provide reading venues for its torrent of pamphlets, newspapers, and books. Through their protracted struggle, the pauper press thus provided an important apparatus for collective movement learning. Its vast reach also created important means for the movement's 'organic intellectuals' to earn, or supplement, their livings through movement-building. From street-hawking and journalism to lecturing and publishing, the work of popular education thus provided important incubators for the emerging leadership of co-operation's extended social movement family. Co-operation's most visible 'economic' achievements would depend on this alternative press network's ephemeral but important contributions.

Most notably, this working class insurgency from within Owenism — stoked by Thompson's campaign, the Brighton press boom and then the radical unstamped — set the stage for consumer co-operation's historic breakthrough at Rochdale in 1844. Symptomatically, half the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers' founders were Owenite-socialists (Fairbairn, 1994). Fairbairn argues they may have adopted their name from the trade union's flagship newspaper, the *Pioneer*: a statement they were "consciously taking their place in the movement for social reform and the advancement of the working class and its interests" (1994, p. 4). Certainly the Chartist press, notably the *Northern Star*, carried regular reports on co-operative initiatives (Thornes, 2017).

The Pioneers' 1844 rise to notoriety and the following year's collapse of Owen's Queenwood community and the closure of his *New Moral World* decisively shifted the balance of forces against patron-led mutualism (Harrison, 2009). Like *The Co-operator* from 1828 to 1830, prominent co-operators' involvement in the fight for press freedom from 1830 to 1836 firmed the movement's working class foundations. However, recovering the co-operative ideal's lustre from the twin failures of Owen's villages of co-operation and the Brighton wave would be no small task. This project of cultural restoration and renewal would fall to another crusading journalist for the working class cause, G. J. Holyoake.

The Fourth Wave: The Holyoake Moment, the Rochdale Imaginary, and Consumer Co-operation's Arrival, 1842-1871

The Rochdale Pioneers' iconic status towers over the co-operative imagination. Yet, as Thornes demonstrates "it is … questionable whether the Pioneers' society did, in fact, mark a significant departure from the main trends within co-operation in the 1820s and 1830s" (2017, p. 48). What is not questionable is that their story uniquely benefited from Holyoake's campaigning journalism.

Holyoake learned his craft on the workbench of the Owenite press, graduating from the demanding academies of the radical unstamped (Hollis, 1970) and the infidel press (Royle, 1974). Stepping in as editor of the *Oracle* after its editor was imprisoned for blasphemous libel, it was Holyoake's turn to serve six months for blasphemous speech in 1842. Holyoake also continued Hetherington's work, joining him and prominent Chartist, Owenite and unstamped agitator, James Watson, on the Newspaper Stamp Abolition Committee. He had helped to ensure the repeal of the 'taxes on knowledge', including the advertisement duty in 1853, the Stamp Act in 1855, the paper duty in 1861, and the securities system in 1869. Altogether, from 1841 to 1877, Holyoake was involved with editing or co-editing half a dozen titles (Holyoake, 1879). He wrote regularly for another half dozen (McCabe, 1922). Over the span of his career, he was either editor or proprietor of at least 18 radical journals (Yeo, 2017a). Sustaining a vibrant alternative press in a period of state repression, he described his papers as "flags carried in battle" (McCabe, 1922, p. 29).

Holyoake also launched the secularist newspaper *The Movement, Anti-Persecution Gazette and Register of Progress* (later *The Reasoner: Gazette of secularism*), perhaps his "greatest achievement" (Yeo, 2017a, p. 110). In fact, he coined the term 'secularism,' as an alternative to the atheism of Owen's 'Rational Religion'. That two decades' long assault on the Church had reduced clerical influence but also limited the working class coalition's reach. Through this secular turn, Holyoake hoped to enlist the moral energies of intellectuals and the religious alike in social reform — an early expression of his 'big tent' quest to broaden the working class movement's base. As Royle argues, Holyoake's secularism was an "agitation for a scheme of rights: the right to think for oneself; the right to differ; the right to assert difference of opinion; the right to debate all vital opinion" (1974, p. 292). As its editor from 1846 to 1861, *The Reasoner* also championed Owenist-socialism and 'moral force' Chartism (Bishopsgate Institute Special Collections and Archives,1998). One of the nineteenth century's leading periodicals, the weekly reached a peak circulation of about 5,000 copies in 1853 (Royle, 1974).

The son of an engineer and a button-maker, Holyoake viewed secularism, Owenism, and co-operation as one social movement. Co-operation's fate would thus rise and fall with the tides of this wider movement to empower working people (Holyoake, 1879). This implied a sweeping democratisation. For Holyoake, freeing workers from exploitation, press controls, the illusions of religion and autocratic rule were inter-dependent aspects of the struggle for working class emancipation; to build a movement of co-operators thus required loosening the hold of dependent, deferential, and individualistic forms of self-hood. Through six decades of crusading journalism Holyoake waged a broad-front battle for moral and intellectual reconstruction; he aimed to shape a generation of free-thinkers and democrats into a progressive historical bloc. For example, just as Holyoake hoped secularism would unite atheists and the faithful behind the working class cause, he also worked to unite the predominantly working class readers of *The Reasoner* and his more liberal, middle class readers of *The Leader* for co-operation (Legette, 2017). He was truly an organic intellectual for working class co-operation (Yeo, 2017a). Indeed, *The Reasoner* was published from Fleet Street House, where production was organised co-operatively including profit-sharing (Royle, 1974).

Of course, the Pioneers' example provided Holyoake with his most potent propaganda. His serialised account for *The Daily News* helped inspire over 200 co-operative launches; their story was often read aloud on consecutive nights at workers' meetings (Holyoake, 1879). Holyoake's *Self-help for the people: A history of the Rochdale Pioneers* (1893/2018) broke new ground; the best-seller was reprinted several times and translated into five languages (Gurney, 2017). The *New York Tribune*'s muckraking publisher Horace Greeley arranged publication of a U.S. edition (Holyoake, 1900). As word spread, yet others replicated their approach. The Rochdale achievement's power as a mythic narrative owes much to Holyoake's journalistic skill, prestige, and devotion to telling their story to ever-expanding audiences. One can only ponder how co-operation's course might have been altered without the "labour of criticism ..., diffusion of culture and spread of ideas" contained in this movement textbook.

Similarly, none of early British co-operation's achievements took place in an ideological or cultural vacuum. They often rested on understandings gleaned from the alternative press, often against strident opposition from Church, State, and the wealthy. In these pages the 'co-operator' gained the knowledge and confidence to step onto the historical stage and the novel rights and responsibilities of 'membership' came to be understood. Less obvious than tallies of membership, sales, or revenues, it was these news-workers' contributions to what Holyoake (1898) called "the co-operative mind" that had made the movement's 'objective' achievements possible.

The Fifth Wave: From a National Movement Press to Co-operative Globalisation, 1871-

In 1869 a group of printers, including former *Manchester Guardian* staff, launched the Co-operative Printing Society (Bishopsgate Institute Special Collections and Archives, 1998). Two years later they commenced printing *Co-operative News* (later *Co-op News*), the movement's first national newspaper (Holyoake, 1879). Holyoake drew up the weekly's prospectus. *Co-operative News* thereby combined English co-operation's now-significant revenue stream with the accumulated know-how of the alternative press tradition that had stoked mutualism's cultural momentum. To ensure the publication's prospects, Holyoake and his partner E. O. Greening rolled up their London-based *Social Economist*. *Co-operative News* built on the *Social Economist*'s readership, the free monthly store journals published in Leicester, Derby, Leeds and Ipswich and a regional paper, *The South of England Pioneer*. However, *Co-operative News* gave the co-operative movement its own national voice.

The last individual to hold shares, Holyoake relinquished them in 1876. He nevertheless contributed regularly and served the board until close to his life's end (McCabe, 1922). He provided Congress summaries but also railed against the Co-operative Wholesale Society through the 1890s for failing to follow motions to adopt profit-sharing with its workers (Yeo, 2017a). This posture of critical solidarity reflected his conviction that "good journalism (was) the life of the movement" (Holyoake, 1879, p. 375). If they were to get anywhere, co-operators needed an engine of co-operative education, an intellectual and moral compass, and a well-charted course. As he would recall several years after its launch, "an uninformed party is like a mere sailing boat. It only moves when outside winds blow, and is not always sure where it will be blown to then" (1879, p. 375).

Indeed, press consolidation had fostered an increasingly hostile environment for independent voices. Driven from the commercial news market after the 1936 reduction of the stamp tax, the cheap news niche once occupied by the unstamped was soon filled with Sunday papers and self-improvement publications (Williams, 2013). While the activism of the thirties brought the working class reading public into being, the forties' structural transformation of the British public sphere increasingly fostered their ideological incorporation.

Space does not permit an account of *Co-op News*' long history; the key point is that this multi-stakeholder media innovation would place Britain's co-operative public sphere on a sound, financial footing. A hedge against market-driven journalism, *Co-operative News* would continue to shelter the movement from arbitrary and hostile winds of outside influence. It provided a movement prone to mission drift and democratic degeneration with Holyoake's propeller. 2021 marks this grand idea's 150th year. Now publishing a glossy monthly and a digital edition, the Manchester-based operation is world history's longest-standing news co-operative (Co-op News, 2020). Founded by co-operatives, it remains a sector-based voice. Augmented by a class of subscriber-members and global reach, its adaptability ensured its enduring relevance. Over a century and a half, it has gone from a weekly newspaper experiment in binding English co-operators together to the digital harbinger of a globalising movement — now reaching instantaneously across the English-speaking world. As the world has changed, so too has *Co-op News*' role, editorial scope, audience reach and membership structure. In 2004, the co-operative began admitting individual members and is governed by four directors from the Co-operative Group (CWS) Limited, one appointed by Co-operatives UK Limited, three from other organisational members, and an individual members' representative. At its discretion, the Board may recruit two additional directors (Co-op News, 2020).

Nevertheless, as the alternative press history sketched above reminds, *Co-operative News* did not emerge magically in 1871 — like Athena springing fully formed from Zeus's forehead. This strategic decision was historically contingent. Without dozens of titles convening a great national conversation about co-operation over the course of half a century, there may not have been a prosperous or visionary enough sector to establish *Co-operative News* 'from above'. Similarly, without the demonstrated achievements of the local store journals and *The Social Economist* in 1871, demand may have been inadequately primed to support *Co-operative News* 'from below'. Without Holyoake's participation in the Owenist press and a myriad of publishing ventures, he would have lacked both the reputation and expertise as an accomplished media activist and editor to lend to the new publication's cause. Indeed, without this apprenticeship there may have been no Holyoake — as his contemporaries came to know him. Moreover, without his far-reaching efforts to launch the Rochdale Pioneers' mythic narrative, that critical new impetus for movement regeneration and expansion may have only sparked a more subdued, limited, and delayed diffusion. In other words, there may not even have been a British co-operative movement — to the extent it developed in Rochdale's wake. *Co-operative News* was therefore not simply a crucial new journalistic platform for an expanding movement, it was itself the culmination of this half century of alternative press agitation.

Conclusion: Where Goes (Alternative) Journalism Follows (Economic) Democracy?

This essay has demonstrated some of alternative journalism's profound contributions to the making of early British co-operation. The Owenist press, the Brighton newspaper boom, the rebellion of the radical unstamped, and Holyoake's life-work each illustrated news-workers' importance to the emerging movement. Indeed, without their symbolic revolution to lay early co-operation's intellectual and moral foundations — against a frequently hostile ideological climate and censorious church and state — there is no guarantee modern British mutualism would exist in its present-day form.

Continuing to knit British leadership cadres across sectoral, geographic, and positional divides, *Co-op News* carries on the mission first assigned it in 1871. Its media activism continues to diffuse information, stimulate reflection, and strengthen mutualist commitments across the movement's mobilising networks. Its counter-hegemonic articulation of the co-operative difference continues to protect Holyoake's movement from the prevailing winds of often hostile outside opinions — instead lending movement progress its democratic propeller. While it is easy to romanticise the heroic feats of the mythic past at contemporary contributions' expense, *Co-op News*' role has great significance in a globalising age. Just as *Co-operative News* first spanned a fragmented British movement to speed co-operation's diffusion, its subsequent title now bridges gulfs of geography, language, and culture. In 2019, readers from every country in the world except four visited the *Co-op News* site (Co-op News, 2020). As history illustrates, good ideas do not simply spread. Movement expansion relies on the painstaking efforts of organic intellectuals working through counter-hegemonic channels to shift the culture — from *The Economist* to *New Moral World*, *The Co-operator*, *The Poor Man's Guardian* and *The Reasoner*. In *Co-op News* and across the alternative press, this cultural and ideological struggle to expand and regenerate co-operation continues.

Certainly, the wider alternative press tradition also continues to evolve — including the emerging sector of news co-operatives. Initiatives including *The Bristol Cable* (established 2014) and Scotland's *The Ferret* (est. 2015) emerged in the wake of a recent British campaign (Boyle, 2012). Monthly magazine *New Internationalist* (est. 1973) is published by a multi-stakeholder co-operative. Daily newspapers such as Italy's storied *Il Manifesto* (est. 1963), Berlin's left-green *Die Tageszeitung (Taz)* (est. 1978), and Uruguay's *La Diaria* (est. 2006) are also published by co-operatives. In fact, *La Diaria* is Uruguay's second place national newspaper (La Diaria, 2020). Similarly, France's *Alternatives Économique* (est. 1980) is that country's second most read magazine (Alternatives Économique, 2019). *Brecha* (est. 1985) is one of Uruguay's two most influential weeklies (Federación de Cooperativas de Producción del Uruguay, 2019).

Not surprisingly, news co-operatives are often in the editorial forefront of advancing alternatives to investor-led development. Just as established media continue to reflect and advance dominant class interests so too do co-operative news-workers continue the "labour of criticism, diffusion of culture and spread of ideas" necessary for further democratic advance. Their experiences also prove media alternatives need not be marginal. Moreover, these and other news co-operators have shown the resilience to plot a sustainable path through investor-driven journalism's contemporary crisis. Add to these achievements, for example, Argentina's swarm of recuperated newspapers or the ambitious 2020 co-operative conversion of six Québec newspapers in Canada and you glimpse the structure of co-operative opportunity in the emerging context of post-pandemic reconstruction (Assis, 2018; Banks, 2019). Certainly, history suggests the news sector has earned more careful consideration from the movement which media activists such as Owen, King, Hetherington, and Holyoake helped bring into the world. Indeed, *Co-op News* is today published from a permanent headquarters named to honour Holyoake's contributions to British co-operation. Holyoake House is a monument to one leading organic intellectual's vast editorial, ideological and cultural contributions to movement-building. It is also a metaphor for co-operation's debt to the historic practice — and enduring importance — of alternative journalism.

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Speaking for Co-operation: The Rise of the Co-operative Press

Anthony Webster

The early British co-operative movement was a rich and complex one. It was one of commerce and business but it was also a social movement and one which was drawn, against its will, into the world of politics and shaping public opinion. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, to proselytise and spread the co-operative message, and latterly to defend the movement against its competitors and enemies, who came to resent the burgeoning success of British consumer co-operation in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This article will chart the emergence and growth of the co-operative press, especially the *Co-operative News*, and will outline how it became just one part of a flourishing publishing empire, which, though diminished, still exists today.

One of first important co-operative publications appeared in the late 1820s, and was the work of Dr William King, an erudite and committed co-operator, who was instrumental in the establishment of two co-operative societies in Brighton. King's *The Co-operator* reached a national audience (especially in the north and midlands) and was instrumental in building support for the first attempt to create a truly national movement, culminating in a series of national co-operative congresses in the early 1830s. A downturn in support for the movement culminated in the discontinuation of *The Co-operator* until 1860 when a new national consumer co-operative movement, based on the Rochdale Pioneers' model, emerged. The consumer co-operative movement grew more quickly and impressively than any earlier manifestation of co-operative organisation and led the Manchester and Salford Co-operative Society to re-launch *The Co-operator* edited by Henry Pitman, younger brother to Isaac Pitman inventor of shorthand and founder of Pitman & Sons printing and publishing company. Henry Pitman took complete control in 1861.

For most of the 1860s this first monthly, and eventually weekly, publication was the principal mouthpiece of the movement in England, though north of the border, J. T. McInnes established *The Scottish Co-operator* in 1863 (Birchall, 1994). As with the earlier adventure into journalism, the emergence of these periodicals reflected an urgent need to drum up political and public support for new co-operative initiatives — particularly the formations of the Co-operative Wholesale Society in 1863 and its Scottish counterpart just a few years later. The letters pages of *The Co-operator* trace the growing opposition of grocers and private traders to the movement. In December 1864 one John Hough highlighted this, signalling an opposition that would grow steadily in strength. The paper provided a running commentary on current affairs, the arts, and the seemingly relentless growth of co-operation, recounting the establishment of new co-operatives and the growth of established ones. During the course of the 1860s, however, *The Co-operator* fell out of favour with many British co-operators. By the last years of the decade there were moves afoot to establish a new journal, much more firmly under the direction of the movement. While the reasons for this are not entirely clear, some of Pitman's strong convictions seem to have caused concern. Pitman was a fierce opponent of vaccination, and eventually 'Anti-Vaccination' was worked into the journal's title, a move which almost certainly caused concern, associating as it did the co-operative movement with quite a controversial stance[1]. The upshot was the creation of the Co-operative Newspaper Society (CNS), a co-operative the members of which were individual co-operative societies, and later became the National Co-operative Publishing Society, and then in 1934, the Co-operative Press. In addition to *Co-operative News*, CNS published a range of publications including *Women's Outlook*, and *Reynolds News/Sunday Citizen* newspaper (Hadfield, 2021; Lonergan, 2011).

Co-operative News, first published in 1871, served several vital functions for the movement. Firstly, it bolstered the morale of the movement at a time when it was coming under attack from private traders, who increasingly saw local co-operative stores as a direct threat. Private commerce had its own mouthpiece, *The Grocer*, which had been in circulation since 1862[2]. It regularly attacked consumer co-operation as a kind of confidence trick, in which naïve working people were seduced by the dividend, which did not compensate for the higher prices it alleged were common in co-operative stores. *Co-operative News* frequently rebutted negative stories in *The Grocer*. On 5 August 1876, for example, an editorial responded in detail to the supposed 'futility' of the co-operative store system claimed in *The Grocer*. It also highlighted efforts by private traders to sabotage local co-operative societies. On 8 May 1886, the *News* reported that in Maryport, local traders pressured the Maryport and Carlisle (M & C) Railway Company to discipline or dismiss several employees who were leading figures in the Maryport Co-operative Society. The traders threatened to arrange their transport needs to avoid the M & C, but to their shock, M & C refused to comply — the principal reason being that it did more business for the Co-operative Society than any other local business! (Webster, 2019, p. xiii). On 24 January 1887, the *News* reported how a mob, supported by local traders, disrupted a meeting to form a co-operative society in Salisbury, Wiltshire, and how the co-operators reconvened in a local pub to continue their deliberations (Wilson et al., 2013). Such reports boosted the morale of co-operators facing local opposition, and rallied them when more concerted campaigns were conducted against co-operation in Scotland and the North West of England in the 1890s and early 1900s. Subsequently the *News* was to be crucial in helping mobilise the movement during the First World War against government policies which imposed new taxes on co-operative societies and excluded co-operators from key government wartime committees. The upshot was the emergence in 1917 of the Co-operative Party.

As important as this external and national political role was, the *News* was also crucial in reporting and commenting on the internal political battles within the movement, especially on issues such as the extent to which societies should source their stock from the CWS and SCWS, the relationship between consumer and productive co-operatives, and the question of the role of labour in the co-operative movement. In the late nineteenth century, the pages were replete with articles by leading co-operative thinkers like Holyoake and E. V. Neale, while the letters pages bristled with combative exchanges on a wide range of questions. Debates at quarterly meetings of the CWS were covered in great detail, as were the deliberations of the annual conferences. In this way the *News* became — and remained — the principal public forum in which the burning questions of co-operation were brought to individual co-operators.

Figure 1: The Wholesale New Tea Warehouse, London (Co-operative News, 1897)

But the *News* also addressed hard-nosed and complex commercial questions affecting the movement. Especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *News* provided regular quarterly updates on the performance of the CWS, together with quite complex narration of key developments. Regular reports on the performance of individual societies also appeared, with 'potted histories' i.e., the main facts about them and detailed analysis of their commercial position. Especially in the early years, these were both sophisticated and lengthy, lending the *News* a considerable authority within the movement. The rapid growth of the movement was celebrated, and new local society and CWS buildings were celebrated by illustrations and eventually photographs (Figures 1 above, and 2 below).

Figure 2: Gateshead Co-operative (Co-operative News, 1899)

By the 1930s, the *News* trumpeted the use of the latest modernist designs for new society department stores and other buildings (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Co-operative society's Emporium, "Beacon house", Southport (Co-operative News, 1935)

The *News* always enjoyed a close relationship with the CWS and SCWS; and by the 1930s, when a new generation of large-scale chain stores began to compete fiercely with the movement, the *News* became a powerful source for promoting CWS commodities. Some of the techniques were quite modern in flavour, though they demonstrated social attitudes towards women, and controversial products (cigarettes) that would be unacceptable today. A favourite advertisement for CWS goods popular in the mid-1930s was the 'family at No. 13', supposedly a typical (and surprisingly suburban and middle class) family and ardent consumer of co-operative produce (Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4: CWS Cigarettes (Co-operative News, 1935)

Figure 5: Pelaw Boot Polish (Co-operative News, 1935)

The educational priorities of the movement were expressed strongly by the *News*, with regular articles on wider news, international politics, literature, and the spread of co-operative ideas across the world. It created a special *Women's Corner* section in 1883, which proved instrumental in the emergence of the Women's Co-operative Guild (see Woodward, 2020). It provided articles from time to time on a wide range of subjects: co-operation in Australia and other parts of the world, current trade policy, as well as developments after 1917 in the newly established Soviet Union. It also brought to the attention of the wider movement existing and rising ‘stars’ of the movement, with short cameos of the careers of key co-operators, usually accompanied by a photograph.

The *News* continued throughout the twentieth century and continues today, though by the latter years it became a much shorter and less cerebral publication. To the modern eye, the *News* of the nineteenth/early twentieth centuries is reminiscent of a modern broadsheet, with attention to detail and analysis as insightful as modern editions of the *Guardian*, the *Times* and even the *Financial Times* (FT). While this had been toned down by the mid twentieth century, the compensation was a circulation of 70,000 copies (Lazell, 2000).

Such was the appetite for publications within the movement that in the 1890s, a string of additional publications emerged, providing information and analysis for particular audiences within the movement. The first of these was the *CWS Annual*, a book length publication which was aimed at serious and educated co-operative leaders. As well as detailed articles on the wholesale and the movement, the annual also provided quite academic and sophisticated political pieces, by such leading commentators as J. A. Hobson, the journalist and commentator on economic and imperial affairs, and Holt Hallett a fierce campaigner for imperial expansion in China and the Far East. It provided an introduction to major domestic and global political questions for the intellectual elite of the movement. It also provided drawings of key CWS buildings around the world (Figure 6).

Figure 6: the CWS Bacon Factory, Tralee, South-west Ireland (CWS Annual, 1895)

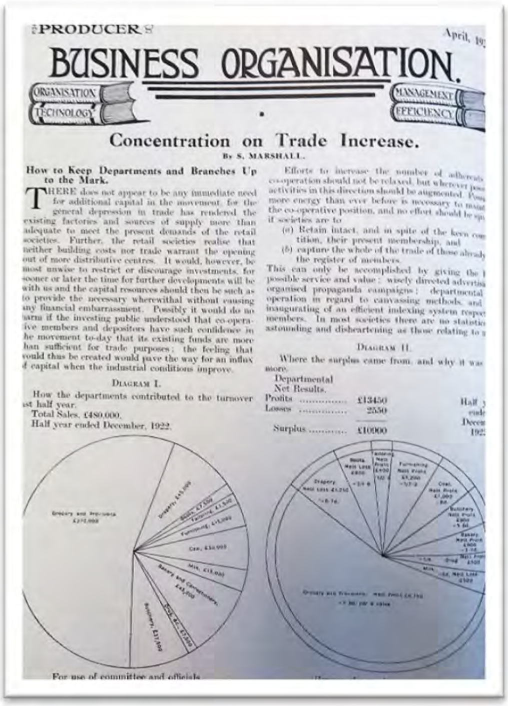
Figure 7: CWS Denia fruit depot, Spain (Wheatsheaf, November 1899)

Then in the late 1890s another new publication appeared, this time a monthly magazine reviewing the work of the CWS and co-operative questions generally. The *Wheatsheaf* specialised in detailed articles about the many different branches of the CWS both nationally and internationally, providing an in-depth analysis of these, and of the various depots, factories and businesses which comprised the CWS’s activities. Again, there was extensive use of photographs (see Figure 7, for example), celebrating as well as highlighting the growing commercial and industrial might of the movement. The target audience for this is difficult to define, but it seems likely that the buyers and management committees of local co-operative societies figured prominently in the minds of *Wheatsheaf* editors, who were keen to build CWS sales to them.

Those interested in co-operative ideas and art were encouraged by the publication from 1905 of *Millgate Monthly*, which published articles on social issues, poetry, and co-operative perspectives on culture. It reflected both the growing confidence of the movement and the surge of interest in socialist ideas at a time which saw burgeoning trade union growth, industrial militancy, and the emergence of the Labour Party.

The travails of the First World War, the radicalisation of the movement and the formation of the Co-operative Party meant that the proliferation of co-operative publications continued. From 1916 the *Producer* was yet another monthly magazine, targeted at Co-operative Society managers and active co-operators. It offered articles on a wide range of subjects, including international political and commercial questions. Its aim was to strengthen co-operative managers' understanding of the context in which they managed their businesses. Business organisation was a major subject to which *Producer* returned regularly (see figures 8 and 9).

Figure 8: Business Organisation (Producer, April, 1923)



THE PRODUCER — April, 192

BUSINESS ORGANISATION.

ORGANISATION · TECHNOLOGY · MANAGEMENT · EFFICIENCY

Concentration on Trade Increase.

By S. MARSHALL.

How to Keep Departments and Branches Up to the Mark.

THERE does not appear to be any immediate need for additional capital in the movement, for the general depression in trade has rendered the existing factories and sources of supply more than adequate to meet the present demands of the retail societies. Further, the retail societies realise that neither building costs nor trade warrant the opening out of more distributive centres. It would, however, be most unwise to restrict or discourage investments, for sooner or later the time for further developments will be with us and the capital resources should then be such as to provide the necessary wherewithal without causing any financial embarrassment. Possibly it would do no harm if the investing public understood that co-operative members and depositors have such confidence in the movement to-day that its existing funds are more than sufficient for trade purposes; the feeling that would thus be created would pave the way for an influx of capital when the industrial conditions improve.

DIAGRAM I.

How the departments contributed to the turnover last half year.
Total Sales, £480,000.
Half year ended December, 1922.

Efforts to increase the number of adherents ... co-operation should not be relaxed, but wherever pos... activities in this direction should be augmented. ... more energy than ever before is necessary to main... the co-operative position, and no effort should be sp... if societies are to

(a) Retain intact, and in spite of the keen com... tition, their present membership, and
(b) capture the whole of the trade of those already ... the register of members.

This can only be accomplished by giving the ... possible service and value; wisely directed advertisi... organised propaganda campaigns; departmental ... operation in regard to canvassing methods, and ... inaugurating of an efficient indexing system respec... members. In most societies there are no statistic... astounding and disheartening as those relating to ...

DIAGRAM II.

Where the surplus came from, and why it was more.

Departmental Net Results.	
Profits	£13450
Losses	2550
Surplus	£10900

Half y... ende... Decem... 192...

For use of committee and officials

Figure 9: Co-operative and the common market (Producer, 1962)

The Co-operative Union decided that it also needed a major specialist journal which would equip its activists with both the political and economic knowledge to promote co-operation effectively. The *Co-operative Review* was launched in 1926, and its remit was wide, addressing not only relevant domestic political issues, but also exploring different models of co-operation developed elsewhere in the world.

In 1929, the Co-operative Press also acquired *Reynold's Illustrated News* a major left leaning weekly newspaper, to reach out to a wider working-class audience rather than just its co-operative members and activists. The aim was to try to build both understanding of co-operation among the wider population and build support for the Co-operative Party. There were other initiatives, including a special war circular which kept co-operative societies up to speed in respect of the latest rules and regulations. But from the 1950s, as the British movement began to lose market share, activists, and members, many of the publications disappeared, one by one. *Millgate Monthly* was closed in 1953, both the *Producer* and the *Co-operative Review* closed in the 1960s, while *Reynolds* discontinued in 1967, after several attempts to relaunch it. Even the *Co-operative News* is monthly now, albeit with a news website (www.thenews.coop) and a remit to look at the global co-operative movement with focused global, UK, and North American web editions. Nevertheless, the constellation of publications which once characterised the movement, and gave it a major national profile in the early twentieth century have mostly disappeared, making it harder to raise awareness of co-operation.

But for the business historian the legacy of this publishing tradition is unique. Few businesses publish as much about their activities, and still fewer choose to conduct strategic debates in public, in the way that the co-operative movement has since the mid-nineteenth century. This reflects the fact that co-operation was and is a social and political movement as well as a cluster of businesses.

The democratic principles of the movement prioritise transparency, and the flourishing of co-operative publications meant that unlike any other business in Britain, and possibly the world, the wealth of material available for the historian is truly a treasure trove. The role of the press in recording the performance of both local co-operative societies and the co-operative wholesales, the debates about strategy and in tracking in depth the complex debates about co-operative business — not just in Britain but across the world — allows the business historian an unparalleled range of sources. Yet wider ignorance of, and in some cases hostility to, the co-operative movement and businesses has led to the neglect of this peerless window into the history of British business. In recent years, this has begun to be addressed in respect of consumer co-operation, especially the wholesales, but many exciting opportunities remain unexploited. In particular, the co-operative sources offer rich insights into the politics of employment and training. The next step needs to be comparative analysis of specific commercial sectors, such as retail and production, exploring differences and similarities between co-operative and non-co-operative businesses. The opening of business archives in recent years makes this an exciting prospect, not least in exploring cross fertilisation of ideas between the sectors, and perhaps through exchanges of personnel. The sheer richness of the co-operative archive means that on the co-operative side, such comparison and analysis is quite possible. It is no exaggeration to say that co-operative publishing as well as individual co-operative society archives offer an opportunity to revolutionise how the history of British business is viewed and being written. It only remains for an emerging generation of historians to seize it.

The Author

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Notes

1. *The Co-operator*, ran from June 1860 to December 1870 when it was renamed *The Anti-Vaccinator* (Jan 1871-2 Dec 1871). Copies available from the National Co-operative Archive, UK: https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb1499-apc
2. *The Grocer* was launched by William Reed in 1862, and continues to be published by William reed Business Media — https://www.thegrocer.co.uk

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 For more information on collections held by the National Co-operative Archive, including, for example, the papers of T. W. Mercer, the Robert Owen Collection, and papers of George Jacob Holyoake, plus co-operative newspapers, journals and magazines featured in this article, visit the Co-operative Heritage Trust: https://www.co-operativeheritage.coop/search-the-archive

Building the Co-operative Commonwealth in Sheffield: The *Sheffield Co-operator* and "Co-opolitics", 1922-1939

Christopher A. Olewicz

The *Sheffield Co-operator* was published every month from May 1922 to July 1939 by the Sheffield Co-operative Party in the UK. With a guaranteed circulation of 30,000 copies, it reported on issues which were of interest to people in Sheffield and refuted the negative reporting from the mainstream press towards co-operatives at that time. The complete collection of 170 editions bound in four volumes was donated to Sheffield Libraries (Local Studies) by the Sheffield Co-operative Party. Largely the work of one man — Albert Ballard, the Secretary of the Sheffield Co-operative Party — the *Sheffield Co-operator* survives as a unique example of a locally produced co-operative newspaper. This article provides an overview of its mission, purpose, content, and influence.

Introduction

> All good wishes to the Sheffield Co-operator for a useful and prosperous career in carrying the message of co-operation to the electors of Sheffield. The voters of this country have listened long enough to the voice of the capitalist preaching through press and Parliament the false doctrine of self-interest and profit-making, which is destroying the world. It is time for co-operation to speak in the home and the house.
> A. Honora Enfield, National Secretary, Women's Co-operative Guild (1922, June, p. 1)

In February 1922 the Sheffield Co-operative Party executive formed a subcommittee to explore the possibility of publishing a newspaper (Sheffield Co-operative Party, 1922, June). Just three months later, in May 1922, the first issue of the *Sheffield Co-operator* appeared, promising a "guaranteed circulation" of 30,000 copies. An eight-page monthly, the paper remained in print for the next 17 years, until wartime restrictions forced its conversion to a bulletin in 1939, which ran intermittently for thirteen editions until 1942.

The pages of the *Sheffield Co-operator* reveal the four separate ambitions of the Sheffield Co-operative Party. Firstly, to promote the candidacy of A. V. Alexander, first elected Co-operative and Labour MP for Hillsborough in 1922 and who served until 1950, with a break between 1931 and 1935 (Boughton, 1985). Secondly, to defend the co-operative movement both locally and nationally from those who viewed its success as a threat to the capitalist system. Thirdly, to defend the Co-operative Party from those inside and outside the movement who believed it should remain politically neutral. Finally, to propagate the values of a co-operative commonwealth as an alternative economic system to capitalism. "Co-operation is life" and "Competition is death", the *Co-operator*'s masthead proclaimed (Sheffield Co-operator,1922, June, p. 1).

Largely the work of one man — Albert Ballard, Secretary of Sheffield Co-operative Party — the *Sheffield Co-operator* was a unique example of a successful locally produced co-operative newspaper. As many contemporary writers promote co-operation to remedy social ills often resembling those of the inter-war years, an analysis of its contents is timely. Do co-operative media outlets exist in isolation to provide a vehicle for more "ethical" journalism, free from the influence of vested interests and commercial pressures? Or is there a higher collective social purpose? Should co-operative media propagandise for the creation of a co-operative commonwealth to replace free market capitalism? Should such a "commonwealth" be based on worker co-operatives, consumer co-operatives, mutualisation, profit sharing, or a combination? The pages of the *Sheffield Co-operator* can act as a guide in the exploration of these questions and more.

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The Sheffield Co-operative Party

In October 1917, the Co-operative Congress officially voted to create the Co-operative Party to win representation in Parliament for the co-operative movement and counter the wartime coalition government's discrimination against co-operative retailers (Pollard, 1971). The vote was far from unanimous however, and society members' orientation towards politics far from certain. Many retail societies counted among their members Liberal and Conservative voters who opposed the abandonment of political neutrality — one of the original "Rochdale Principles" (Cole, 1944, pp. 64-74).

Even in Sheffield, where the Co-operative Party quickly gained a foothold, a significant minority of Society members opposed the speed with which the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society shifted towards political engagement. The local Party grew out of the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society Political Council, established in January 1918. A year later, in March 1919, a Liberal organised "coalition committee" launched a successful coup of the Society executive with the intent of removing it from politics. However, those who held a "whole-hearted commitment to political activity" (Adams, 1987, p. 61) soon regained control. It was only after the 1920 Budget proposed a Co-operation Profits Tax that the other major Sheffield Society, the Sheffield & Ecclesall Co-operative Society, rescinded the previous resolutions its executive had passed opposing political activity. By 1922, the *Sheffield Co-operator*'s inaugural year, both societies favoured political activity (Adams, 1987, p. 65).

Following its creation, the Sheffield Party executive immediately opened negotiations with the Sheffield Labour Party, who agreed not to stand candidates against the Co-operative Party in Neepsend, Walkley, and Hillsborough for Council elections, and the Hillsborough constituency for General elections (Mathers, 1979). In the 1918 General Election, the Labour Party endorsed the Co-operative candidate Arthur Lockwood, a Sheffield born patternmaker, who was not elected. The same year, the first Co-operative candidates were elected to Sheffield Council, including Eleanor Barton, the first woman councillor to be elected in Sheffield and a future President of the Co-operative Women's Guild (Gurden, 1999).

The Sheffield Party was driven by the "organisational genius" of its Secretary, Councillor Albert Ballard, Agent to A. V. Alexander, the Co-operative and Labour MP for Hillsborough. Opened in 1920, the Hillsborough Co-operative Institute was its hub. It hosted fellowship meetings, play-reading groups, children and adults' choirs and a successful Ramblers' Club which organised walks (rambles) in the countryside that attracted between 3,000 and 4,000 people annually (Boughton, 1985). *Sheffield Co-operator* events interspersed entertainments with distribution drives. The Hillsborough Institute thus became "a total social environment" and a "jewel in the crown of the political co-operative movement" (Boughton, 1985, p. 138). All attendees were encouraged to become active supporters of the Co-operative Party and Ballard organised a network of party workers with a "captain" and "lieutenant" covering every 200 houses in the Hillsborough constituency (Ballard, 1923, p. 1).

The success of the Hillsborough Branch was not entirely appreciated within the local Labour Party. In 1926, Tom Garnett, Secretary of the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, complained to Egerton Wake, National Agent of the Labour Party. Garnett argued that the Hillsborough Labour Party was not functioning. He wrote that "… although the Co-operative Party is not an affiliated organisation … they [co-operators] are permitted at Hillsborough to dominate the situation" (Boughton, 1985 p. 352). Wake suggested the Co-operative Party should affiliate to the Labour Party, but possible opposition within the two retail societies made this inexpedient (Boughton, 1985). A joint committee decided future Co-operative candidates would go before Labour selection conferences. It was not until 1930, however, that divisional Co-operative Parties agreed to affiliate to the Trades and Labour Council.

The *Sheffield Co-operator*

Following the Co-operative Party's creation in 1917, press coverage towards co-operatives became increasingly hostile. According to the *Co-operator*, establishment press claimed societies were handing "money to wicked Labour organisations and evilly designing Socialists" and that the true aims of Society Directors were to "do away with ... personal freedom ... the freedom of our children" and eventually "exterminate" people (Sheffield Co-operator, 1923b, April, p. 4). It is not surprising therefore, that the *Sheffield Co-operator*'s arrival was greeted with optimism by the two city co-operative societies.

At a time when "materialistic selfishness" and the post-war trade depression tested the co-operative faith, the *Co-operator* could "fight the workers' cause from the Co-operative standpoint". As "yet another link in the chain of activities" it could strengthen the faith in the vision of the co-operative commonwealth (Rose, 1922, p. 1). The paper was an "effective medium" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1922a, May, p. 4) that enabled the local movement to fight against the "constant torpedoing" meted out by the anti-co-operators, who boomed "private trade against co-operation" and "the gospel of every man for himself … The capitalistic view of life, the capitalistic scheme of values, [and] the reiterated … assumption of the workers' unfitness to govern"(Sheffield Co-operator, 1923, August-September, p. 6).

This hostility extended towards the local press. In 1926, a "local Tory journal" launched a further campaign asking its readers to vote for a motion to withdraw Brightside and Carbrook Society from political action, on the basis that co-operation was well supported among members of Parliament (Ballard, 1926). If this were true, the *Co-operator* asked, why had the Co-operative Parliamentary Committee fought "for twenty years to secure equal treatment" for co-operative pharmaceutical chemists, auditors, and representation on various Government Committees, from a Parliament whose collective "principles and interests" were absolutely opposed to the co-operative system (Sheffield Co-operator, 1926, April, p. 1). These were the principles which the *Sheffield Co-operator* repeatedly advocated were needed in the House of Commons. They were only being heard now that the Movement had secured such representation. The *Co-operator* asked who were the "political adventurers" to whom J. J. Dale, the proposer of the motion, referred? "Does he mean anyone, or all, of our eight guardians who are giving their time and service free to the work of alleviating the terrible distress of the city? Does he say that of our splendid representative in the House of Commons?" (1926, April, p. 1). The "Tory motion" put forward by "a Tory organiser to secure a Tory result" ultimately failed (Sheffield Co-operator, 1926, April, p. 1).

Instances such as these convinced the editors of the *Sheffield Co-operator* that the Movement was right to have involved itself in politics (Sheffield Co-operator, 1923b, January-February; Sheffield Co-operator, 1925). Leaving the fate of the movement in the hands of private traders organised through the Associated Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of British Industries, and the ranks of the "anti-co-operators" (Penny, 1922, p. 5) — would leave co-operators as "the slaves and dupes" of a minority who wished to undo all that the movement had achieved to date to bring about a more "co-operative nation" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1923b, April, p. 4). Just as dangerous were the "professedly neutral people" who wished the co-operative movement to "stand aside" from politics (Sheffield Co-operator, 1923b, January-February, p. 4).

Why then, given the desire of many co-operators to remain neutral or independent, had the Co-operative Party decided to "coalesce" with the Labour Party? It had done so, the *Co-operator* stated, because many members agreed with Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald that the co-operative movement was a section of a "great working-class movement" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1923, March, p. 4). Macdonald's vision of a united "People's Party" could only be realised when consumers became "fully conversant with trade and commerce, production, and distribution — use, rather than profit" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1923, March, p. 4). Until then, the Co-operative Party and the trade unions "had to work on the same workers from different angles" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1923, March, p. 4). Trade unionists "could preach against capitalism, they could organise to secure increased wages," but "both things were useless if they spent with capitalism and allowed the owners … to increase prices more rapidly … than wages." The working classes had to not only "preach against capitalism" but also to "spend against it" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1927, March, p. 3).

Who is Alexander?

Following A. V. Alexander's selection as the Co-operative and Labour candidate for Hillsborough, the first edition of the *Sheffield Co-operator* asked, "Who is Alexander?" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1922b, May, p. 1). He was, it was claimed, "an apostle of the Co-operative Commonwealth" who declared his faith in co-operation "for all producers and consumers for mutual benefit of the whole of the members of the community" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1922b, May, p. 1).

Alexander's political ascendency had been swift. Born in 1886, he left school to work in the offices of a Bristol leather merchant. In 1920, he was a local government clerk, working for the Bristol School Board and then Somerset County Council (Tilley, 1995, pp. 2-4). He became active in the co-operative movement serving as vice-President of the Weston Super-Mare Co-operative Society (Tilley, 1995, p. 5). In the same year, with no previous political experience, he beat 100 other applicants to be appointed full-time Secretary to the Co-operative Union Parliamentary Committee.

Based in the East End Offices of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, Alexander subsequently represented the co-operative view on various trade boards and led delegations to the President of the Board of Agriculture and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Tilley, 1995). He successfully lobbied to pass an amendment to the Government's 1921 Finance Bill, striking out a proposed Co-operation Profits Tax. This brought his name to the attention of the Sheffield Co-operative Party. They invited him to be their candidate at the next General Election after Arthur Lockwood moved to London to act as the electoral agent to Alfred Barnes, who subsequently won East Ham South as the joint Co-operative-Labour candidate at the 1922 Election.

In a speech to business leaders made soon after his adoption as candidate for Hillsborough, Alexander spoke of his belief in the co-operative commonwealth. He believed that "competition" had been shown to be a "curse" to humanity, based upon a false doctrine of "survival of the fittest and weakest to the wall" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1922, November, p. 1). Just as in the "Hungry Forties" when Rochdale had shown that "men and women of goodwill" could work to convert a competitive society to one based on consumer co-operation, the same could be proved during the post-war trade depression (Sheffield Co-operator, 1922, November, p. 6). Alexander was duly elected Member of Parliament for Hillsborough, and in 1924, became Under-Secretary to the Board of Trade in the first Labour government (Sheffield Co-operator, 1924, March).

"A far from average politician", Alexander's speeches over the next five years threw "a flood of light" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1928, p. 1) upon consumer exploitation and abject working conditions. A senior member of the Parliamentary Labour Party, he preached on the dangers of monopolisation (Alexander, 1936) and how the co-operative movement might combat the rationalisation of capital and the artificial restraints on trade that were "inevitable corollaries" of private enterprise at a time when prices had fallen to non-profitable levels. Alexander pleaded for a united co-operative response:

> In order to combat successfully the growing tendency of legislation to retard, and indeed, to limit the expansion of co-operation, it is necessary … to recognise that the political fight for the next few years will largely range around whether collectivism in industry and commerce is to be based upon ownership by, and service to the common people, or is it to be based upon the Corporate State, and with an ever expanding system of incorporated industry for private profit (Sheffield Co-operator, 1936, October, p. 1).

Of the three forms of co-operation — profit-sharing, co-partnership (workers' co-operatives) and consumers' co-operatives — Alexander believed that only consumer co-operation held the potential to genuinely transform society. Many a profit-sharing or co-partnership scheme had broken down, and their economic contribution was "infinitesimal". They were mere palliatives compared to consumer co-operation which provided "all the necessary commodities and services [required] for human existence and development" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1922, November, p. 6). It had potential to bring balance to the marketplace, maintaining consumption to protect working men and women from the "periodic gluts, stoppages … and unemployment" (Alexander, 1925). This was the system of co-operation, mutual and self-help which the landed classes had declared "a state within a state". Whether co-operation would ultimately prevail was unknown, but what was certain was that change was needed:

> Whether this should be State action, nationalisation, Guild Socialism, or co-operation was not for him to say, except that efficiency, experience, and perhaps, ultimately, expediency would govern our choice. He did, however, contend that democratic control of an evolutionary character working from the bottom was infinitely better than control from the top (Sheffield Co-operator, 1926, July, p. 7).

After the election of the second Labour Government in 1929, the *Co-operator* had expected Alexander to return to the Board of Trade. If the Rochdale Pioneers had known when they "formulated their comprehensive programme of future action" that one of their future representatives would be a member of the British Cabinet, "they would have gasped" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1929, July, p. 1). But as First Lord of the Admiralty, Alexander was an ideal candidate. As an editorial by T. W. Mercer explained, "For handling business issues, he has a natural flair … his mind … stored with economic facts … [he is] more than capable of managing the 'mighty business' of the British Navy", and overseeing the building of ships, the placing of contracts, "and enrolling boys and men ought to be conducted in the good co-operative way" (Mercer, 1929, p. 1). Indeed, a dose of co-operation would serve the Navy well if the Co-operative Party's policy of International Co-operation was ever to be introduced.

Alexander is one of the forgotten figures of Labour Party history, despite having served as Defence Secretary in the first Attlee Labour Government. In addition to his many Parliamentary commitments, he remained dutiful in his constituency appearances right up until his retirement as an MP in 1950. In 1948, when he was made an Honorary Freeman of the City of Sheffield he recalled conversations with Sheffield workmen, who "in the midst of their grumbles about what the City Council did not do for them" considered Sheffield to be "pre-eminent" in its "municipal progress compared to other centres" and in "its steadily built-up tradition of municipal ownership of public utilities" (Co-operative Home Magazine, 1948, p. i).

The Co-operative Commonwealth

The two decades following the end of the First World War were an era in which idealists determinedly pursued the beliefs of "community, co-operation and self-determination" to create a better world — a co-operative commonwealth (Neima, 2021, p. 6). The *Sheffield Co-operator* drew upon this idealism. It envisaged a massive co-operative society covering "*every* purchaser in the whole country", with *all* profits from shopkeeping and manufacturing being diverted to the members. "Nobody wants 'State Control' … we want control *by the people* … a nationwide co-operative society, making as well as selling" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1923a, April, p. 5). Science had converted the world into a neighbourhood. The movement had to ensure that that "neighbourhood" would evolve into "brotherhood" (sic) (Sheffield Co-operator, 1930, May, p. 3).

Without such a commitment to a more collective ownership of the means of life (Sheffield Co-operator, 1936, December, p. 3) it was expected that the movement would eventually "fall to pieces" (Patricia, 1925, p. 3). The founders, "ridiculously imaginative people", had "mingled much imagination with their dreams" but the "political struggle of the working class to get control of the political machine" had never been grasped (Sheffield Co-operator, 1924, August, p. 6).

Now that workers had the vote, however, this was possible. All that was needed was the will. It was one thing "to indulge in all sorts of imaginings about Labour associations for building up the new order, it was another matter 'when it came to the practical application of this gospel' to give every 'small-holder' a share" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1924, August, p. 6).

The *Co-operator* argued that the movement could be a "great social force, training men and women to look after their own trade, teaching them to overcome difficulties, proving to them that it is better to try to do things for themselves than to be always grumbling about adulteration, [and] high prices" (1922, October, p. 4). Opposing such developments were the rapidly increasing "trusts and combines", created by the late nineteenth century consolidation of capital begun in the United States. In 1919, the British Committee on Trusts reported that "no branch of British industry [was …] exempt from this trustification movement" (Smith, 1927, p. 4).

The *Co-operator* claimed co-operation could best defend communities against the trusts, by securing "democratic finance, democratic ownership, and democratic control". (Smith, 1927, p. 4). It was "opposed to the principle of serving the interests of the privileged few" and only "public regulation" was able to prevent exploitation of the consumer through high prices (Smith, 1927, p. 4). The real battle of the future would be the "broad issue of public versus private control of the trustified industries" and the conversion of the trusts into instruments of public good (Smith, 1927, p. 4).

The first step to developing society on these lines was at the municipal level, because it shared a "closer intimacy with our domestic lives than the State" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1924, October, p. 4). Municipalities had responsibility for housing, education, sanitation, recreation, public health considerations, roads, and hospitals. Co-operative representatives had also fought vigorously for local ownership of water and gas. The *Co-operator* (1927, October) claimed that co-operators were "ideal members of town and city councils" noting that a council was a "large Co-operative Society" and co-operators had already gained "practical business training" on the "management [and] education committees" of their local retail societies (Sheffield Co-operator, 1927, October, p. 2). The *Co-operator* (1930, November) further suggested that the example from Sheffield had demonstrated that co-operation did not only "do much for the individual" but also saved "much public expenditure" (p. 5):

> The movement is one of the greatest thrift agencies in the kingdom … It is no use bolstering up co-operative enterprise on the one hand, and sending private traders, or the representatives of vested interests, to the City Council on the other … Many a family has been saved from destitution during hard times by the store of accumulated dividends which stood to the credit of the family at the co-operative society, with the results that rates are lower in consequences of returns made to co-operators which have enabled them to keep the wolf from the door (Sheffield Co-operator, 1930, November, p. 5).

The progress made in Sheffield towards modernisation was swift. On the second anniversary of the election of the Labour Council, the *Co-operator* (1929, November) introduced the Co-operative and Labour Party's Manifesto. It celebrated that "the dire prophecies" of their political opponents had not materialised and that "civic affairs had been improved in all directions" (p. 4). The *Sheffield Citizen*, the organ of the Sheffield Citizen Association (a Conservative and Liberal anti-Labour coalition) had earlier denounced the Council's policies as "extravagant and extremist" (Barton, 1927, p. 1). J. G. Graves, the leader of the Independent Liberal Group of the Council, had agreed that it made sense for many public services to be owned by the municipality. However, there were limits to what the Council could do — it was not "a glorified Co-operative Society" (Mathers, 1979, p. 245). But the *Co-operator* stood steadfast. "Movement in the direction of collectivism and a higher standard of life", Councillor Alfred Barton argued would be won "not by wild outbursts, but by patient, intelligent, scientific, but relentless progress, growing out of the old", thus building up a new society (Barton, 1927, p. 1).

Britain Reborn

Following the collapse of the Labour Government in 1931 and the formation of the National Government, the *Sheffield Co-operator* adopted a hostile stance to Ramsay MacDonald and his Conservative dominated Cabinet. The editors stated that it was the poor who had paid for the economic crisis of 1931. The Government had sought to broaden the tax base by "placing taxes upon practically every article of food, clothing, and household requisites used by the poorest of the poor in order to relieve the burden of the taxation of the rich" (Alexander, 1932, p. 1).

In the years after 1931, the co-operative movement was once again targeted by Government and private interests. They believed that retail societies had an unfair advantage over private traders (Alexander, 1932, p. 1). The 1933 Budget included a provision stating that co-operative societies were not paying their fair share of taxation. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, appointed the Raeburn Committee to investigate (Sheffield Co-operator, 1933, p. 1). It included a director of the Columbia Gramophone Company, which had boycotted co-operatives "on the grounds that they were co-operative and gave dividends on purchases to their members" (Carbery, 1969, p. 38). Its report proposed exempting society dividends from taxation. However, remaining society surpluses would be taxed, which the *Co-operator* stated was "solely for the purposes of making an attack upon working-class co-operative savings in order to satisfy the trade opponents" (1933, March, p. 1). It pointed to the fact that the dividend would be taxed, because it followed that "there is a smaller sum available for distribution … if undistributed surplus is taxed" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1933, p. 1).

The announcement caused outrage in Sheffield. On 27 March,1933, 5,000 co-operators attended a protest demonstration at Sheffield City Hall, organised on behalf of the Brightside and Carbrook, Sheffield and Ecclesall, and Handsworth Woodhouse co-operative societies. With every room of the Hall filled, A. V. Alexander set out more clearly than ever the case of the co-operative movement:

> Friends, in this time of world and national crisis … nothing is showing the way out of our national crisis to the same extent as the mutual collective co-operative … efforts of the followers in our days of Owen, King, Kingsley, Hughes, and Holyoake, and all those who were out to teach men and women to save themselves from economic crisis by their own control and collective effort …
>
> … It is one of the greatest causes that has ever happened in the history of the world, and like all good causes have always incited — to use the words of the prayer book — envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. That is the origin of the attack upon us … Here is a case where the workers have been thrifty and got together; where they have made progress towards their own collective ownership of the means of life, and when their opponents see this progress and the thousands of pounds which we gather for working-class independence and stability, they just think this is a good chance to get some of it back for the relief of the rich … If we do not resist this monstrous injustice we shall be false to the memory of all our Pioneers from Owen and the Chartists onwards … It helps men and women to hold their heads up; to be independent; to look even employers in the face. Let the nation continue to be built on a virile line of thrift and independence (Sheffield Co-operator, 1933, April, p. 1).

In 1932, the Co-operative Party issued its economic response to the National Government in the form of the seven-part *Britain Reborn* manifesto. The *Sheffield Co-operator* eagerly endorsed its platform, particularly the municipal programme endorsed by the Easter Conference at Southsea — outlined in *Britain Reborn Vol. 7: Civic Ideals* (Co-operative Party, 1932). The new policy was built on "democratic representative Government and control of municipal trading services as against government or control of such service by professional or expert bodies such as commissioners or corporations who are divorced from direct democratic influence" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1932, April, p. 1). As such the extension of powers of local authorities included:

> … provisions for ad hoc local authorities to federate for social services, trading services, and housing and town planning … that in the development of public or collective services, provision must be made for the consumers' co-operative movement to become an integral part of the national economy …
> In any development of a publicly and co-operatively controlled banking system provision should be made for municipal banks or a municipal corporations bank, the municipal bank to have the status of a

> clearing house bank … that the extension of co-operative trading in the State necessitates the removal of the legal disabilities upon co-operators in their capacity as public representatives in regard to voting upon public contracts (Sheffield Co-operator, 1932, April, p. 1).

Over the decades, many questioned the lack of a co-operative presence in the policies and rhetoric of the post-war Labour Government. Despite the close relationship between the two parties, it has been argued that the Labour Party "did not take the political ambitions of the co-operative movement seriously", causing "significant tensions" when Labour policy began to undermine co-operative business interests (Whitecross, 2016, p. 132). Some attributed this to the perceived weakness of the Movement, its opposition to state control as the only method of public ownership, and the relative decline of co-operative businesses in the post war era (Whitecross, 2016). Others argue the movement's inability to put forward a manifesto for socialist government distinct from Labour Party policy amounted to "wasted years" (Whitecross, 2016). More time should have been spent advancing "co-operative forms of social ownership to complement nationalisation following the publication of *Britain Reborn* (Sheffield Co-operator, 1932, April, p. 1).

Through the 1930s, the *Co-operator* continued to support A. V. Alexander, and propagandise for the movement, which in Sheffield appeared in good health. Persistently high unemployment and an unstable international outlook led to an increase in party membership over the next few years (Sheffield Co-operator, 1936, May, p. 5). In 1932, 3,000 co-operators gathered at the new City Hall for the Co-operative Party's autumn campaign meeting, where the failures of the Ramsay MacDonald's National Government took centre stage. J. A. Longden, Sheffield Co-operative Chair, claimed that the breakdown in capitalism in industry and finance necessitated "its replacement by a co-operative system of society" stimulated by the transferring of public utilities into public ownership (Sheffield Co-operator, 1932, October, p.1). Reporting on a speech made by Alfred Barnes MP in the mid-1930s the *Co-operator* (1936, May) further stated that capitalism had brought, "chaos, anxiety, alarms, insecurity, revolutions, dictatorships, poverty, and unemployment, and that only the introduction of a co-operative system in production, politics, publicity, and government could ensure peace (p. 5).

Barnes, the editors of the *Co-operator*, and many others within the Movement, were convinced that co-operation alone had the potential to bring stability to Europe. As early as 1923, it warned of the conditions of economic despair which bred fascism. As a Home Notes columnist suggested, "because there are a large number of people who have never troubled to think out the root causes of poverty and unemployment … the Fascisti idea … will cause untold suffering for brute force never advanced any righteous cause" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1923a, January-February, p. 1). Rennie Smith, Member of Parliament and frequent *Sheffield Co-operator* contributor, drew attention to Mussolini's destruction of the Italian co-operative societies and the confiscation of property from society members (Smith, 1926). British society members' interest in the plight of the Italian co-operators showed that "local co-operators realise that the co-operative movement all over the world," was a common cause (Smith, 1926, p. 3).

The deterioration of economic and material conditions in the 1930s was similarly lamented. The *Co-operator* published articles supporting the Co-operative Guild's boycott of goods from Nazi Germany (Sheffield Co-operator, 1939, p. 7). It denounced the forced closure and dispersion of the German Union and Wholesale Society in Prague, following the annexation of Sudetenland. As war became increasingly likely, the *Co-operator* railed against Hitler and the National Government for permitting such a likely tragedy to occur stating that never was it more necessary to "see the principles of co-operation applied … if there could be more mutual help, more trust, and more co-operation among nations, then the world would not be disordered as it is today" (Sheffield Co-operator, 1937, p. 7). Co-operation could lessen the chance of war, and boost peace and security; "Can we do that at the present time?" the paper asked rhetorically (Sheffield Co-operator, 1937, p. 7).

Seventeen Years

Alfred Barnes' vision did not hold and neither did that of the *Sheffield Co-operator*, the final edition of which appeared in July 1939. Three months later, when the first edition of the *Sheffield Co-operator Bulletin* appeared, Britain was at war. For nearly twenty years, the *Co-operator* had "played its part in the advocacy of co-operative principles and the promotion of co-operative trade" as "the organ of a political party". It had advanced "co-operation as a trading system", and criticised "the powers that be" putting forward "constructive suggestions … that the 'co-operative system' should be adopted in local and national affairs" (Sheffield Co-operator Bulletin, 1939, p. 1).

What would happen after the war, the editors of the *Bulletin* asked? High ideals could "easily be dimmed" or "permanently obscured in the applications of war tactics and the instinct of mere self-preservation", further demonstrating the need for the co-operative movement to continue to propagate "its articles of faith and its plan towards the Commonwealth" (Sheffield Co-operator Bulletin, 1940a, October, p. 1). "Never again", A. V. Alexander responded, "should the experience" of the War be repeated. It was the duty of the co-operative movement to keep the co-operative spirit alive and used for the purpose of creating a new State in which "no one truly desirous of serving the family and the community" would be prevented from doing so (Sheffield Co-operative Bulletin, 1940b, October, p. 1).

For all the perceived weaknesses of the Co-operative Party in the 1930s as a policy-making body, one cannot deny that in Sheffield, Party members succeeded in building an effective political machine with the *Sheffield Co-operator* as its mouthpiece. Almost 100 years after its first issue was printed, the arguments that it attempted to make — that true public ownership as advocated by co-operators did not equal top-down state ownership, that consumer co-operation were the key to unleashing the co-operative commonwealth — are still valid today. In 2017, the Labour Party issued a report entitled *Alternative Models of Ownership* (Barrott et al., 2017) which explicitly ruled out a return to "Morrisonian" style nationalisations (Bell, 2018, p. 4), instead promising a "co-operative economy" (Bell, 2018, p. 10). While Labour was defeated in the 2019 election, it certainly appears that any future discussions involving public ownership will take their cues from co-operative forms of ownership rather than those which characterised the British state in the post-war period.

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Hidden in Plain Sight: How UK National Newspapers Report on Co-operatives

Anita Mangan

How do UK national newspapers report on co-operatives? Is there media bias and are co-operatives neglected in mainstream journalism? This article analyses the general coverage of co-operatives across UK national newspapers in 2020 to understand how co-operatives are presented to the public. The research is based on two key questions: how often are co-operatives reported on in UK national newspapers; and what kinds of stories feature co-operatives? Results show that co-operatives remain virtually invisible in mainstream newsprint. Only 640 pieces are published with just 32 stories featuring co-operatives in any great depth. These can be categorised using four themes: high profile business; features; personality-driven journalism; and community activism. Based on these themes, the article makes three points about the UK national newspaper coverage: co-operation is never explained; co-operation is associated with 'other' people such as foreigners or the poor; and co-operation is politicised. The article concludes by arguing that because co-operatives continue to be a marginal presence in UK national newspapers, co-operative journalism and journalism about co-operatives is needed now more than ever.

Co-operatives often suffer from invisibility, even when they are successful. In the UK, for example, the co-operative economy has a combined turnover of £39.7 billion, membership nearing 14 million, and 7,237 co-operatives spread across every sector of the economy (Co-operatives UK, 2021). Despite these successes, however, the general public has little or no knowledge of co-operative principles, values, and models. People might be familiar with The Co-op or The Co-operative Bank as high-profile businesses and 'high street', familiar brands, but this does not necessarily translate into an in-depth understanding of co-operatives. The invisibility takes many forms: education focuses on mainstream, for-profit business models (Mangan, 2014); professionals, advisors, and business owners can be unaware of co-operatives (CECOP, 2013); and the history and communal memories of local co-operatives often die out as communities change over time (Rodgers et al., 2015).

Of significance for this special issue of the *Journal of Co-operative Studies* is the coverage of co-operatives in mainstream media. The special issue asks how co-operatives are treated in the media, suggesting that they are often neglected. Mangan and Byrne (2018) explore this issue in relation to the UK national news coverage of the Co-operative Bank (2011-15), comparing reports in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* with those in *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*. Surprisingly given their different political leanings, the newspapers' coverage was broadly similar and fell into five themes: customer service stories; standard financial reporting; personality-driven journalism; stories driven by public relations; and political coverage. Most of the articles were framed using neoliberal values. Thus, during the bank's 2013 financial crisis, newspapers simplified and sensationalised the story, producing good copy but in a way that undermined public understanding of, and confidence in, alternative governance structures.

This article builds on and updates the Mangan and Byrne (2018) study by exploring how co-operatives were reported on in the UK national newspapers in 2020. The research is based on two questions:

1. How often are co-operatives reported on in UK national newspapers?
2. What kinds of stories feature co-operatives?

Rather than focusing on a particular co-operative or doing a comparison between a small number of newspaper titles, the aim was to analyse the general media coverage of co-operatives across UK national newspapers to understand how co-operatives are presented to the public. As newspapers are not bound by the same impartiality requirements as broadcast

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media, the decision was taken to focus on newsprint only in order to capture a range of opinions and political stances.

The article is organised as follows. It begins with a brief discussion of the media's role in framing, justifying, and legitimising perspectives for the general public. This is followed by the methods section which explains how the data were gathered and analysed. Findings are presented using four themes: high profile business; features; personality-driven journalism; and community activism. The discussion makes three main points about national newspaper coverage: co-operation is never explained; co-operation is associated with 'other' people such as foreigners or the poor; co-operation is politicised, partly because it still carries the taint of association with the Co-operative Bank crisis of 2013. The article concludes by arguing that because co-operatives continue to be a marginal presence in UK national newspapers, co-operative journalism and journalism about co-operatives is needed now more than ever.

News Media and Neoliberal Perspectives

The media play an important role in framing, justifying, and legitimising perspectives (Kuronen et al., 2005; Vaara & Tienari, 2002). In the UK, newspapers are seen to have a close alignment with right-wing neoliberal capitalism. For example, Berry (2016) charts the history of the UK press, noting a long history of hostility to trade unions, large-scale government, and social welfare. He argues that the emergence of press barons such as Conrad Black and Rupert Murdoch in the 1970s, coupled with the growth of public relations in the 1980s-90s, created conditions which favoured neoliberal perspectives. The growth in financial and business reporting in daily newspapers also prioritised economic and business agendas over social, political, or cultural ones. These processes were exacerbated by deregulation of the press and cost-cutting (Berry, 2016; Davies, 2009). Deregulation concentrated newspaper ownership, narrowing down the breadth of proprietorial and editorial voices. Smaller newsrooms meant that sources were not checked, and journalists came to rely on press releases and other newspaper stories for copy, meaning that a small number of stories could dominant the news cycle (Davies, 2009).

By legitimising neoliberal interpretations of the events, editors and proprietors can play a significant role in shaping public opinion and creating common narratives. For example, in coverage of the financial crisis (2007-08), subsequent recession, and austerity policies, UK national newspapers framed the events and political decisions in economic terms, meaning that individuals were reduced to 'economic actors' rather than people or citizens who were struggling (Temple et al., 2016). The crisis was framed as a public spending deficit, rather than private debt, with the previous Labour government blamed for the crisis, and austerity presented as beneficial (Berry, 2016). This creates significant silences where alternative perspectives are neither presented nor discussed, thus shaping public opinion to accept neoliberalism as the norm (McDonagh, 2019; Preston & Silke, 2011). In such cases, dissenting voices and alternative interpretations are often pushed to alternative media spaces (Barros & Michaud, 2020), exacerbating their invisibility to the general public.

A final point to consider is the growth of business reporting in daily national newspapers, particularly the ways in which business activity is presented and legitimised. Early research by organisation scholars on business news reporting focused on how stories were presented, justified, and legitimised to the public (Kuronen et al., 2005; Vaara & Tienari, 2002). For example, by studying mergers and acquisitions in Finland, Vaara and Tienari (2002) demonstrate that a rationalistic discourse predominates in the media's reports. The events were framed in narrow economic terms, which presented the decision-making as driven by 'the business case' rather than wider societal considerations. Zhu and McKenna (2012) extend this approach by charting the complex interplay between rational and nationalistic discourses in their study of a failed international merger. They demonstrate how nationalistic rhetoric in the media played a role in delegitimising the proposed takeover. Finally, Murray and Nyberg (2020) explore legitimisation strategies from the perspective of corporate public relations and lobbying, demonstrating how businesses use the media to promote favourable coverage, often on contentious issues, or to influence public policy. This last study points both to the power of the public relations sector in a depleted newsroom (Davies, 2009) and the unchallenged proliferation of neoliberal perspectives in the media (Berry, 2016).

Although these studies represent a small portion of research on how business news is framed, they point to a predominantly economic narrative, which prioritises managerial voices. Such a dry economic narrative means that social, political, and community values are frequently sidelined in the press, especially in times of economic crisis (Temple et al., 2016). The narrowing of voices and perspectives creates a standardised national narrative, with heroes and villains (Hartz & Steger, 2010), winners and losers. In turn, this perpetuates the UK news media's long history of stigmatising individuals and groups (McArthur & Reeves, 2019), particularly the poor. By framing news reporting with an overarching neoliberal perspective, the media helps to normalise and legitimise specific business practices, at the expense of alternative modes of organising. As such, it is little wonder that co-operatives might suffer from invisibility in the UK national press. In what follows, UK newspaper reports on co-operatives from January to December 2020 are analysed, to explore whether such marginalisation continues to be the case.

Methods

This article is based on a tradition of analysing media reporting to learn about organisations and organising (for example: Barros & Michaud, 2020; Hargie et al., 2010; Hartz & Steger, 2010; Kuronen et al., 2005; Luyckx & Janssens, 2020). Empirical data for this paper were gathered using a similar method to that developed in Mangan and Byrne (2018): the focus was on UK national newspapers (weekday and weekend) to include broadsheet and tabloid journalism, daily stories, and opinion pieces, as well as a range of political perspectives. As newspapers are not bound by the same impartiality requirements as broadcast media, the decision was taken to focus solely on newsprint stories in the expectation that a broader set of stories and opinions about co-operatives might emerge. To get the widest possible set of results, the search term 'co-operative' was chosen. The date range of 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020 was used to explore how co-operative stories are covered across the year and to see whether co-operatives featured in reporting on Covid-19.

Gathering the data was done in a series of steps using the LexisNexis Library News database (https://www.lexisnexis.com). The initial search on the term 'co-operative' was filtered by the label 'UK National Newspapers', yielding 69,186 results. These also included entries where the alternative spelling 'cooperative' was used. The date range 01/01/20 to 31/12/20 was applied (1,768 results) and then duplicate entries were hidden (1,722). This gave a list of 16 UK national newspapers (see Table 1).

The results in Table 1 show the raw data generated by the search engine. Each article was checked to remove further duplicates (for example, where online, early, regional, and international editions had the same byline, content, and date). This step also removed outlier stories that used the word 'cooperative' to describe behaviour rather than co-operatives as an organisational form. This last step was interesting in the sense that it showed how broadly newspapers refer to the concept of co-operation without necessarily being interested in co-operatives. Common categories included: crime ('co-operating with the police'); politics (countries adopting a 'co-operative attitude' in relation to various political developments); online gaming (reviews of games with 'co-operative gameplay'); and astrology ('friends will be co-operative').

Table 1: Total number of published articles January to December 2020

Newspaper	With Duplicates	Duplicates Hidden
The Guardian	337	337
The Times	348	329
The Independent	205	204
telegraph.co.uk	189	187
The Daily Telegraph	122	118
The Sunday Times	122	110
The Mirror (Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	106	103
The Sun	81	78
Daily Star Online	66	66
The Express	43	43
Daily Record and Sunday Mail	42	42
The Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday	42	42
The Observer	26	25
The Sunday Telegraph	22	21
The Sunday Express	12	12
The People	5	5
Total	**1768**	**1722**

Finally, as significant overlap occurred between the online and printed version of *The Daily Telegraph*, they were merged. This left a total of 640 stories, spread across 15 sources (see Table 2). The top three newspapers to report on co-operatives, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *The Daily Telegraph* (including telegraph.co.uk) are daily broadsheets published Monday to Saturday. These accounted for over half of the sample (358 out of 640). The other entries consisted of a mixture of broadsheet and tabloid titles, published daily, Sundays, online and in newsprint.

Table 2: Final selection of published articles January to December 2020

Newspaper	Final Selection
The Guardian	134
The Times	120
The Daily Telegraph and telegraph.co.uk	104
The Independent	74
The Sunday Times	33
The Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday	29
The Mirror (Daily Mirror and Sunday Mirror)	26
The Sun	26
Daily Record and Sunday Mail	21
The Express	19
The Observer	18
Daily Star	15
The Sunday Telegraph	12
The Sunday Express	7
The People	2
Total	**640**

To analyse the data, each newspaper's corpus of articles on co-operatives was read and ordered by month to determine the frequency of stories across the year (see Table 3, below).

June had the fewest articles (35), while October had the most (75). The second half of the year featured more stories (364) and the top five newspapers featured at least one article per month. After establishing the frequency of coverage, each article was then assigned three descriptive codes. The first noted the newspaper section (for example: news, business, politics, travel, culture), while the second noted the article's main theme (for example: retail, money, food and drink, Covid-19, opinion). The final codes noted whether co-operatives were the main subject of the article ('in-depth'), if they were mentioned in part of a larger story ('factual') or included as trivia or novelties ('random').

From this initial sorting, four key themes emerged: high profile business; features; personality-driven journalism; and community activism. The next section will explore each of these themes in turn, before moving on to the discussion and conclusions.

How UK National Newspapers Report on Co-operatives

In general, reporting on co-operative business is a marginal concern for UK national newspapers. Of the 640 articles published during 2020, only 32 featured co-operatives in any great depth. The majority of these appeared in three newspapers: *The Guardian* (8), *The Times* (7) and *The Guardian*'s sister paper *The Observer* (6), which is published on Sundays. There was no overall theme to these articles, however, as they included reports on community activism, letters to the editor, negative opinion pieces, and reports on international development. Most articles on co-operatives fall into the 'factual' category, where co-operatives are mentioned in connection to a larger story but the co-operative itself is not the main focus. An example of this type of factual mention is the reporting on coronavirus in Danish mink farms: both *The Mail on Sunday* (Bucks, 2020) and *The Independent* (Olsen, 2020) reported that 40% of global mink production is from Kopenhagen Fur, a co-operative of 1,500 Danish breeders, but that is the only mention of co-operatives in the article. In other words, they are a point of interest but not the main concern.

Table 3: Newspaper articles per month January to December 2020

Newspaper	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
The Guardian	11	9	15	10	12	5	14	12	15	10	9	12	134
The Times	9	8	5	11	17	8	13	11	7	11	8	12	120
The Daily Telegraph and telegraph.co.uk	3	9	6	8	2	6	12	8	13	19	10	8	104
The Independent	3	4	6	6	3	3	7	3	4	12	13	10	74
The Sunday Times	3	1	4	2	6	2	1	4	3	1	3	3	33
The Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday	3	3	6	1	4	2	0	2	1	2	2	3	29
The Mirror (Daily Mirror and Sunday Mirror)	2	0	2	3	3	3	2	4	1	2	2	2	26
The Sun	1	2	2	3	0	2	1	8	0	4	3	0	26
Daily Record and Sunday Mail	1	1	2	0	2	0	1	4	3	3	2	2	21
The Express	2	0	2	0	2	2	2	2	1	4	1	1	19
The Observer	1	2	2	1	2	0	0	2	1	2	3	2	18
Daily Star	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	5	2	0	1	15
The Sunday Telegraph	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	2	3	2	0	12
The Sunday Express	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	7
The People	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Monthly totals	**40**	**41**	**53**	**48**	**59**	**35**	**53**	**64**	**56**	**75**	**60**	**56**	**640**

In what follows, the 640 articles are discussed using four key themes: high profile business; features; personality-driven journalism; and community activism. These illustrate the wide range of co-operative businesses that exist, while simultaneously highlighting the paucity of coverage about co-operatives in the UK national press.

High profile business

Most business stories related to well-known names on the UK high-street (i.e., a common name for an area's main shopping district, such as 'Main Street' in the US): specifically The Co-operative Group and The Co-operative Bank. The Co-operative Group (the Co-op Group) has a long history in the UK, dating back to the foundation of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) in 1863 from the merger of a number of independent societies (Wilson et al., 2013). In 2000, the merger of the CWS with the Co-operative Retail Services led to the formation of the Co-operative Group which bills itself as one of the world's largest consumer co-operatives (Co-operative Group Ltd., n.d.). The Co-operative Group is owned by individual members and independent co-operative societies. It has 3,750 outlets around the UK, covering food, funeral care, insurance, and legal services. The Co-operative Bank (Co-op Bank) is not a co-operative but was part of The Co-operative Group until a financial crisis in 2013 (Mangan & Byrne, 2018). It no longer has any co-operative affiliations but has not changed its name.

Newspaper articles about the Co-op Group most typically featured in general reports about UK supermarkets, particularly how they were responding to Covid-19. For example, in March 2020, *The Guardian* reported that Asda and the Co-op Group had announced purchase restrictions to combat panic-buying and stockpiling (Sparrow & Campbell, 2020). A month later, *The Times* reported that Co-op Group faced a £200 million bill to cover the cost of hiring temporary workers and installing Covid-19 protective equipment (Jones, 2020). By October, however, *The Telegraph* was reporting that the group was anticipating increased sales thanks to lockdown restrictions (Foy, 2020).

Articles about the Co-op Group were largely neutral in tone and rarely featured interviews or explanations about the co-operative business model. One exception was an interview with Steve Murrells, chief executive of the Co-op Group, in the *Mail on Sunday* which referred to the Group's charitable spending:

> The Co-op — by no means the wealthiest organisation but one with a history of community involvement — is handing £1.5 million to food banks, £4.5 million to other local causes and charities over the next two weeks (Craven, 2020, para 6).

While approving of the donations, the article failed to make the link between community involvement, membership, and the consumer co-operative's business model. Furthermore, not all the coverage of The Co-operative Group was as positive as this piece. Earlier in the year, the *Mail on Sunday* had criticised sales tactics in Co-op Funeralcare (Walne, 2020). In September, an in-depth report by *The Daily Telegraph* revealed hard sales tactics, high mark-ups, and unprofessional behaviour in Co-op Funeralcare branches in south London (Adams et al., 2020).

Negative coverage was also a feature of reporting about the Co-operative Bank. In the first half of the year, most stories were factual in nature, recording developments in the banking sector and product updates. By August 2020, however, broadsheets and tabloids alike were reporting on the bank's struggles: "The Co-operative bank is the latest firm to fall victim to the pandemic jobs bloodbath" (Phillips, 2020, para 1); "The Co-op Bank might be better named the shrinking bank" (Brummer, 2020); "The Co-operative Bank has promoted Nick Slape, its chief financial officer, to become its sixth chief executive in nine years" (The Times, 2020); and "Troubled Co-operative Bank in takeover discussions with private equity giant Cerberus" (Burton, 2020). These stories framed the bank as problematic, making particular reference to the bank's 2013 financial crisis and the travails of Paul Flowers, the bank's former chairman (see Mangan & Byrne, 2018). For example, in an otherwise sympathetic interview with Steve Murrells, chief executive of Co-op Group, the *Daily Mail* referred to the "so-called Crystal Methodist Paul Flowers, who was forced to quit amid allegations of drug use" (Sunderland, 2020, para 23).

Such references were not unusual. The *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Times,* and *The Sunday Times* all referred either to Flowers or the bank's financial crisis during their 2020 reports. From the overall coverage of high-street business, then, the casual reader would not learn anything about co-operative business models and values.

Features: travel and reviews

An unexpected source of factual stories about co-operatives was found in travel writing and in food and drink reviews. Obviously, travel features were much reduced because of national and international lockdowns, but *The Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* still published some travel writing. Many of these reports tended to present the co-operatives as part of the 'local colour': "Our first stop is Al Nour, a disabled women's cooperative that hand crafts contemporary embroidered linens, kaftans and other clothing" (Parkes, 2020, para 10); "the wine cooperative — Terraventoux — has understood everything about wine tourism. They've devised all sorts of wheezes to get you out into the vines" (Peregrine, 2020, para 13). Others treated co-operatives as a quirky feature of the local economy: "Today most (dive boats) are run as cottage industries; there may be a single owner or a co-operative, but not typically a big brand" (Rogerson, 2020, para 4). None of the features discussed the co-operatives in any depth.

Apart from *The People* and the *Daily Star*, most newspapers included some reviews of co-operatively produced food and drink. These features typically included factual information about wine, coffee, and chocolate produced by co-operatives. Many of them were driven by press releases (see Davies, 2009). On 28 June, for example, the *Sunday Express* and *Daily Mirror* both featured identical copy about Grenada's Organic Cocoa Farmers' and Chocolate-Makers' Cooperative being a 'game-changer' for local people. For some (*The Independent*, *The Observer* and *Sunday Express*), such PR-driven features were a significant proportion of their-reporting on co-operatives. Although, few of the articles offered in-depth explorations of co-operatives, they introduce readers to a wide range of co-operative businesses around the world.

Personality-driven journalism

These articles were driven by celebrity stories and quite often introduced co-operatives at random. In the broadsheets, co-operatives were used to bring a humorous tone to news and opinion pieces. For example, *The Times* invited a wine co-operative to comment on the news that Kylie Minogue was to launch her own brand of French wine: "(they were) unsure whether Minogue will pull the region into a bustling new commercial era or tar their image with a tacky veneer of glitz" (Sage, 2020, para 3). In the right-of-centre broadsheets, the humorous tone was often at the expense of the co-operative model. For example, *The Daily Telegraph* speculated on taste, class, and race by asking whether "wearing £7000 of stealth-wealth hand smocking, hand stitched by a granny co-operative in Hastings" was more acceptable than giving a child a designer handbag (Armstrong, 2020). Similarly, in *The Sunday Times* James May opined that "You could revive British industry by making a Soviet style national bicycle factory that made one [type of] bike and call it the People's Bicycle Co-operative of Britain" (Rufford, 2020, para 8).

Unlike the broadsheets, co-operatives are not a source of humour for tabloid newspapers, but instead are presented as an unusual, albeit random, feature of a celebrity's biography. Thus, *The Express* mentioned that UK rock band Genesis "was always a writers' cooperative" (Thomson, 2020, para 19). Similarly, *The Mirror*, *The Sun* and *The People* all reported that actor Sean Connery's first job was as a junior horseman with St Cuthbert's Co-operative Society dairy. This snippet of news featured in news of his 80th birthday in August and featured again in his November obituaries.

Community activism

This final theme is the one that deals with co-operatives in greater depth, encompassing stories about community activism in the UK, global development, and co-operative advocacy in the letters pages. Of the 15 UK national newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, its sister

Sunday publication, were the outlets that covered these kinds of stories most frequently. This is unsurprising, given that both papers are considered to adopt a broadly left-of-centre position that is generally sympathetic to activism and alternative forms of organising. Other outlets, both broadsheet and tabloid, carried occasional reports.

Newspaper readers are a source of many of these articles. For example, *The Guardian*'s 'Other Lives' featured 16 obituaries, written by readers, that recorded a wide range of co-operative activism, in areas as diverse as medicine, the arts, housing, environmentalism, and regional consumer co-operatives. The letters page in *The Times* carried a readers' debate in late January about where and when the UK's co-operative movement began. Letters in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* featured advocacy from Co-operatives UK ("the obstacles to people moving from informal mutuality to a formal mutual body are now considerable" — Mayo, 2020, para 1) and suggestions for life after Covid-19 ("The future will have to promote human values, co-operative structures in industry and community solidarity" — Meadowcroft, 2020, para 2). While limited in number, the tone and tenor of these reader-driven pieces point to knowledge and activism that happens mostly outside the mainstream.

Most stories about community activism were filed under international news or global development. *The Guardian*, for example, featured a story about a women's fishing co-operative in Somalia with 70 members and 10 all-female staff (Hujale, 2020), while *The Times* reported on migrants in Italy who had set up a co-operative farm (Kington, 2020). The role of the co-operative in these success stories remained unexplored. In UK news, there were features in both tabloids and broadsheets about community activism. For example, *The Express* featured the growing co-operative pub movement (Hopps & Batstone, 2020), while *The Daily Record* reported on a crowdfunding campaign for a co-operative brewery on the Isle of Eigg (Dingwall, 2020). In *The Independent*, a feature on Stirchley, Birmingham, featured three worker co-operatives: Artefact, Loaf, and Birmingham Bike Foundry:

> At Loaf, Martha expounds on the virtues of the co-operative business model that shares out the pay, workload, and decision-making between its nine members. It's a haven from the "horrible hierarchies" she's experienced in her earlier career (Smith, 2020, para 35).

As part of a larger piece about independent businesses, the article gave a rare voice to worker co-operatives. It was also unusual in that it mentioned co-operative business models and the principle of co-operation among co-operatives.

To summarise, with just 640 stories in 15 publications during 2020, co-operatives are an elusive presence in the UK national newspapers. The articles can be grouped into four themes: high profile business featuring The Co-operative Group and The Co-operative Bank; features such as travel writing and food and drink reviews; personality-driven journalism that used co-operatives to generate humour or illustrate unusual aspects of celebrity; and community activism, where co-operatives were linked to a wider interest in social justice and global development. Very few articles featured co-operatives as the main focus. Instead, they tended to be mentioned in passing. The analysis that follows considers three issues that emerge from this coverage: co-operation is never explained; co-operation is for other people; co-operation is political. The discussion concludes by considering the implications for *Co-operative News*.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study began with two research questions: how often are co-operatives reported on in UK national newspapers and what kinds of stories feature co-operatives? The answer to the first question is that co-operatives continue to be a marginal presence in UK national newspapers. Of the 15 national news outlets, publishing between January and December 2020, there were only 640 articles that mentioned co-operatives. Of these 640 articles, only 32 gave more than a cursory mention to co-operatives. Within the 32 articles, only one report in *The Independent* (Smith, 2020) featured several (worker) co-operatives and discussed why co-operatives are different to other business models and organisational forms. The answer to the second question is equally discouraging. The bulk of co-operative reporting related to high-street business stories about The Co-op Group and The Co-operative Bank, where the stories were driven by a predominantly neoliberal, economic narrative (Berry, 2016; Temple et al., 2016). Travel writing, food and drink reviews and celebrity-driven stories make up the remainder. Of the in-depth stories, these tended to be themed around community activism and featured contributions from readers or stories about the role of co-operatives in global development.

There are three points that can be made about this coverage. The first is that co-operation is never explained to readers. Except for the article by Smith (2020), which introduced worker co-operatives and democratic governance as part of a wider article on regeneration, most articles about co-operatives do not explain their structure, principles, or values. Partly, this is because many of the stories feature high profile businesses, where the term ‘co-operative’ is treated as a brand name and of no additional significance. Thus, reports on the retail sector treat the Co-op as just another supermarket (for example: Foy, 2020; Jones, 2020; Sparrow & Campbell, 2020). This reflects the predominant neoliberal framing of business reporting, which silences or marginalises alternative economic models (Mangan & Byrne, 2018; Preston & Silke, 2011). Several studies have suggested that economic narratives are particularly prominent during a crisis (Berry, 2016; McDonagh, 2019; Temple et al., 2016) and reports about co-operatives during the Covid-19 pandemic support this view. Apart from a few references to the Co-operative Group’s charitable donations during the pandemic (Craven, 2020), there was no reporting about co-operative resilience (Birchall & Hammond Ketilson, 2009) and how co-operatives could help to rebuild the economy. By never explaining the co-operative advantage (Mayo, 2015) to readers, the UK newsprint media were continuing to marginalise and silence co-operatives.

A second point is that co-operatives are routinely framed as organisations for ‘other’ people. Apart from reporting on celebrities such as Sean Connery, UK newspapers routinely framed co-operation as a pursuit for foreigners and the poor. The UK co-operative movement’s 13.9 million members and 250,128 employees (Co-operatives UK, 2021) are glossed over in favour of a narrative that positions co-operatives in opposition to the ‘normal’ pursuits of the general public. Hence, reviews can praise the produce from French wine co-operatives or the cocoa farmers’ co-operative in Grenada, but they do not link the high-quality produce to the co-operative business model, nor is there ever a suggestion that a similar model would work in the UK. This message of otherness is reinforced by global development stories which, even though they are often well-meaning, frame co-operatives as a tool of the poor (Hujale, 2020; Kington, 2020). As the poor are often stigmatised in UK newspaper coverage (McArthur & Reeves, 2019), this is another example of how media framing continues to marginalise and delegitimise co-operatives.

The final point relates to political positioning in relation to reporting on co-operatives. It is here that the neoliberal bias in mainstream UK newspapers is most apparent as coverage of co-operatives is often politicised, particularly in right-of-centre newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph,* and *The Times*. Opinion pieces in these outlets often position co-operatives as the preserve of left-wing zealots. Hence, in *The Sunday Times*, May’s pro-cycling stance is reduced to musing about setting up a “a Soviet style national bicycle factory” and calling it “the People’s Bicycle Co-operative of Britain” (Rufford, 2020, para 8). Similarly, in *The Telegraph* online, Lisa Armstrong’s snide reference to a ‘granny co-operative in Hastings’ (Armstrong, 2020) manages to be both ageist and anti-co-operative in one short phrase. While these turns of phrase are meant to be humorous, they point to an underlying distrust of non-capitalist perspectives, alongside the normalisation of neoliberal values (Berry, 2016). In this sense, co-operative reporting seems to carry the taint of association with the Co-operative Bank crisis of 2013 where coverage of the bank’s financial difficulties was politicised (see Mangan & Byrne, 2018). Except for *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, all the broadsheet titles referred to the bank’s 2013 crisis, usually adding a spurious reference to the travails of Paul Flowers, the former chairman, for good measure (for example Sunderland, 2020). As Mangan and Byrne (2018) argue, this produces good copy, but does little to promote public understanding or trust in co-operatives.

To conclude, UK newspaper reports on co-operatives in 2020 make for light reading. While a superficial search of 'co-operative' would suggest some interest in the topic, newspapers more typically refer to co-operative behaviour, rather than co-operatives as an organisational form. The 640 published articles showed little understanding of, or interest in, the co-operative model, showing that co-operatives continue to be marginalised in the UK national newspaper landscape.

This special issue of the *Journal of Co-operative Studies* asks why we should care about co-operative journalism and this study offers a clear example of why journalism needs co-operative-owned media *and* media about co-operatives. Firstly, co-operative-owned media add to the plurality of voices and reports in the public domain, countering the predominant neoliberal narratives in the national press. Secondly, media about co-operatives is needed to educate the general public about the value of co-operatives. This is part of Principle 5 (ICA, 2018) and is needed to counter the public's lack of familiarity with the co-operative model. Finally, the combination of co-operative-owned media and media about co-operatives would help raise the visibility of a movement which is currently hidden in plain sight.

The Author

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Colluding to Conceal the Co-operative Difference? A Discourse Analytical Study of Finnish S Group's Nationwide Price-drop Campaign

Anu Puusa and Sanna Saastamoinen

In 2015, consumer retailer S-ryhmä (S Group), the biggest co-operative group in Finland, launched a nationwide operation to cut the prices of hundreds of consumer products. The operation became national news with lengthy discussions on various forums. This article analyses those discussions via the lens of two significant Finnish newspapers. Using a discourse analytical approach, we argue that news discourses reflect dominant norms of private ownership; maximising profits as the primary purpose for businesses; and a presumptively competitive ethos for commercial life. In the S Group campaign, newspaper coverage largely reflected lack of knowledge or interest in co-operatives' unique features. Consequently, we suggest newsroom reforms and journalism education that acknowledge the characteristics and purposes of different business forms would yield more meaningful representations of economic and social reality. School of journalism and in-service instruction in economic pluralism, including co-operative education, would thus advance journalism's professional commitment to truth-seeking and robustly democratic self-governance. However, we note the active complicity of the co-operative federation in setting the news agenda, encouraging the framing of their actions as a simple price war. The extent to which co-operative communications strategies may de-emphasise their unique character and importance therefore needs to also be considered.

Introduction and Background

Co-operatives have a distinct democratic structure, guiding principles, and identity that distinguish them from other business models (International Co-operative Alliance, 1995). A key difference between co-operatives and other business forms is that co-operatives aim to meet their members' needs and to maximise the overall benefits for their members (Limnios et al., 2018; Michelsen, 1994). Unlike investor-owned firms (IOFs), co-operatives' aims are not reducible to profit-maximisation (Juga & Juntunen, 2018; Mazzarol et al., 2011; Nilsson, 2001; Novkovic, 2012; Tuominen et al., 2013). Studies confirm that co-operative activities are based on doing things together, equality, self-help, and democracy (see, for example, Patmore & Balnave, 2018) and participating in the development of local communities (Vieta & Lionais, 2015).

Mazzarol et al. (2011) found that when consumer co-operatives operate in markets, prices can be driven down setting a basic price ceiling for products; thus, consumer co-operatives discipline markets against price-gouging (Spear, 2000). According to Novkovic (2008, p. 2173), "co-operatives buy locally produced goods at higher prices to ensure food safety, local development, and other goals" and "sell at reduced prices in low-income communities and offer many other examples of internalisation of community concerns into a co-operative business". In this way, supply and pricing decisions can be made taking account of co-operative social goals.

At an ideological level, co-operatives' special characteristics are generally recognised, and co-operatives are thought to have a strong value system. In practice, definition of these special characteristics is difficult (Nilsson, 2001; Puusa & Saastamoinen, 2021; Spear, 2004; Tuominen et al., 2010). Hence, co-operatives have suffered from identity and image problems, including the fact that their purpose is not well known, or is misunderstood (Skurnik, 2002). Moreover, co-operative members have been found to be ignorant of their ownership role — even if they use co-operative services regularly (Jussila et al., 2012).

The capitalist business culture has been deeply rooted in many societies with the limited company emerging as the dominant business form. People's ideas about ownership and entrepreneurship reflect the assumption that companies' purpose is to maximise shareholder profits (Puusa et al., 2013; Smith & Rönnegard, 2014). As Mooney & Gray (2002, p. 6) argue:

> … the neoclassical economics model generally assumes competition among actors as the predominant relationship. Social relationships are assumed to be competitive with similar members of the environment and conflictual with dissimilar members although the languages of market power, rather than conflict are used.

According to Hind (1997), co-operatives defy traditional economic and management theories whereby companies' goals are revenue, growth, or maximising and optimising sales. For co-operatives, Hind argues, these goals are "either superfluous or act as constraints within which other member benefit goals may be aimed" (p. 1078). To illustrate this conflict between co-operative and dominant economic understandings, this study analyses press coverage of consumer price cuts driven by the Finnish consumer co-operative S Group. As its campaign became national news, it revealed the inadequacy of dominant news discourses to account for entrepreneurial diversity. Since journalism not only describes reality but also produces it (Karvonen, 2018), the study investigates how the purpose of co-operatives is represented, distorted, or neglected in Finnish media texts.

The Discursive Power of News Media

The role of journalism has traditionally been seen as objectively portraying social reality, and delivering factual information (McQuail, 2000). According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), respect for the facts and the public's right to truth define the journalist's role (2021, para 1). In addition, the IFJ (para 2) outlines that "in pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in offering an honest collection and publication of news, and of the right of fair comment and criticism". The media's tasks are therefore seen as accurate accounting of daily news, acting as a forum for public and critical discussion, presenting an overall picture of various social groups, presenting and clarifying social values, and providing full access to the latest information (McQuail, 2000). Yet, as human beings, journalists can never be fully objective. Instead, journalistic methods are objective (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Beyond merely reporting facts, journalistic interpretation of facts helps construct reality (Karvonen, 2018). Viewpoints both presented and omitted shape news texts. Through their linguistic choices, the media shapes different versions of reality thus defining what perspective is heard and how reality is represented (Fairclough, 1995; 2015). This interpretive role confers a significant social responsibility on journalists.

Ward (2005) proposed a social contract for journalism based on the idea that "the public grants (or guarantees) certain freedoms and privileges to the press with the expectation that journalists will act responsibly, fulfil a range of functions and provide benefits" (Ward, 2005, p. 8). Furthermore, Ward (2005) argues that journalists should provide a comprehensive account, thus avoiding conflicts of interest. Additionally, the international ethical rules of journalism state that journalists should avoid distortion of facts, libel, and unfounded accusations and make sure they distinguish factual information from commentary and criticism (IFJ, 2021). Studies on financial and business journalism, however, question journalists' commitment to the public good (Davis, 2005; Starkman, 2009; Tambini, 2009). If business journalists tend to reflect investors' interest in stock prices rather than the greater public interest, then they may influence markets through selective content or by presenting the news at a specific time (Tambini, 2013).

Context of the Study

Most Finnish agricultural producers are members of co-operatives that supply and process agricultural raw materials. The largest companies in the Finnish food industry are thus mainly owned by producer co-operatives. For example, Valio's share of raw milk supply in Finland is about 80% (Aravuori et al., 2019), and the joint share of meat supply by Atria and HKScan is 65% (Hannuksela, 2020). Therefore, compared to IOFs, food industry companies with a co-operative background have a majority market share.

All retail stores and food industry companies do business with each other, regardless of their ownership structure. There are three main businesses that dominate the retail sector in Finland: S group, K Group, and Lidl. S Group is a customer-owned network of companies in the retail and service sectors, with more than 1,800 outlets in Finland and the largest co-operative group in Finland. K Group, which has 1,007 stores in Finland, is a listed company with shares listed on Nasdaq Helsinki. Lidl, a German international discount retailer chain belonging to the Schwarz Group and the fifth biggest retailer in the world, has about 180 stores in Finland.

S Group's market share grew steadily between 2010 and 2014. At the same time Lidl grew strongly while K Group's market share fell slightly by 0.9 percentage points (Päivittäistavarakauppa ry, 2021). In 2015, S Group's share of Finnish retail trade was 45.96%, an increase of 0.2 percentage points from the previous year, while K Group's share was 32.7%, a decrease of 0.4 percentage points, and Lidl's 9.04%, a decrease of 0.2 percentage points.

The price-drop campaign

2015 was a time of intense price competition in the Finnish retail sector. S Group began cutting prices of daily consumer goods. This campaign was referred to as a price-drop or "halpuutus" in Finnish, which also coined a new term in the Finnish language. Half a year earlier, prices in the consumer retail business had also been cut by K Group.

On 18 January 2015, S Group announced price reductions. A TV advertisement used the price of milk as an example, which according to the story was more expensive for Finns than the price of a detached house. S Group described the reductions as a strategic decision that required streamlining operations and cutting costs due to the fact "Finns have considered the price of food too expensive" (S Group, 2015b). Additionally, in a press release (S Group, 2015a), Taavi Heikkilä, president and CEO of the group stated:

> We are doing everything we can to make us the cheapest grocery store for Finns ... We have asked ... how we can best help ordinary Finns now that we are living in really difficult times ... The message is clear: the price of everyday food purchases must be brought down ... Our only purpose is to help ordinary Finns (paras 3-7).

Between 2015 and 2019, S Group reduced the prices of thousands of products more than a dozen times.

Research Methods

In total 27 articles published on cost-cutting in Kauppalehti, and 87 articles published in *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* during 2015 were analysed. *Kauppalehti* publishes general interest articles about financial and economic issues, while *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, Finland's second most read newspaper, identifies itself as a "rural defender" and advocate of the rural economy. *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* is politically non-aligned and a leading supporter of The Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK), an interest group representing farmers, forest owners, and rural entrepreneurs in Finland. With over 316,000 members in local agricultural producers' organisations and regional forest management associations, MTK's main aims are to lobby for agricultural and forest policy and promote rural entrepreneurship. MTK owns the Viestilehdet limited company which publishes the *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* newspaper.

Both *Kauppalehti* and *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* are well known, respected, and have wide circulation in Finland. In addition, we wanted to choose newspapers with different profiles. *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* is clearly profiled as a voice for the rural community and for producers.

Kauppalehti is more generic and its target group is managers, entrepreneurs and anyone who is interested in business and trade. Additionally, the choice of media was influenced by the fact that both newspapers are national whereas the majority of other major Finnish newspapers are regional.

Every newspaper published during the research period was browsed through *Kauppalehti*'s archive, as the archive cannot be searched. The articles were reviewed by looking through the headlines, subheadings, and images, resulting in identification of 27 articles. The archive of the *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* works with the use of a keyword search which allows one to search old editions at different levels while excluding search criteria. The keywords used in *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* were cheap* (see Note 1), SOK, and S Group. A total of 87 articles on the topic were found in *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, 47 of which did not address the campaign. While the lack of search facility may have resulted in fewer articles being found in *Kauppalehti*'s archives, this is also likely to be explained by the different profile of the publications.

A discourse analytic approach was used to identify the discourses used to account for the price-drop campaign by S Group, including its motivations and the campaign's consequences, and the similarities and differences between the publications were compared. The analysis proceeded according to Fairclough's three-step process (2015, pp. 58-59) beginning with a review of the text, which word choices were used in the articles, and how the texts were constructed and meaning conveyed. In the second stage of the process, the discussants' discourses were interpreted. Finally, the analysis sought to explain the key findings and reveal which stories were being told, what arguments were emphasised, which viewpoints were canvassed, and which facts or viewpoints were overlooked or under-represented. In other words, the study analysed how the press framed S Group's campaign as meaningful.

Four actors and voices were identified from the articles in *Kauppalehti*: 1) S Group, 2) reporters/the media, 3) K Group (IOF), and 4) societal actors and experts. Simiarly, the *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* articles highlighted four distinct actors: 1) S Group, 2) reporters/the media, 3) producers, and 4) the food industry. From the *Kauppalehti*'s articles, four discourses were identified: creating and maintaining competition; questioning of motives and implementation; equalising discourse; and discourse of the social actors. Four discourses were also found in articles in *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*: creating and maintaining competition; questioning of motives and implementation; price formation; and discourse regarding food and food manufacturing inspired by the price-drop. Thus, the study found two predominant main discourses, which will be the focus of the key findings section. The first was a discourse of confrontation, primarily reflecting the competitive market context. The second discourse questioned the motives and the implementation of the price-drop campaign.

Key Findings

The discourse to create and maintain competition

The sub-themes of the discourse to create and maintain competition were divided into two categories: 1) building and maintaining confrontations through situational descriptions, and 2) building and maintaining confrontations by grouping actors into winners and losers, beneficiaries and victims. In both publications, situational descriptions and word choices construct and maintain the discussion of confrontations and competition in many ways. The discussion over the entire campaign intensified expressions to create confrontations, and competition; indicated by several texts where reporters/the media used pointed terms full of meaning to describe the studied phenomenon, such as "price war", "price race", "racing", "arms race", "sufferers", "victims", "distress", and "killing". For example, "A price war means the right prices … There has been a fight" (Saario, 2015a); "The price race is getting tougher" (Kiuru, 2015); "S Group rushes into a price war" (Reku, 2015); "Low prices will cause trouble" (Nieminen, 2015); and "Will the price-drop kill the Finnish peasant?" (Pentikäinen, 2015).

In the second category, competition and confrontation were constructed and maintained by grouping actors into winners and losers, and beneficiaries and victims (payers): "Someone always has to pay for reduced prices, just like when prices go up" (Tammilehto, 2015b). In this debate, Finnish food producers were placed in the role of payer and are assumed to be unarmed in price negotiations. S Group was named the winner and beneficiary. This can be interpreted to mean that companies are expected to maximise profits and use stronger bargaining powers for selfish needs. The possibilities or benefits of co-operation in the food chain are not raised, even though this is one possible starting point in the co-operative system. Producers believed that lowering food prices is an underestimation of their work in a difficult economic situation, and they see S Group's operations as an immoral attack, as reflected in the following extracts:

> Agriculture is in danger of falling victim to a trade price war (Kivirinta, 2015).

> Domestic food manufacturers … have less bargaining power against trading companies than large suppliers when prices are distorted. If the store sells food to the consumer below production costs, the manufacturer will not be left with much afterwards (Tammilehto, 2015b).

> Cheapening distorts competition and puts small food producers in a difficult situation (Tammilehto, 2015c).

These texts also set up confrontations between different retail groups (S Group, K Group, and Lidl), and the competition between them is regarded as an automatic starting point to ensure that market shares are maintained and increased. In other words, lower prices appear as a response to the intensified competition situation when the German Lidl entered the market. In the following extracts, the discourse did not reveal the starting point of the co-operative system for meeting the needs of its members:

> Forecasting is not easy, but I expect that the triumph of Lidl will continue ... While nearly all other chains are in a slump, Lidl just keeps on going (Saario, 2015b).

> People have started to consume products that have lower prices and prefer to buy discount products and own brands. The obvious winner is Lidl, as its success is based on low prices (Tammilehto, 2015a).

Interestingly, the publications ignored the price reductions previously made by K Group, while the confrontation between S Group and Lidl was highlighted. In this debate, Lidl is referred to in a highly positive light and S Group is branded a "bad boy": "One is forgiven of his sins and the other — who is committed to price reductions — remains as the bad boy"; and K group "becomes a friend of the producers" (Tammilehto, 2015d).

In summary, the rhetoric used highlighted competition, and created confrontations. The basic principles of private ownership were visible in texts, claiming that a competitive situation was automatically the basis for business. Neither responsible business nor co-operation between actors were discussed. The business form and the co-operative system were not discussed at all in a discourse based on creating and maintaining competition.

The discourse of questioning of motives and implementation

The motives and implementation of the price decrease were identified as the second main discourse in the data. According to journalists, S Group's price-drop campaign was a reaction to Lidl's competitive challenge. The entry of Lidl into the Finnish market forced Finnish chains to lower their prices whereas previously the large Finnish chains had (artificially?) maintained (excessively?) high prices. According to journalists, lower prices attracted more consumers because of the economic collapse. Some texts even claimed that S Group had no other choice because it would otherwise have lost customers and a share of the market:

> The retail chain (S Group) was simply forced to … meet Lidl's price challenge … Lidl is the force for change in trade (Saario, 2015b).

It is noteworthy that none of the texts started with the assumption that this campaign should have anything to do with the co-operative's purpose, even after S Group justified the cuts with reference to co-operative principles (S Group, 2015a). Even though K Group started its price competition about six months earlier than S Group, albeit not as extensive as S Group's price-drop campaign, the media did not question their actions. The texts analysed suggest that S Group's price-drop campaign started as a reaction to increased price competition. They revealed journalists' suspicions of the selfish motives behind the price-drop campaign in order to increase sales, strengthen market share, and create profits:

> S Group did not cut its prices just to be friendly. It decided to reduce prices to increase its sales. The goal is therefore to gain as much profit as before, preferably even more, and increase S Group's market share (Hallman, 2015).

> The reason … for the fall in prices is the defence of market share against German Lidl, which has become a serious challenger (Maaseudun Tulevaisuus, 2015a, para 5).

According to S Group's narrative, the motives for the price-drop campaign include the economic slump and the competitive situation vis-à-vis other retail groups. The debate is marked by a defensive tone, through which S Group seeks to correct the discourse in which it has been set as an oppressor of producers:

> The share of trade in the price of food is not the same as the profit of trade … the food industry negotiates prices with producers (Ala-Siurua & Holmberg, 2015).

Another motive for the price-drop was also identified: S Group's will to fulfil its basic mission, i.e., to work in the best interests of its customer-owners, and to support them during financially challenging times:

> Basically, the advertising campaign is about implementing SOK's strategy, lowering the price of food in a situation where consumers' purchasing power has weakened (Torikka, 2015c).

> During his term as CEO, Heikkilä has emphasised the idea of co-operatives, which do not aim for maximum profit, but the profit must end in the interests of the members (Tammilehto, 2015e).

In both publications, the journalists did not recognise that the purpose of the co-operative system was to offer its members maximum benefits instead of maximising profits. While representatives of S Group said this was a long-term strategic action based on the basic purpose of the business, according to journalists, it was a short-term marketing campaign. The journalists strongly questioned S Group's messaging about how S Group could cover the costs of the price-drop campaign with lower profit margins and by improving effectiveness. They also speculated about who would have to pay the bill:

> S Group announced ... lower prices. This is of course good news, but we must keep in mind that this is not about charity… S Group probably won't be cutting their margins. The industry, producers and other stakeholder groups will face pressure (Pesonen, 2015).

> The price-drop campaign launched in the daily consumer goods trade at the beginning of the year is not a fixed-term discount scheme, but a permanent strategic choice (News Manager, 2015).

In other words, the journalists questioned and doubted the idea that consumers would benefit from lower prices.

Like the journalists, K Group also questioned S Group's motives, but this discourse had a different meaning in part. K Group stressed its own sustainability and co-operation with producers, emphasising actions through which it works with producers, while S Group's price reductions were considered irresponsible:

> (K Group) announced a new "Thanking the producers" campaign … customers can pay one extra euro for Finnish Christmas ham, which goes directly to the producer. And K Group pays a second extra euro for ham, so the producer gets two euros which is eight per cent of the price (Tammilehto 2015d).

S Group as a follower of K Group, or even a copy-cat was especially emphasised in articles in *Kauppalehti*. The price-drop campaign was deemed a skilful but intentional marketing stunt, and its motive was to follow K Group's actions and/or create profits:

> K Group continues to lower its prices … We will not start any head-to-head battle with our competitor; instead, we have already taken significant action to lower our prices. It rather seems that S Group has followed our lead (Mikko Helander, CEO of K group cited in Tammilehto, 2015a).

To summarise, it appears that in many comments made by representatives of K Group, the price-drop campaign was judged without paying any attention to the differences in the business forms. Like the journalists, K Group representatives saw the price-drop campaign as an intentional, and even questionable marketing stunt. The source texts used in the analysis contained the implicit and inbuilt assumption that the purpose of business was to maximise profits. The financial results and possible changes in market shares for both companies were also reported. It is interesting that no attention was paid to why the profits of S Group seemed to be improving, or why the profits seemed more positive than those of K Group. The differences between the two business forms were ignored. For example, the fact that the co-operative's system is based on its members and its purpose is to offer them as many advantages as possible may have resulted in price reductions which then attracted co-operative members and encouraged them to use the services more widely. As stated above, journalists were suspicious of the price-drop campaign and the actions of S Group. They questioned the nature of the campaign, its timing, motives, execution, and length. Moreover, they questioned S Group's arguments for price cutting on a co-operative basis.

Finnish producers considered S Group's price-drop and its advertising to have undervalued their work. From their point of view, the aim of S Group's price-drop campaign was to criticise the high price of Finnish food and production costs: "Marketing is perceived to denigrate Finnish food" (Torikka, 2015b). According to the producers, S Group's advertising tried to create the impression that cheap food was the goal. The marketing campaign was seen as a severe blow to the producers' values and food appreciation:

> The boundary conditions of food produced in Finland must be remembered, and it must never be turned into a cheap brand (Lehtinen & Kiviranta, 2015).

During this campaign, producers called for co-operation between the various players in the food chain and felt that S Group's price-drop and the associated marketing campaign were not conducive to co-operation and threatened producers' livelihoods. The success of Finnish food production in the market was perceived as impossible in a situation where S Group lowered its prices:

> Trade, industry, and farmers in the food chain drink from the same cup. The chain will not survive if one drinks the cup empty and the others lose their share. Instead of trust, bitterness and mutual blame arise. Co-operation, openness and better mutual understanding can ensure the preservation of high-quality food production, even in difficult times. It is worth moving from cheap to fair (Maaseudun Tulevaisuus, 2015b, paras 17-18).

> It is very important to make sure that the Finnish consumer wants domestic food. She/he wants domestic food to be tasty, healthy, and reasonably priced, and to have a good image. Instead of being degraded, appreciation is required now (Pietikäinen, 2015).

Co-operatives and S Group's principles and values were called into question by producers. Reductions in food prices were perceived to be contrary to the principles, as producers felt that they had to pay for the discounts: "They (price-drops) show that the co-operative principles have been forgotten" (Torikka, 2015a). As a result, "many producers have cut their S Group's bonus card [a symbol of the ownership of a co-operative] in half" (Torikka, 2015a).

S Group defended itself against K Group and the producers' questioning of the permanence, consistency, and co-operative impact of the price-drop campaign. The texts analysed emphasise that this was not a single short-term scheme, but a strategic choice related to the form of business and implemented by means of long-term work and improved efficiency, together with a sense of community and, therefore, co-operation between different members of the Group:

> Reducing costs is made possible by cutting costs in marketing, and in administrative and IT costs. For example, energy costs were cut by almost 10% last year (Pilkama, 2015, para 4).

> We are streamlining our own operations by EUR 60 million annually, says the CEO (Viitala, 2015).

Also indicated by the descriptions is the under-reported fact that S-Group is owned by its members. The assessment of the impact of the price-drop campaign and profits thus raises the idea of duality in the co-operative system. S Group is the market leader, which operates profitably while fulfilling its basic mission to serve its co-operative members: "… seeking the highest possible profit is not part of the co-operative system" (Tammilehto, 2015e).

A co-operative differs from an enterprise owned by its shareholders in that co-operative members invest by using services instead of making capital investments. The increased use of services increases the sales volume of the co-operative, and co-operative members are rewarded for their use of services in accordance with the principles of the co-operative. This partly explains why reduced prices can produce business benefits in the co-operative system.

To sum up, the reasons given by S Group for the price reduction (supporting customers in difficult economic times) were called into question. Instead, the voices of the journalists in the discussions argued that S Group's motives were selfish and that the price reductions were seen as an attempt to maintain/increase their share of the market. The journalists also questioned the long-term nature of the price cuts. The voices of K group and the producers also came to the fore in the debate. K Group criticised S Group for copying its own operations and considered price reductions to be a marketing ploy. The discourse put forward by the producers directly accused S group of undervaluing the producers. They strongly questioned that price reductions would be recovered by S Group's own operations and blamed them for covering for discounts by paying less to producers.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that in the media and articles reviewed, there was little evidence of knowledge or appreciation of a co-operative as a specific business form or acknowledging differences between organisational forms or purposes in general. This is evident in the description of the price-drop campaign which was seen merely as a marketing campaign to maintain and/or increase S Group's market share. Price reductions were believed to be a temporary step paid for by lowering producer prices.

Based on our analysis, it appears as if the articles did not seem to believe the claims made by the price-drop campaign's launcher about the underlying motives and purpose of the co-operative, questioning or even ignoring such claims. This became clear, for example, in conversations on whether the campaign was based on selfish motives, or a long-term strategic trend related to the purpose and task of the co-operative's activities. This finding is not surprising for *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* as it can be assumed that its perspective favours producers. Yet, it is noteworthy that the discourse surrounding S Group's price-drop created a competitive situation and the activities of S Group were also questioned in *Kauppalehti*. It should be noted, however, that by emphasising prices in its information and advertising, S Group repeatedly formulated its own role throughout the campaign, emphasised by the creation of a new word for the phenomenon. Although S Group claimed that co-operative principles were behind the fall in prices, it should have considered the need to provide a more detailed justification for such action.

Awareness of co-operatives and the co-operative idea is generally poor in Finland (Puusa, et al., 2016; Puusa et al., 2013). S Group did not emphasise strongly enough their co-operative mission or their attempt to serve their membership. Rather, S Group's language can be seen as a strategy adapted to the hegemony of capitalist business norms rather than highlighting the principles and dual nature of co-operatives (Novkovic et al., 2022). While it is surprising that S Group's communication is strongly identified with capitalist business language and focused on transactional relationships with consumers, co-operatives face pressure to use capitalist business logic, even when it has been found to jeopardise the realisation of their original purpose and cause a deterioration of identity. Thus, such a communication strategy can be self-defeating because it presents co-operatives as indistinguishable from other forms of enterprise.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that as organisations develop and establish their position in a given industry, they begin to lose their distinctive identity and thus resemble other operators (see also Cornforth et al., 1988; Mazzarol et al., 2011; Nilsson, 2001; Puusa et al., 2016; Puusa et al., 2013). According to DiMaggio and Powell this institutional isomorphism is due to several reasons. For example, professional managers go through an education dominated by business logic and principles adopted from the IOF world and approached via neoclassical economics. Isomorphic pressures also originate from public authorities and the perceived legitimacy of various business models. The findings show the significant influence of principles of private ownership and profit maximisation as the main purpose of businesses (Fontrodona & Sison, 2006; Nilsson, 2001; Novkovic, 2012; Puusa & Saastamoinen, 2021). Thus, differences between various business forms were not recognised, and S Group could not communicate these clearly. Instead, these discourses failed to distinguish between distinct forms of business in the retail commerce sector. Similarly, no distinctions were made between businesses with different tasks or their historical and current significance for the economy, culture, society, or politics. The ignorance in the articles analysed was surprising. The effect of co-operatives at the national level was clearly not known. For example, the texts did not recognise the co-operative system as the force for national welfare that it is, based on history, financial statistics, and studies. Consequently, we suggest newsroom reforms and journalism education that acknowledge the characteristics and purposes of different business forms would yield more meaningful representations of economic and social reality.

To sum up, in the light of the results of this present study, it can be said that journalistic accounts interpreted as suspicious or even biased can largely be explained by the dominant status of private ownership in our society. Co-operatives constitute a somewhat unknown system and they do not sufficiently highlight the ultimate purpose of their form of enterprise. In journalism, however, being unfamiliar with a phenomenon should not prevent editors and reporters from fact checking. Ignorance is no excuse to leave the matter obscure when it is presented (Ward 2005; IFJ 2021). As highlighted above, school of journalism and in-service instruction in economic pluralism, including co-operative education, could also advance journalism's professional commitment to truth-seeking and democratic self-governance. Finally, the question may also be asked whether co-operatives have provided adequate information in accordance with Principle 5: to "inform the general public — particularly young people and opinion leaders — about the nature and benefits of co-operation" (ICA, 2018, para 11).

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Note

1 cheap* denotes a 'wildcard' search and is generally used to find multiple endings e.g. cheap, cheapen, cheapening, cheaper, cheapened.

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Comparing Media-based Co-operatives: What is the Appeal of Co-operative Organisations for Independent Journalists?

Anca Voinea

This paper compares and contrasts three media-based co-operatives whilst exploring the model's potential to empower journalists and readers. The research is based on an in-depth survey of three journalists from different co-operative publications. The three case studies featured are the *New Internationalist* in the UK, *Alternativas Económicas* in Spain, and *Alternatives Économiques* in France. Highlighting the context in which each of these co-operatives has emerged, the study examines the various advantages and disadvantages of the co-operative model in journalism. The research found that these media co-operatives share many common elements, which derive from their business model, including a tendency towards collaboration and reluctance to rely on advertising in order to maintain editorial independence. All three interviewees said the co-operative model provided their publications with a higher degree of editorial independence, when compared to private investor-owned business models. The findings suggest, however, that the model is not immune to the challenges affecting the media industry, such as the decline in print media or the Covid-19 pandemic. The interviewees identified other challenges, such as continuing to pay staff decent wages, securing funding, and reaching the required number of subscribers to be financially sustainable.

Introduction

The potential of the co-operative model to be part of the solution to the media crisis has been the focus of several research papers. Among these was the pamphlet *Good News: A Co-operative Solution to the Media Crisis*, published by Co-operatives UK in 2012. The paper explored the challenges faced by local news outlets, such as commercial decline, technological challenges, and ethical misbehaviour, arguing that these are linked to the private investor-owned business model employed by these media outlets. In response to what it identified as "a crisis of finance and legitimacy" (Boyle, 2012, p. 6), the pamphlet recommended "a media owned and produced differently" (p. 7), adding that co-operative owned media organisations can help build trust, connect better with readers, and promote accountability.

In 2013 Co-operatives UK and Carnegie UK Trust further explored the potential for new business models for local news outlets. As part of the project, the two organisations hosted eight workshops in which they explored the opportunities for co-operative owned local media in the UK, bringing together practitioners involved in co-operative media organisations. The Trust also provided £10,000 of support to five local news organisations around the UK to deliver "innovative local news projects" (Boyle 2013, p. 5). One of the key findings of the workshops was that the co-operative model appealed to journalists because it "leverages support for local news into new sources of revenue and capital based on ownership as well as consumption" (p. 6). However, the workshops also revealed that despite interest in the model among journalists, there was a need for support and advice in terms of business and membership development. Another barrier identified was the difficulty of acquiring existing titles from current owners.

Siapera and Papadopoulou (2016) also explored the co-operative model's viability to combine entrepreneurial dynamism and innovation with the public mission and social role of journalism. Focusing on co-operative journalistic enterprises in Greece, they examined whether the co-operative business model could enable journalists to be entrepreneurs without compromising their journalistic ethos and identity. They explained how co-operatives are owned by their members, who, in the case of journalism co-operatives, can be either journalists or readers, a combination of the two, and even include other stakeholders, such as technical support staff, distributors, or advertisers.

The International Co-operative Alliance's (2018) *Statement on the Co-operative Identity* adopted in 1995 defines a co-operative as "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise" (para 1). The *Statement* also emphasises that co-operatives operate based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity and in accordance with the seven co-operative principles. Yet, Siapera and Papadopoulou (2016) note that while these values and principles apply to journalism co-operatives as well, there is a lack of empirical evidence as to how these work in practice. By examining four co-operative journalistic ventures in Greece and analysing secondary data and materials from the wider co-operative sector, they were able to answer some questions related to how and why co-operatives emerged in the journalism sector. They found that a media crisis that led to lay-offs, deteriorating working conditions, and wage cuts acted as an impetus for journalists looking for an alternative ownership model. Another reason was a disconnection between mainstream media and Greek society. Their research also revealed some characteristics of co-operative media organisations, such as a tendency to prioritise public interest and collaborate rather than compete with other media outlets.

A similarity across the studies is a sense of ownership and pride among the journalists involved in these publications. The ownership model also leads to a new set of social relationships both among journalists and journalists and readers, particularly in the case of co-operatives that operate flat hierarchies (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016). Siapera and Papadopoulou's research concludes that co-operative journalism provides an attractive alternative for "a journalism that wishes to re-establish its social role and its position in the Commons" (2016, p. 2).

While the advantages of the co-operative business model are well documented and research by Birchall and Ketilson (2009) suggests that co-operatives are more resilient during crisis, there is limited research about how journalists have used the model. Taking into account these studies, this paper aims to show how the co-operative model works in practice whilst exploring the viability of the model as a solution to the media crisis. For this purpose, the paper provides a close examination of three case studies.

Methods

This article is based on an in-depth survey with three journalists, one from each of three media co-operatives in France, the UK, and Spain. Each participant received a standard questionnaire (produced in French, English, and Spanish) with 18 questions, which touched on their co-operative's history, business model, governance, funding, and relationship with the wider co-operative sector. They were also asked to describe the main benefits and disadvantages brought by the co-operative model and state their opinion on the model's replicability.

The three respondents are worker-members of the *Alternatives Économiques* in France, the *New Internationalist* in the UK, and *Alternativas Económicas* in Spain. The *New Internationalist* was chosen due to its dual experience, having recently converted from a worker co-operative model to a multi-stakeholder model. All three magazines are co-operatives in which journalists, readers, and other stakeholders hold shares. They all operate based on a subscription-based business model.

In addition to the interviews, the study also compiled data from these organisations' websites and annual reports to obtain further information on their governance and funding. The next section summarises the main findings of the interviews.

Results

All three journalism co-operatives included in this research are co-owned by their employee members. *Alternatives Économiques* is a French magazine specialising in economic issues.

It was founded in 1980 by Denis Clerc, who at the time was involved in the Unified Socialist Party (Charon, 2020). Along with other activists, he published the first edition of the magazine and distributed it to 4,000 of his contacts. Around 900 of those who received the first issue chose to subscribe to the Paris-based publication, which in time grew and became more professionalised.

Initially set up as an association, *Alternatives Économiques* became a co-operative and participative society (Scop) in 1984. Under this legal structure employee-members must always be in the majority and hold at least 51% of the capital and 65% of the voting rights. Upon joining as a member, each employee contributes a share of their salary on a monthly basis to acquire their shares in the enterprise. It has a total of 40 employee-members (Alternatives Économiques, n.d./b). The magazine also has external stakeholders through its Association of Readers and the Civil Society of Readers, who hold minority shares in the co-operative. The Association of Readers is made up of individual subscribers who want to be more involved in the publication. They can suggest topics for the magazine issues and even pitch articles for its blog section. The Civil Society of Readers brings together external shareholders/investors.

Oxford-based publisher *New Internationalist* was set up in 1973 by Peter and Lesley Adamson, with the aim of offering a radical analysis of development and rich-poor world relationships. Like the case of *Alternatives Économiques*, having a group of activists to help to get the project off the ground was of crucial importance for the initial success of the publication. During their final undergraduate year, the two founders had started a movement called *Third World First* with the aim of raising money for charities. After more than 25,000 students signed up for the campaign, the *New Internationalist* was launched as a short-term magazine to keep them involved (Adamson, 2013).

Two years later, Oxfam and Christian Aid backed a proposal to relaunch the magazine as a monthly publication aimed at a wider audience. The *New Internationalist* became a worker co-operative in 1980 when the Adamsons transferred ownership to the New International Trust. In 2017, it became a multi-stakeholder co-operative after the employee owners decided to convert the Trust that owned the magazine from a company to a co-operative society. The conversion was backed by a share offer, which saw 3,600 people from 42 countries invest and became co-owners of *New Internationalist* (Voinea, 2021). Today the New Internationalist has over 4,500 co-owners and nine worker owners. It publishes a bi-monthly magazine, books, and runs an online ethical shop. New Internationalist Co-operative Society (NIC), which is co-owned by readers runs a subsidiary, New Internationalist Publications (NIP), which is run as a worker co-operative (New Internationalist Co-operative Ltd., 2020).

Alternativas Económicas (2021; n.d.) is a Spanish language monthly news magazine, which focuses on economic and social issues. It was formed in 2013 in Barcelona when its former director, Andreu Missé, had the idea of adapting *Alternatives Économiques*, a magazine he had been reading for a long time, to the Spanish market. The idea attracted three other journalists and together they launched the publication. *Alternativas Económicas* was backed by its French counterpart, who not only owns shares in it, but also has a partnership with it, which allows the former to re-use some of its content. Later, other co-operatives from Spain acquired shares in *Alternativas Económicas*, namely Cevagraf, which is the printing co-operative that prints the magazine, Compacto, an advertising and marketing co-operative, and the Federación Andaluza de Empresas Cooperativas de Trabajo (FAECTA) — the Andalusian worker co-operative federation.

Why the co-operative model?

While the *New Internationalist* and *Alternatives Économiques* did not initially start as co-operatives, the journalists who owned the two publications decided to adopt the model within a few years of existence.

In her answers co-editor Amy Hall, who joined the New Internationalist's team in 2019, described some of the benefits of functioning as a worker co-operative:

> The benefits are that we are putting our principles into action, we have more autonomy (and responsibility) as workers, decision making is more democratic and so more people agree with — or are on board with working with — decisions that are made, it makes for richer editorial content as more people have fed into it (Hall, A., July 2021).

With regards to the main advantages of being a multistakeholder co-operative she added:

> As a longstanding workers' co-op, co-operative principles are in our DNA. It felt only natural to take these principles one-step further and open up to our readers. We wanted to preserve our co-operative way of working and principles but bring what we do closer to our readers. Our co-owners feel a real sense of ownership over *New Internationalist*, and they are more involved in our decision-making. We have much more direct contact than we did before which means it is easier to share feedback and ideas (Hall, A., July 2021).

This view was reiterated by Laurent Jeanneau, the managing editor of *Alternatives Économiques*, who, in his answers to the questionnaire, emphasised the editorial independence gained through the co-operative model. He also pointed out that being a co-operative seemed like the most suitable business model due to the fact that *Alternatives Économiques* tries to raise awareness about alternative economic models, including co-operatives:

> It is because the newspaper is owned by its employees that we can be sure that we are not under any pressure from an advertiser or a majority shareholder. But that's not all. It is also about being consistent with the values we advocate in our columns. We write at length that there are economic and social alternatives, that the economy is not just about the most unbridled liberalism and that greed is not the only possible horizon. Well, we are trying to demonstrate it in the way we operate as a business. Proof by example, if you will (Jeanneau. L., June 2021).

The journalists who founded *Alternativas Económicas* were guided by a similar belief that the co-operative model would grant them editorial independence. Juan Pedro Velázquez-Gaztelu, journalist at *Alternativas Económicas*, explained their motivation in his questionnaire answer:

> After studying other business models (public limited company, limited company …), my colleagues decided that the co-operative one was the ideal model. In a co-operative, journalists can work with absolute freedom, since we are solely responsible for the content, and make the economic decisions that we consider most convenient for the company. For readers it is a guarantee that we work independently of political and economic powers (Velázquez-Gaztelu, J. P., May 2021).

The answers revealed that editorial decisions are taken in a similar manner at all three magazines. However, unlike the other two co-operatives, the *New Internationalist* does not have a hierarchy and since 1987 it has operated an equal pay policy; therefore, day–to-day editorial decisions are made jointly by its editorial team, led by four co-editors. The wider worker membership can also have an input through the Common Council and by voting on which magazine topics to cover. Readers can also express their opinions by sending letters and sending emails. Each 'Big Story' topic is led by a co-editor who makes two proposals to the editorial team, and they and others can feed their ideas into the shaping of the magazine. The marketing manager is also involved in the editorial process when it comes to issues such as the front cover photograph.

At *Alternatives Économiques* editorial decisions are taken in a traditional manner, during an editorial meeting. However, Mr Jeanneau pointed out that, despite the existing editorial hierarchy, this is being done "in a more collegial way than in other media":

> I sometimes have to make arbitrations, but it is always after deliberation. A co-operative is democracy applied to business. We discuss, we debate a lot, we try to find a compromise. When it comes to making a decision, we vote, especially to elect our board of directors. Obviously, we do not vote to decide whether we are going to do this or that article. But the democratic culture of our co-operative permeates all of our operations. We will try to come to an agreement rather than impose a decision from top-down (Jeanneau. L., June 2021).

Meanwhile, at *Alternativas Económicas*, all journalists meet once a month to undertake editorial decisions. The meeting usually takes place on the first week of the month and enables the journalists to debate content ideas, select a theme for the issue and decide on the various sections within the magazine. Each journalist is assigned articles during the meeting. The magazine in run by an editorial team under the leadership of a director, whose role is that of a managing editor (Alternativas Económicas, 2021).

Governance

There are several similarities between the three journalism co-operatives in terms of governance. *Alternatives Économiques* is headed by a president and a general manager appointed by the board of directors, which is elected by all employees of the worker co-operative on the principle of one member, one vote. The business is structured into departments with department heads and a management committee:

> There is a hierarchy, not everything is horizontal. But this hierarchy can be challenged by employees, and they can debunk it if they want to (Jeanneau. L., June 2021).

In the case of *Alternativas Ėconómicas*, which is a co-operative of associated labour, the main governing body is a Governing Council made up of all the worker-members and a representative of the collaborator-members. Collaborator-members are investor members who make up 30% of the votes in the general assembly, while the worker members have 70% of the votes. Each collaborating member agrees to contribute €4,000 to the project and some contribute articles to *Alternativas Ėconómicas* on a freelance basis. At the time of writing, the co-operative has 75 members, the majority of whom are collaborator-members, with only eight worker-members who each contributed €15,000 to the co-operative.

The New Internationalist Co-operative Society is a multi-stakeholder co-operative society with two different classes of members. User members are the employees of New Internationalist Publications and make up the board of the co-operative concerned with the day-to-day overseeing and running of our business. 'Non-user members' have voting rights over the Editorial Charter and access to the Common Council. Two non-user members were invited to join the board of the co-operative in 2019 with plans to appoint a full board made up of member-owners and worker owners in 2021.

The Common Council, which has 14 members is described as "a critical friend" aiming to ensure the *New Internationalist* upholds its values and promotes collaboration and ideas exchanges between *New Internationalist* staff and readers (New Internationalist Co-operative Ltd., 2020, pp. 25-26):

> As co-owners, they [non-user members] are the joint custodians of our mission. *New Internationalist* cannot deviate from its founding principles without the agreement of its investors. The most important document defining what we do is our Editorial Charter. This defines why and how we do our journalism. The Charter is something we own together. For any change to the mission or Charter, we need 75 per cent of the worker members and 75 per cent of our investors, to agree to it (Hall, A., July 2021).

Business Model

The three media co-operatives operate based on a similar business model, whereby subscriptions are the main source of income.

Alternatives Économiques (n.d./a) says it continues to rely on subscriptions; its advertising income has declined and accounts for a low share of the total turnover. With 90,000 copies sold each month by subscription and at newsagents and 850,000 readers per month, the magazine is financially sustainable. In 2021, it reported an operating income of €360,000 (Dousson, 2021). In addition to its monthly magazine, Scop Alternatives Economiques also publishes special issues, a political economy magazine, a foreign policy magazine, and various dossiers (Alternatives Économiques, n.d./a).

Similarly, the sustainability of *Alternativas Económicas* depends on the number of subscribers it has. The magazine estimates that growing subscription levels to 4-5,000 subscribers would enable it to become financially sustainable. The co-operative also took the decision not to rely on advertising early on:

> From the beginning we wanted the readers, not the advertisers, to support the magazine financially, for two fundamental reasons: it is a guarantee of our journalistic independence, and it provides us with a much stronger base to face the problems that arise (Velázquez-Gaztelu, J. P., May 2021).

The *New Internationalist* has set the target of increasing its print subscribers from 16,000 to 19,000, which, according to its estimations, would make the business sustainable in the long-term. Furthermore, the co-operative aims to bring the management of its subscriptions in house and plans to build audiences outside of the UK (Voinea, 2021, June 1). Its online ethical shop handled over 30,500 orders in 2020, with sales of over £1.1 million, which amounted to 53% of its income. Magazine and digital journalism sales accounted for 23% of the co-operative's income while book publishing and contracts represented 24% of the income. The *New Internationalist* provides a range of services to other organisations, including design, editorial and project management, and contract publishing. In the year 2019-2020, the *New Internationalist*'s total expenditure of £2,824,612 exceeded its income of £2,505,561 (New Internationalist Co-operative Ltd., 2020).

Covid-19 impact

Covid-19 affected the way in which all three co-operatives operate. For *Alternativas Económicas* the pandemic meant that most employees had to work from home and meet online via Zoom or Skype. The co-operative's finances were not affected by the pandemic with subscription levels and advertising income remaining stable. The co-operative also welcomed five new member-collaborators during this period. Similarly, *Alternatives Économiques* was able to adapt to the new working environment and while subscriptions for the print issue were affected by the pandemic, the income from digital subscriptions increased.

The *New Internationalist* faced similar challenges in terms of print subscriptions, particularly since one third of new magazine subscriptions would normally come through face-to-face interactions at various events all of which faced cancellation due to Covid-19. To cope with the impact of the pandemic, the *New Internationalist* launched a community share offer in May to fund its post Covid-19 recovery. The co-operative was able to raise £354,750 via the share offer, which will back its three-year investment strategy. As part of the strategy, the publisher will work to strengthen its campaign journalism, change the way in which the magazine is being sold and distributed, incentivise subscriptions, and invest in its online ethical shop (Voinea, 2021, May 4).

Challenges and Opportunities

Whilst all three interviewees said they enjoyed a higher degree of editorial independence due to their co-operative business model, they also identified several challenges posed by it. For example, when *Alternatives Économiques* went through a difficult phase in 2019, the co-operative structure was both an advantage and a disadvantage:

> … we managed to overcome the crisis without making any drastic redundancies, after having discussed it a lot between us and having put everything on the table, the figures, everything. This is another important feature of co-operatives: economic information is transparent. Anyone internally can know all the numbers. It helps to understand why we make such and such a decision rather than another (Jeanneau, L., June 2021).

Yet, whilst *Alternatives Économiques* was able to avoid making drastic redundancies, Jeanneau warns that the model can place co-operatives at a disadvantage as struggling publications requiring investment:

> The co-operative model can be a disadvantage in the event of financial difficulties because no investor will want to put money into this project if he cannot control it afterwards, or even make a profit when he resells his shares. In a Scop, that's impossible. You can lose money, but not win it: at best you will resell your shares at the price at which you bought them. So, you have to do it on your own. This requires being even more rigorous in the management of the company (Jeanneau, L., June 2021).

For the *New Internationalist* the decline in print media was a big challenge in recent years, particularly post Covid-19 when the co-operative lost its biggest source of new subscribers — meeting people at face-to-face at events:

> Continuing to pay our workers and contributors a decent wage (important to our principles), while also sticking to our politics and making enough money to keep the business running has been a challenge at times but things are looking better at the moment (Hall, A., July 2021).

Alternativas Económicas faces similar pressures and, as a magazine that has been in existence for only a few years, it is still facing difficulties attracting enough subscribers to become sustainable. To date, the magazine has 2,200 subscribers and sells around 500 magazines at different points of sale:

> Our main challenge is to get a sufficient number of subscribers to the magazine that allows us to have decent salaries and guarantee the financial future of the project (Velázquez-Gaztelu, J. P., May 2021).

A further challenge for *Alternativas Económicas* has been raising its profile due to the lack of resources required to carry out a strong advertising campaign and consolidate the publication's digital edition.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research revealed that adopting the co-operative model does not in itself bring long-term sustainability to media organisations but that it leads to more editorial independence and collaboration within the workplace. Furthermore, the commitment of all three co-operatives included in the research to advertise only organisations whose values and principles align to their own means that they are reliant on subscriptions. The existence of an engaged group when setting up the co-operatives and a network of like-minded people to distribute the print issues to when they first started are key to the initial success of the publications.

Asked whether the co-operative model could be a solution to the media crisis, the three interviewees had different opinions:

> Of course. The co-operative model allows you to be more flexible when making decisions. Co-operatives are more resilient to crises because they are joint efforts and put workers above any other interest. Our incentives are not only economic; we also seek the common good and serve society (Velázquez-Gaztelu, J. P., May 2021).

> Possibly. If there was a core of people willing to take on running the business. It could be a great way to reduce corporate interests in the media, but many organisations would need to restructure to make it work (Hall, A., July 2021).

> The co-operative model can be a handicap in the event of financial difficulties (Jeanneau, L., June 2021).

The interviewees also made several recommendations to groups considering setting up their own journalism co-operatives:

> Find a viable economic model (Jeanneau, L., June 2021).

> Make sure you have a solid core of people who can put the time in to get it off the ground, think hard about how you are going to make it work financially / how much time you can put in if you are not able to earn a decent wage, keep reminding yourself of why you set up and your mission (Hall, A., July 2021).

> My advice would be to make the effort because it is worth it. In a world in which large economic groups dominate information, it is essential that journalists work with absolute freedom. It is also much more satisfying to know that the fruits of your work benefit yourself, your colleagues, and society in general (Velázquez-Gaztelu, J. P., May 2021).

In terms of what could be done to further advance the model, Velázquez-Gaztelu thinks *Alternativas Económicas* can serve as an example to show that it is possible to publish a magazine independently, without the backing of big economic groups:

> It would be very important to disseminate among journalism students that there are different business models from the large communication groups and that they can work freely, write interesting topics, and develop a good professional career (Velázquez-Gaztelu, J. P., May 2021).

The research also suggests that the support *Alternativas Éconómicas* received from *Alternatives Économiques* could also be replicated by other co-operative magazines to help them become established. Furthermore, all respondents confirmed that their co-operatives had a good relationship with the wider co-operative movement, although the degree to which they engaged with other co-operatives varied.

The findings suggest that the co-operative model can be an attractive option for journalists wishing to enjoy greater editorial independence. Furthermore, journalists working for co-operative publications tend to collaborate more amongst themselves and take decisions in a more transparent manner and, as in the case of the *New Internationalist*, can operate a flat hierarchy and equal pay policy. Nevertheless, as revealed by the experience of *Alternatives Économiques*, the co-operative model does pose a challenge when it comes to raising funding. Thus, while the model remains a viable option for journalists, it is not, on its own, a panacea to the media crisis and journalists running the publication still need to ensure they have a sustainable business model.

Research Limitations

Several research limitations should be noted. Firstly, only three employees were interviewed. Future research could include a bigger sample size and interview several employees from each co-operative. Secondly, previous research on the topic was limited. Thirdly, the interviewees were sent a set questionnaire, which they answered in writing. Due to limited access to these respondents, their limited availability, and the fact that the interviews were conducted in different languages, it was not possible to ask them many additional follow-up questions upon receiving their answers.

The Author

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Co-operative Journalism: A Greek Case

Michael Fefes

While there is a history of co-operative enterprise in Greece, this has been largely limited to "traditional" (agricultural) kinds of co-operatives. Until recently there was no co-operative activity in the field of media and more generally the press business. The economic crisis of 2010 created opportunities to develop new modes of entrepreneurial activity in the co-operative sector. In this context, and following the collapse of *Eleftherotypia*, a national daily newspaper, *Efimerida ton Syntakton* — the *Journalists' Newspaper* — a leftist progressive paper, was established in Greece in 2012, saving the jobs of the co-operative's members. Indirectly owned by its employees, the *Journalists' Newspaper* is an important example of co-operative journalism in Greece. It has proved to be a successful experiment surviving within a turbulent environment. It claims to support quality journalism, is presently financially viable, and intends to continue as a co-operative. This article draws on secondary data which is further informed by structured and semi-structured interviews with a key member of the co-operative to describe their experience of the creation and development of the newspaper.

Introduction

As the International Co-operative Alliance's (ICA) facts and figures show, with at least 12% of humanity part of any of the 3 million co-operatives on earth, the co-operative movement is far from being a marginal phenomenon (ICA, 2018b; ICA, 2020). While co-operative enterprise models exist in Greece, they have been largely limited to the "traditional" kinds of co-operatives. As such, the most widespread model is agricultural co-operatives, although there are consumer co-operatives, supply co-operatives, housing co-operatives, and other co-operative forms. To date, there has been no, or limited, co-operative activity in the field of media and more generally the press business in Greece.

A problematic period of Greek post-Keynesian social and economic policy, exacerbated by the 2007 economic crisis, led to a severe economic and social downturn in 2010. Economic and social turmoil, largely the result of sharp and deep cuts in income, characterised Greek society for at least 5 years. This period saw the closure of many businesses and increases in unemployment accompanied by all the problems caused by such phenomena, including poverty, homelessness, and reduction in workers' protection. On the other hand, this situation set the structural conditions for the emergence in public discourse of the notion of co-operation as a way to alleviate the negative consequences of unfettered market forces (Spyridakis & Dima, 2017). Hence, the economic crisis highlighted the need to support social innovation and the development of new ideas (products, services, and models); to build or re-invent forms of economic and social life based on strengthening social relations; and to emphasise social rather than only financial values (Anthopoulou et al., 2017; Petrou & Koutsou, 2014).

In this context and as an experiment in a time of unprecedented conditions in Greece, the *Efimerida ton Syntakton* or the *Journalists' Newspaper* (JN) was established. The first issue of the paper was released on Monday 5 November 2012, two years from the outbreak of the economic crisis. JN is a special and unique example of co-operative journalism in Greece (Smith, 2016). It is the first large-scale co-operative news venture in Greece (Papadopoulou, 2020), and, to the best of the author's knowledge, the only one yet realised in the Greek media sector.

The aim of the present paper is to describe and illustrate the JN case. To do so, the paper draws on bibliographical research (Allen, 2017) supplemented by two interviews, one unstructured and one semi-structured, with Mr. Nicholas Voulelis, the elected director of the JN. As a key informant, Voulelis (also referred to as the interlocutor) is a respected journalist and former director of the Athens News Agency (Restakis, 2016). As a pioneer of the project since

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its inception, he is strategically placed to provide insight into the creation and development of JN. While it is acknowledged that interviews with other members of the co-operative would have provided a broader perspective on the development of JN, the interlocutor's narrative and especially his perceptions and understanding of the experience is of interest here and provides a platform for further research. The paper starts with a brief description of co-operatives and Greek co-operative legislation. This is followed by an overview of co-operative journalism in Greece, describing and explaining the motives behind the creation of JN, its entrepreneurial and management regime, its organisational culture, and several details as to the function of the newspaper. The paper concludes with a look to the future.

Co-operatives and Greek Co-operative Legislation

Co-operatives are *sui generis* private enterprises, combining both an economic and a social facet in their activities. The private economic initiative is an element residing in the nature and process of their business. On the other hand, the social element gives them their distinctive character (Fefes, 2013). According to the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) the co-operative principles — voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; co-operation among co-operatives; and concern for community — should always be the guidelines putting values into practice (ICA, 2018a). The provision of a simple and stable legal framework is of equal importance.

The State may encourage co-operatives to start and then foster their development by securing a friendly environment for their growth and stability. Unfortunately, co-operative legislation in Greece is rather fragmented (Douvitsa, 2020; Fefes, 2020) with separate laws for each type of co-operative (for example energy co-operatives, housing co-operatives, social co-operatives, and worker co-operatives), thus leading to different treatment among co-operatives. Some legal norms are rather old and outdated, while others are brief and incomplete. Additionally, Greek co-operative legislation describes the least prerequisites that co-operatives must follow (compulsory law — subject to international norms). Finally, rules of civil and commercial legislation are applied to co-operatives as a residual source (for more detailed discussion of Greek laws regarding co-operatives, see Fefes, 2007; Iliopoulos,2000; Nasioulas et al., 2017). Such a complex situation is a product of recent Greek history (since 1974) and an outcome of public policy aimed at controlling the agricultural vote. Such policy caused people to distrust not only traditional co-operatives but also the governments that failed to safeguard the balance between society and market power (Mouzelis & Pagoulatos, 2004).

It is not strange, therefore, that the co-operative model never became very popular, and co-operatives are marginal actors in the economic life of Greece. Yet, especially after the economic recession, people created or re-invented organised forms of social co-operation. By building on their social networks, they attempted to contribute to their own wellbeing and consequently to local development. The individuals forming these co-operatives share similar characteristics. Often, they are people dissatisfied with the current social, economic, and political system and try to avoid any relation to old-fashioned co-operatives. Being open to new ideas, new business models and innovations through their education and experience, they believe in collaboration as a way to break with the past and to establish a new kind of social contract of trust and solidarity (Light, 2008). This can be viewed as an expression of independence and detachment from formal structures and the negative aspects of mainstream economy (Spyridakis & Fefes, 2018). JN is considered a telling example of that tendency.

Co-operative Journalism and Greece

One may distinguish four types of co-operative enterprise models in the media sector. The first is a co-operative founded and owned by other media, which are themselves separate legal persons, that is its members are newspapers, website publications, broadcasters etc.

A good example of such a model is the Associated Press (AP), an American non-profit news agency founded in 1846 (Associated Press, 2021; Harvey 2020). The second model is a co-operative founded and owned by journalists (and often other workers), who work and invest in and manage their own news media. The third model is a reader-owned media co-operative (Sheffield, 2018). The fourth is a multi-stakeholder model combining different stakeholder groups (journalists, readers, investors) — see, for example, the examples presented by Fouquet et al., 2021, and Voinea, 2021).

Until recently these types of media co-operatives were absent in Greece. The closest example of the first co-operative model is the Athens Macedonian News Agency (AMNA) formed from the merger of the Athens News Agency and Macedonian Press Agency in 2008 (www.amna.org). *Efimerida ton Syntakton* (Efsyn) — JN — is an example of a hybrid co-operative model and Greece's first sustained national co-operative newspaper (Papadopoulou, 2020).

JN's Creation

Co-operatives, as in the case of JN, often arise from a particular social, economic, or environmental need. All founding members of JN were previously working for one of the then most popular newspapers in Greece, *Eleftherotypia* ("Free Press"). In December 2011, *Eleftherotypia* — which was founded as an entity co-owned by journalists but within months had been taken over by publishing firm Ch.K. Tegopoulous SA — faced grave financial problems. Despite all attempts to save it, the newspaper went bankrupt. Before this, the circulation of the newspaper had been suspended when the employees, who had been unpaid since August 2011, had started repeated 48-hour strikes. The result of all this turbulence was that all the people working for *Eleftherotypia* (circa 850 employees) lost their jobs.

In early 2012, approximately 50-60 former employees initiated discussions around the publication of another newspaper. The idea matured over the summer, resulting in a plan for a daily afternoon paper under the title "*Journalists' Newspaper*". About 100 people decided to get involved in this project and on 1 November 2012, the publication of the newspaper was officially announced. The first issue published on Monday 5 November.

According to Voulelis, subsistence needs were only part of the motivation for the creation of JN. More specifically, the aim was not only to find jobs for the fired personnel of *Eleftherotypia* or other mass media but also to fill a vacuum left by *Eleftherotypia*. Additionally, to act as a counter to traditional media owned by business people associated with particular political parties and with specific political and economic interests and influence (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Siapera et al., 2015). Therefore, the founders decided to publish a co-operative newspaper that would be independent of the then established system, without the support of the governing or another political party, without a strong owner-publisher, and without being part of a media group.

It is obvious that the founders had in mind that co-operatives "could better shore up the social and democratic role of the media through a business model based on using commercial success to provide social benefit" (Boyle, 2012, cited by Harvey 2020, para 8). Harvey, commenting on the report by Co-operatives UK, states that "co-operatives already have the key requirements for media organisations. They are trusted businesses, with a reputation for fairness; they are resilient; and they are accountable to their members" (2020, para 9). Indeed, the report argues that "journalist-owned co-operatives can ensure decent employment with news ethics less subject to being bent by unscrupulous owners or management" (Boyle, 2012, p. 3).

The newspaper's proclaimed aim was to provide independent, in-depth, substantial research and analysis to cover a wide range of issues (EfSyn, 2021). While always abiding by journalism ethics, its criticism would be sincere — "strict, harsh but honest" (EfSyn, 2021, para 4), in relation to both the respective government and to other political powers. Thus, the readers would enjoy an accurate, independent, and comprehensive news regardless of their political orientation, be it from the fringes of the conservative faction to the far left. The newspaper intended to be sensitive to all “new messages and … contribute to the shaping of a new landscape, in a progressive direction” (EfSyn, 2021, para 6).

JN’s Ownership Status

As an independent co-operative newspaper, JN is edited and published by “Co-operative of employees in newspapers and magazines” through the Independent Media SA (société anonyme — similar to a public limited company — company limited by shares in the UK). The Co-operative is the main shareholder in the SA (EfSyn, 2021, para 3) i.e., the employees are majority shareholders, although shares have also been offered to readers (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016). SAs are a popular type of company in Greece mostly because shareholders bear no liability for the debts of the company, risking only their investment to acquire their shares. According to Voulelis, the reason for selecting this organisational form was twofold. First, there was a clear ideological dimension. The founding members did not wish to “bear the label” of the publisher-entrepreneur. Having been involved in a harsh conflict with their employer for at least 6 months, the idea of being the “boss” was not appealing. Secondly, members were already familiar with the SA model and although they wished to take advantage of democratic control of their co-operative by the members, the co-operative model was less familiar and the legislation more complex.

When asked whether they had ever thought about dissolving the SA and the taking over of the paper by the co-operative itself, the answer was negative. They think that the choice has worked fine till now and there is no reason to change a successful model:

> We must not forget that when we started the JN, everybody gave us 1-2 months of life. Nevertheless, we survived, we expanded, and we have a daily paper circulating for about 9 years.

Voulelis considers the scheme to be functional, and accountable. There are specific controls at three levels (see next section): the paper itself, the co-operative members (the general assembly of members for example elects the director), and the Board of Directors (BoD) of the SA. It is important to point out that while the co-operative is the owner of the paper, it does not intervene in its essential function. The topics and the content of the newspaper articles as well as any political orientation remain strictly at the discretion of the director, the editorial board, and the chief-editors. Of course, we must not forget that almost all these people are at the same time members of the co-operative, however they do not mix their dual identity as members and independent journalists.

JN’s Organisational Status

Co-operative of employees in newspapers and magazines

The first pillar of the paper is the co-operative. The founding members of the co-operative were mainly the former employees of *Eleftherotypia* and its Sunday edition *Kyriakatiki Eleftherotypia* and former employees in other media (EfSyn, 2021, para 3). Membership of the co-operative is open to all employees (or even volunteers), be they journalists, technical, or administrative staff under an employment contract, a services contract, or a project contract. The candidate member must apply in writing for admission to the co-operative. The application is filed with the BoD, who will accept or reject the application at its first meeting after the application is received. In case of rejection, the applicant may appeal to the General Assembly (GA), which is the final judge. In case of acceptance, the GA approves the membership.

The co-operative is governed by the law on civil co-operatives and its statutes. The aims of the co-operative are to participate in media business through the purchase of shares; to participate in its management; to protect and advance the professional and economic status and interests of their employees, including the education and training of and information for their journalists and other categories of employees; and the social and cultural amelioration of their employees. It is also provided that the co-operative may release newspapers and magazines, however this aim is not yet realised. The duration of the co-operative is 50 years, and its governing bodies are the GA, the co-operative BoD (5 members, 2 years' service) and the Supervisory Board. All other issues are regulated by the statutes, including for example: rights, obligations, liability, exit, and expulsion of members; competence and function of the governing bodies; shares and financial issues; books and records; surpluses and reserves; and winding-up and liquidation.

Independent Media SA

The second pillar of the paper is the SA. An SA in Greece is governed by Law 4548/2018 and its statutes. The founding members of the SA were the co-operative and two individuals ('natural persons'). The main aim of the SA is the publication of daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, or any kind of printed or electronic material of general or special content. Further objectives detail activities within the media sector. In line with the co-operative, duration of the SA is 50 years although this may be prolonged by the GA. The share capital at the time of writing is 185,200 euros and 97-98% of the share capital is held by the co-operative. All shares are nominal. There are also clauses on pre-emption rights and right of first refusal in case of increase of the share capital or the purchase and sale of shares, as well as minority shareholders' rights.

The governing bodies are the GA, the BoD and the auditors. The SA BoD may have 3-7 members serving for 5 years. Finally, there are provisions for the duration of the fiscal year; the annual financial accounts; the profits, losses, and dividends; the winding-up; and the liquidation of the company.

JN — the paper

JN is the trading name of the SA. The paper is run by a group of people, each having their own role and participating in a daily conference to set the topics, the content, and the ongoing reportage and research to be presented in the paper. Initially, the editorial board, the BoD of the co-operative and the BoD of the SA were the same persons; however, the situation is now different, and the service posts are undertaken by a variety of people. This editorial board consists of 9-11 people: the director, the editing directors, and the chief editors. There are several departments or teams covering specific areas, such as politics, economics, and the arts as well as administrative, commercial, and technical employees.

As mentioned above, the director is elected by the GA of the co-operative, so all member-employees vote for the director. The director is the person responsible for day-to-day decisions, and in case of crucial issues there is a consultancy procedure with the editorial board. The final decision lies with the director. The director is also responsible for hiring or firing of personnel, the allocation of posts, and is the contact person for the governing bodies of the SA and the co-operative.

Financial and Ideological Dimensions

The release of the paper was a novel experiment in the Greek media sector. To quote Voulelis:

> Nothing like this has ever happened in Greece. Everybody told us that we shall close down within 2 months. We are still here and go on for 8.5 years. During this period of time 5 to 6 newspapers were released and closed down, we are still alive, we preserved our readers with its ups and downs despite the harsh competition. We made a breakthrough in the established situation of Greek media industry.

While revenue generation is crucial, financial independence is of the utmost importance for the people involved in JN. To this end, JN relies on circulation and advertising revenue. As Voulelis explains:

> We have no banking loans, no obscure or secret financial backup, we do not base our paper on a single supporter. We guard our financial independence and sustainability based only on our readership, our advertising revenue, and periodic crowd-funding. Whenever we need more money, we turn to our members, therefore we have made capital increases to face rising costs.

Two significant aspects of the crisis in the Greek media landscape have been the continued decline in newspaper circulation figures while paradoxically having over 70 newspaper titles in a country of 10 million (Siapera et al., 2015). To put this into perspective, Siapera et al., (2015, p. 452) outline that in the UK, for example, there are "fewer than 25 titles of national daily, weekly and Sunday newspapers". In this climate, did the founders of JN feel uncomfortable starting such an initiative for a new paper? Voulelis provides a response that acknowledges the difficulties, but he is also positive regarding longer-term sustainability:

> Naturally, all members understand the difficulties especially nowadays. They realise the problems stemming from declining readership, rising production costs, and decreased advertising input, however all print media are facing the same challenges and they hope that at the end of the day they will survive in an increasingly challenging environment. After all, we boast that we made the difference in a traditionally functioning sector, we broke the "monopoly", precisely because we are absolutely independent.

Voulelis champions independence and, against expectations, JN has been successful. Yet, Boucas & Iosifidis (2020) point to enduring problems within the media landscape. As mentioned above, a feature of almost all Greek daily newspapers is that they are related to a specific political-ideological direction. All of them claim to be independent, meaning they are not directly affiliated with a political party. In considering the political role of newspapers in Greece, however, Siapera et al. (2015) note clientism and the "use of Greek journalism as a means of influence of various businessmen has had major implications for its credibility" (p. 453). Additionally, they point to Papathanassopoulos's (2001) arguments that "newspapers are not seen as an economic venture but rather as the means by which to exert political pressure" (Siapera et al., 2015, p. 453). For example, there are papers that are official instruments of political parties, for instance Rizospastis ("Radicalist") for KKE (the Greek Communist Party) and Avgi ("Dawn") for SYRIZA ("Coalition of the Radical Left"). SYRIZA gained great influence during the economic recession and formed a government from 2015 to 2019. Following the election of the New Democracy right-wing party, SYRIZA has become the biggest opposition party in the Greek Parliament. JN is perceived as having a political orientation close to that of SYRIZA. However, Voulelis was adamant on this point:

> At the very beginning there was no clear political view, however, since the majority of members came from *Eleftherotypia*, I may say that we were a leftist progressive paper. Little by little it became more specific, we took a progressive, alternative, investigative, revealing direction. We do not reproduce news from Athens News Agency (ANA) or other foreign agencies. We are a paper, which searches, reveals, opens new issues. For instance, we were the first to open the refugee crisis issue or the Golden Dawn's crimes [an ultra-right neo-Nazi party, which entered the Greek parliament form 2012-2019] … our reports were used as evidence during the court procedure. This way, we have built a general political-ideological left-friendly direction, however this does not mean it is standard and unassailable. We have reporters close to SYRIZA, others are former Communists, and others are more close to the centre-left ideology, who influence the direction of our paper.

Regardless of what our interlocutor is saying, it remains the case, for good or for worse, that JN is identified with SYRIZA by a large portion of the public and is considered by some as a party newspaper. In Voulelis's opinion nothing could be further from the truth and pointed to the paper's repeatedly strong criticism of SYRIZA's views, especially when the party was in government. JN was the first to rally against SYRIZA's partner in government, an ultra-right party, condemning the "unnatural" coalition. They have also criticised the party's views on Greek external policy:

> We were not backed by SYRIZA, in fact SYRIZA based on us and our work. WE GET NO FINANCIAL AID FROM A POLITICAL PARTY or another such source. We have advertising income; however the advertisers are not immune, and we shall never suppress news so as not to upset them. Quite the

> opposite, we are ready to publish news, which will displease them. I just pose an example, when we released a case of an industrial accident at the premises of one of our advertised clients.

Voulelis is proud both because JN has become a point of reference for the left audience, and it is one of few newspapers that aims to provide credible and trustful news briefings:

> Every morning, in almost all foreign embassies, they read two newspapers in order to form a valid opinion for what is going on in the country. One of them is us, and this a reason to boast, since we have become a point of reference in a short period of time alongside other much older newspapers.

To date JN has been considered a successful example. The people forming the co-operative were able to combine editorial and business departments, to become financially viable, to save jobs, and to support quality journalism in the process. However, commercial viability is always a challenge for all media businesses. Readership has declined especially since 2016-2017, and finance is always a daily struggle. The final section considers the prospects for JN in this challenging environment.

Future Directions for JN

Given the general phenomenon of declining readership (5,000 sales daily, 15,000 on weekends), JN are looking at specific commercial policy changes. One of the issues under consideration is whether there should be a shift to a daily online newspaper and keep a printed edition at the weekend (since the weekend circulation is satisfactory). As many of the members are still emotionally attached to the daily paper, such plans will only come to fruition when the members are ready to go forward. Meanwhile, there are constant endeavours to improve the internet site of the paper, so that it may become a cornerstone to such development; however not to the detriment of the printed paper. The current target is to develop them on an equal footing.

When asked if there were any plans to circulate a special paper for co-operatives and the co-operative movement, Voulelis ruled out such a possibility, suggesting that:

> There is no strong co-operative movement in Greece. There are only the classic co-operatives, which unfortunately are not trusted by the public, mainly due to the mischiefs of agricultural co-operatives. It is also true that there are no employees' co-operatives, which would give an impetus to the co-operative movement. Therefore, a special edition would not have an audience, so it would fail.

Yet it is crucial to have the press to communicate, raise awareness of, and promote co-operative principles and activities. If there were constant reports on co-operatives, the sector would become more visible. Voulelis spoke of JN's support for co-operatives:

> We are doing our best towards this direction. We have repeatedly promoted co-operative models in Greece and internationally. We have repeatedly published for co-operatives. We try to offer our readers mental food around the subject, we try to stimulate them to look upon it with greater interest and love. However, it is a lonely attempt and I do not think we have any important results [to show]. Co-operatives are treated by the rest of the media almost with indifference or as a by-product of the economic growth and crisis of the last 20 years. Co-operative movement is not among the central concerns of the media.

Even so, JN remains the only example of co-operative journalism In Greece. One is not enough to prove the success of the model, because as Voulelis warns, "given the circumstances, who knows, tomorrow we may close down as well". Unfortunately, the appeal of co-operative or employee-owned organisations for independent journalists does not seem attractive as Voulelis attests:

> Above all, we had high hopes that our case would motivate other "workers" to take over their failed workplace forming a co-operative, but to no avail. When a well-known publishing complex closed down, we called the people there to follow our example and form their own co-operative business. However, that was completely out of their thinking. We proposed they join us and work together in an established co-operative newspaper. They did not think of that, they waited for the next boss to take over the business. I do not blame them, I understand that you need money to form a business, money that is not available especially in light of the economic crisis and theCovid-19 pandemic.

One of the reasons that such initiatives are not widespread is the complex co-operative environment in Greece. The legislative regime is neither helpful nor easy to navigate and there is no co-operative culture in the country. Voulelis's experience points to a lack of clear understanding of what the nature of a co-operative is and how it works, therefore such attempts are ruled out:

> We have suggested the idea to create a co-operative distribution agency owned by all or the majority of the Greek media. Our attempt failed, because the other publishers were not interested. So, there is currently only one distribution agency owned by an individual publisher. Don't ask me why, I do not understand the attitude of the rest of the publishers. Do they prefer a monopoly they cannot control? Don't ask me.

It is clear from Voulelis and the work of JN since 2012, that the views voiced by *Co-op News* editor, Rebecca Harvey, are shared in that "journalism however it is published or broadcast, should be autonomous and independent. It should educate and inform. It should be concerned about the communities it writes for and about" (2020, para 6). However, opinions are mixed regarding the employee-owned co-operative model and whether it has the ability to recover failing media outlets in Greece. Despite expressed doubts shown in the comments above, Voulelis' response to this dilemma is definitely affirmative, because, as he says, "We made it. What we made was called a folly, but we made it. So why not others?"

Concluding Remarks

In Greece, co-operative legislation is complex, and the co-operative movement is weak. New co-operative models, such as workers' co-operatives, are not usual, and one may see the *Journalists' Newspaper* as a unique experiment in the press business. Owned by its employees and working according to the co-operative way of business in keeping with the co-operative principles, the paper has saved jobs, works to support quality journalism, and is, to date, financially viable. JN is a leftist progressive paper, and it intends to continue as a co-operative. It is a supporter of all co-operative attempts in any sector or economy; a promoter of co-operative ideals; and an explorer of new models of journalism. As Iosifidis & Boucas (2015, p. 4) suggest "self-organisation in media production and the quest for new sustainable business models" has become increasingly important and it is really worth watching as to whether what was perceived as a "folly" will continue trying to adapt to a challenging and demanding environment.

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Co-operative Conversion in the Newspaper Industry: Navigating Between the Reefs Toward Success

Étienne Fouquet, Myriam Michaud, Luc K. Audebrand, and Claude-André Guillotte

The rise of digital media and platforms is driving significant change in the newspaper industry. These changes are forcing local media to alter their offerings and, for many, to change their ownership structure. In this context, cases of transformation into a co-operative form are particularly interesting. This article presents the case of CN2i, a grouping of regional media in the province of Québec (Canada), that has adopted a co-operative form following the bankruptcy of the former private press group. This case is particularly interesting, because each local media is constituted as a multi-stakeholder co-operative, and they are all integrated into a second-level co-operative. We rely on publicly available information and interviews with key actors to explore the success and challenges of the new co-operatives. Such a radical and fast transformation is accompanied by tensions that we highlight in this article. Drawing from a paradox perspective, we deepen the analysis of tensions arising from this transformation. We use Smith & Lewis's (2011) framework to describe paradoxes as they correspond to belonging, organising, performing, or learning categories.

Introduction

It is well known that the press and news media represent the "4th estate" whereby a free and strong press is considered as one of the foundations of modern democracy (Anderson, 2006; Brunetti & Weder, 2003). However, the rise of digital media and platforms is leading to significant changes in the print media sector (Balle, 2020; Bernier, 2016). This is changing citizens' information access practices, in addition to capturing an increasing share of advertising revenues previously destined for local media, which are, in turn, increasingly struggling to survive (Fontanel & Sushcheva, 2019). The web giants, nicknamed GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft), are generally considered the main cause of these revenue drops (see for example, Association des médias écrits communautaires du Québec [AMECQ], 2019). Yet, such business models are not designed to meet local and regional information needs. This situation is even more worrisome given the decline of local and regional media in Québec and elsewhere (Brunelle & Brin, 2019), as well as the impoverishment of information with civic value (Public Policy Forum, 2018).

In this article, we draw on a case study to show that the co-operative model can be an avenue for addressing these issues and highlight some inherent tensions that must be managed in order to do so (Audebrand, 2017). Although co-operative entrepreneurship in the media sector has gained some recognition in Europe, it remains somewhat marginal in North America. For example, in Québec, there are eight enterprises dedicated to journalism using the co-operative model, most of which focus on local news. That said, little is written about co-operatives in the North American journalism community, and even less literature examines the shift from private to collective ownership in the print media sector.

To deepen our understanding of the solutions to the challenges faced by the print media and of transitions from private to collective ownership, this article outlines a recent case of a "co-operative takeover" of a large press group in Québec (Canada), made up of six local press organs, namely the Coopérative nationale de l'information indépendante (National Co-operative of Independent Information: CN2i). CN2i is a producers' co-operative that brings together six local newspapers, which are themselves incorporated as multistakeholder co-operatives — whose members are workers, readers, and advertisers — and whose mission is to offer local information. Founded in 2019, after the bankruptcy of Groupe Capitales Médias (GCM) the then owner of the six local newspapers, the CN2i produces and distributes national and regional information online, and in print on Saturdays. CN2i's story is especially interesting due to the importance of this media group in Québec's press ecosystem, the rapidity of the organisational change involved by this conversion, and the central role played by institutional actors to ensure its survival.

Due to the social and economic context in which local news media evolve, the co-operative model has quickly emerged as one of the only viable avenues in the eyes of Québec institutional actors. A starting point for this article is the idea that collective ownership by members as well as the social mission of co-operatives (McMurtry & Brouard, 2015; Tortia et al., 2020) can be considered as important assets to build a free and independent press. Co-operatives do not have to answer solely to the financial interests of their owners and can therefore more easily put forward their social mission of providing rich, accurate, and relevant information to the public. In addition, co-operatives are recognised for their territorial anchoring and proximity to local communities (Draperi & Le Corroller, 2015), which fits the needs of local press organs. In short, a free press must be free from financial pressure, and a local press should be rooted in local communities; two elements that are congruent with the co-operative model.

Nevertheless, the implementation of such a model involves several challenges and generates tensions, which we explore in this article through the case of CN2i. To do so, we adopt the paradox theory perspective, which invites examination of tensions, oppositions, and dualities as inherent to the organisation's life — especially in the context of change (Jay, 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011). The data used for this study comes from both the extensive public information surrounding the creation of CN2i in the popular media and from interviews with key actors in the conversion, including some employees, board members, and institutional partners.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we present the process of converting GCM into a producers' co-operative, highlighting the contextual and institutional elements that fostered this transformation. Then, the tensions arising from this conversion are detailed and linked to the four main categories of paradoxes highlighted by the literature, namely, paradoxes of belonging, organising, learning, and performing (Smith & Lewis, 2011). We conclude with lessons and warnings identified for the CN2i management and broader co-operative management.

The Fascinating Story of CN2i

Setting the stage: the pre-conversion

GCM was born in 2015, when a single shareholder acquired several regional newspapers in Québec. Only two years after this acquisition, in 2017, the company encountered significant financial difficulties. Recognising the urgency of the digital shift, GCM obtained assistance from the provincial government through a $10 million loan (all amounts are in Canadian currency). This loan was part of the launch of a government programme to help the print media, dedicating over half of a $36.4 million budget envelope to digital transformation. At the same time, Investissement Québec (https://www.investquebec.com/quebec/en/), the government's economic development and business support arm, provided an additional $10 million loan to GCM to foster its digital transition. For the Québec government, there was no doubt that quality regional information provided by the six daily newspapers, employing about 300 employees, was essential to democracy.

Despite this financial support, GCM announced on 19 August 2019, that it would file a notice of intention under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to seek protection from its creditors. The trustee in charge of administering the newspapers following the filing for bankruptcy was very sensitive to the peculiarities of the situation; as a national company, many jobs were at stake. Moreover, the local newspapers it encompassed were pillars of regional and local information in

Québec. In short, this bankruptcy jeopardised not only an important enterprise, but put at stake a large part of the free and professional press.

On the same day, the Government of Québec announced emergency aid of $5 million to protect GCM from its creditors — which means that in total, GCM received $25 million in its short life from various governmental bodies. Québec's Minister of the Economy justified this action by the need to keep the press group in business while a buyer was found. The Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN — https://www.csn.qc.ca) — a Québec-based central labour body that federates independent local unions, quickly announced joint support with the government and expressed interest in participating financially to ensure the revival of the group's operations. While the file was in the hands of the bankruptcy trustee, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, other private groups expressed interest in the relaunch, but none followed through. Therefore, the co-operative model came out as a solution to allow a rebirth of the local press group.

Local media working together to find a solution

Representatives of the employees from each of the newspapers affected were involved in a provisional committee, namely *Le Droit* in Gatineau, *Le Soleil* in Québec City, *Le Nouvelliste* in Trois-Rivières, *Le Quotidien* in Saguenay, *La Tribune* in Sherbrooke and *La Voix de l'Est* in Granby — six cities that qualify as regional capitals. Together, they created a buyout plan that was presented to the trustee. This plan emphasised the co-operative option and relied on two major strategies to ensure short- and long-term survival. First, to build a pool of financial resources sufficient to get through the next three years; second, to diversify the funding sources to achieve an acceptable level of risk for potential financial partners and members of the newspapers.

On 23 December 2019, GCM announced the sale of its six regional newspapers to a new entity: the Coopérative nationale de l'information indépendante (CN2i), a producers' co-operative, for the symbolic amount of one dollar. The CN2i thus took over the nearly 300 employees and obtained financial support from: Investissement Québec (https://www.investquebec.com/quebec/en/); Fondaction (CSN — https://www.fondaction.com/); Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs (FTQ — https://www.fondsftq.com/); Caisse d'économie solidaire Desjardins and Desjardins Capital (https://www.desjardins.com); the Chantier de l'économie sociale (https://chantier.qc.ca/?lang=en); and the Réseau d'investissement social du Québec (https://fonds-risq.qc.ca/en/).

The employees of the six local newspapers then launched a co-ordinated campaign to raise funds in the form of donations or preferred shares (non-voting shares that bear interest) from the community entitled "*Je coopère pour mon journal*" (I co-operate for my newspaper). The campaign aimed to support the start-up of multistakeholder/solidarity co-operatives for each newspaper. The response was positive, with $2.7 million raised just two months after the trustee decision to authorise the relaunch through the co-operative model, reassuring the funders and demonstrating public support for their local media.

In addition to the fundraising campaign, other measures were put in place to help the co-operatives get off the ground. Workers gave up their pension funds and agreed to a two-year wage freeze. In addition, a contribution of 5% of employees' salaries was made in the form of preferred shares.

Thanks to the mobilisation of employees and communities, CN2i was able to conclude the joint financing of $13 million from the partners mentioned above. This financing was accompanied by a joint guarantee, by the seven co-operatives (i.e., CN2i and its six constituents) of future debts incurred by one of the local co-operatives in the group. In March 2020, the general manager of *Le Soleil* — the largest and oldest of the six local co-operatives — made the following observation in an open letter to readers:

> The support of our partners is not just a profession of faith. It acknowledges the strong support of the communities (your donations, which total $2.7 million). Above all, it is the result of a detailed analysis

> of our business model and our development plan. And our ability to transform ourselves. Because it is clear that no partner would have come on board if our only ambition was to continue our operations on the same model. Doing the same thing, but better? It's a start, but it's not enough anymore (Carignan, 2020, para 13-14).

Strategic support from MCE Conseils

To enable such an organisational transformation, the assistance of a strategic advisor, specialised in both organisational development and collective ownership, was crucial. At the request of institutional investors, MCE Conseils was hired to accompany the conversion of GCM into CN2i, and the passage from private to collective ownership. MCE Conseils (https://www.mceconseils.com/) is a strategic consulting firm founded in 1987 that offers diversified management support and has a long experience with social economy organisations. Given its long experience in the co-operative sector, particularly with Québec paramedics' co-operatives, MCE Conseils was chosen to support the development of the co-operative solution and the strategic coaching of C2Ni's members.

Its mandate was validated after the co-operative avenue was presented to the workers of each local newspaper, who agreed to explore the co-operative path. More precisely, the workers of each regional media outlet were asked to vote on a theoretical project to relaunch the newspapers of the Capitales Médias Group Inc. in a co-operative form. The message transmitted to the workers was that the evolution of the group would be continuous and that the core challenge was to find the best way to co-ordinate the activities and to distribute them among the co-operatives.

MCE Conseils was involved in setting up the co-operatives and in negotiating with the bankruptcy trustee and was also responsible for developing a training programme for the workers. The training programme was primarily designed to allow members to quickly take ownership of the co-operative model, knowing that the design of the organisational structure would be defined as it went along. Members were also surveyed for training needs. Training began at a critical time in the development of the co-operatives. Indeed, understanding the co-operative model and the new role of owners devolved to the workers was an important antecedent to the negotiations concerning the pension fund, which the workers would give up, to ensure the development of a sustainable financing structure.

At the same time, MCE Conseils helped to organise fundraising and developed a comprehensive plan for the six newspapers, emphasising the importance of co-ordinated action and the need for a national strategy. It is also worth noting that most of these changes took place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which hastened the digital shift. The training programme is still on-going and needs to be continued in order to keep the strategic plan and the co-operative potential on track, as well as keeping members active and engaged in its development.

Role of the Unions

Prior to the conversion, each newspaper managed its union allegiance independently and chose to affiliate with a particular centralised organisation. These union ties were maintained after the conversion, creating a situation where workers at CN2i newspapers are certified under two centralised unions, the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ) and the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), both of which represent a wide variety of work groups in Québec and often compete for local union representation. Moreover, these two unions currently act both as financial partners — through their respective investment funds (Fondaction and Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs) — and as protectors of workers' rights, thus playing two different and somewhat conflicting roles. As financial partners, the unions have an interest in reducing operational costs — including wages — but as protectors of workers' rights, they must fight for better working conditions.

A complex structure for a complex project

At the time of writing, in the fall of 2021, CN2i pursues its mission, which is to pool and share information and resources needed so that its member co-operatives can offer an information service to the population of their region, while preserving editorial independence. CN2i supports its members — the local newspapers — in their efforts to ensure the professionalism, quality, and diversity of information in the regions of Québec.

To do so, CN2i's co-operative model operates on two levels. First, each local newspaper constitutes a multistakeholder co-operative, i.e., a co-operative that includes more than one category of members such as workers, consumers, and supporting members (Michaud & Audebrand, 2019). First-tier co-operatives (local newspapers) include workers as members (i.e., journalists and other employees related to the production of the regional news) and each of them may choose to also include either consumer members (which may include readers and advertisers) or supporting members (who support the mission of the media outlet), or both. Each newspaper is managed by an editor-in-chief and each of the six co-operatives adopts its own budget and produces its annual income statement as an independent entity. Second, all six co-operatives are producer members of the CN2i co-operative. This second-tier co-operative, while not a federation, provides common services to each co-operative, including financial planning for the entire group, co-ordination of the digital shift, and human resource management.

In addition, as a member of CN2i, each first-tier co-operative provides a service to the entire group. For example, classified ads are managed by one of the co-operatives, while obituaries by another, and customer service for the digital transition by a third. In this way, each local co-operative assumes responsibility for ensuring the success of the shared activity and is seen as producing content for the producers' co-operative.

It should be noted that two of the six local media, namely *Le Soleil* in Québec City and *Le Droit* in the Outaouais region, benefit from the presence of government legislative bodies in their region — the National Assembly located in Québec City and the Canadian Parliament, in Ottawa. Indeed, government business generates news of national not just regional, interest, which places greater demands on these two co-operatives, but also offers them greater opportunities. The co-operation agreement between CN2i's member co-operatives provides a revenue model that includes a content-sharing agreement between the co-operatives that takes this reality into account.

In terms of governance, CN2i's Board of Directors is composed of six directors, appointed by each of the local co-operatives. A seventh is delegated by the funders. A representative of MCE Conseils (see below) is present as an observer for strategic monitoring. The board of directors meets once a month with the executive directors of the co-operatives, who do not have voting rights. These meetings provide an overview of the organisation's activities. Each meeting is preceded by a meeting of the non-executive directors, who prepare formal resolutions presented to the board.

The strategy for the whole group is first developed by CN2i. Each co-operative is then asked to complete its own strategic plan in line with the group's objectives. The strategic plans of each co-operative are then integrated into an overall plan by CN2i. If a co-operative does not meet its objectives and performance indicators, it must submit a recovery plan to the other co-operatives. This structure is very different from the group's past experience, where a central authority controlled strategy and operations. Since the conversion, each co-operative is autonomous and has its own strategic plan but has a duty to coordinate it with the group's strategic objectives. In sum, while the seven entities work together toward the same objective, they all face various challenges and their complex structure brings tensions, that are explored in the next section.

Discussion: Unveiling the Conversion's Paradoxes

The previous case description highlights several success factors that prevented the bankruptcy of the six regional newspapers and favoured the creation of CN2i. Central to the success factors is the involvement of a diversity of actors from the co-operative ecosystem and beyond. Such a change could not have occurred without the involvement of actors from civil society, finance, and politics spheres. It is quite rare to see so many actors, with diverse interests, come together to carry out a project of this magnitude in such a short time. Despite the success of this conversion, the creation of CN2i does not solve all the problems faced by the organisation. Moreover, new challenges are emerging as a result of its constitution. There are therefore several risk factors to consider. In other words, CN2i must navigate between several tensions to ensure its sustainability.

It seems appropriate to analyse the CN2i situation using the paradox perspective. Paradox scholars explore the variety of paradoxes embedded in the life of an organisation. According to this perspective, a paradox corresponds to the juxtaposition of two elements that are both opposites and complementary, thus creating tensions. From this perspective, an organisation's success lies in its ability to create a dynamic balance between these tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011), allowing individuals, teams, and organisations to learn and develop creativity; build flexibility and resilience; and unleash the potential of individuals in the organisation.

This theoretical approach aligns well with the co-operative duality, that is, a dual structure of an association of persons and an enterprise, which pursue both social and economic goals. Paradox literature highlights the tensions arising from the complexity of the co-operative model, the diversity of goals pursued as well as their potential for conflict (Puusa et al., 2013; Torgerson et al., 1998).

According to the work of Smith and Lewis (2011), paradoxes can be grouped into four categories. *Belonging* paradoxes arise from identity issues within organisations. *Organising* paradoxes are related to structural, organisational, and power issues. *Learning* paradoxes come with organisational renewal and the challenges it poses. *Performing* paradoxes correspond to the oft-conflicting performance criteria of organisations. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the four types of paradoxes as defined by Smith and Lewis (2011, p. 383) and indicates how they translate in the case of CN2i.

Table 1: Types of paradoxes at CN2i

Type of paradox	Description (Smith & Lewis, 2011)	Paradox at CN2i
Belonging	Includes tensions between the individual and the collective, between competing values, roles, and memberships.	Mutualisation vs. Individualisation
Organising	Includes tensions between collaboration and competition, empowerment and direction, and control and flexibility.	Centralisation vs. Decentralisation
Learning	Includes tensions related to change and transformation, between building upon and destroying the past to create the future.	Stability vs. Change
Performing	Includes tensions between multiple and competing goal as stakeholders seek divergent organisational success.	Economic profitability vs. Social profitability

Belonging paradoxes at CN2i surface notably in the opposition between values and strategies of mutualisation and individualisation. On the one hand, co-operatives must mutualise certain services to ensure the survival of all its constituent parts; on the other hand, each co-operative strives to ensure the survival of its own business. There is thus a built-in and ongoing tension between the willingness to belong to a larger, more encompassing entity (CN2i) and a more immediate belonging to the specific identity of the local co-operative. In other words, each local co-operative must agree to mutualise services (and sacrifice the resulting revenues) for the benefit of all co-operatives, while maintaining and fostering its own activities, in order to provide work for its member-workers. Obviously, this causes tensions between the different co-operatives, each wanting its fair share of the cake.

The mission of CN2i (and its producer members) is to provide regional and national information. Thus, it is easy to see the constant dilemma in the choice of information of national interest for the benefit of the group, and that of regional interest for the benefit of the regions covered by each newspaper. Moreover, as mentioned above, two of the six newspapers cover, in addition to regional topics, subjects of national interest and thus reach a larger audience. This difference can influence the membership and contribution of each co-operative to the group and foster belonging tensions, even conflicts, among members of the co-operative group.

CN2i is also challenged by several organising paradoxes, particularly between centralising and autonomising tendencies. On the one hand, the local newspapers made a transition to co-operatives to protect their managerial and content-production autonomy. On the other hand, they are part of a producers' co-operative that takes up a lot of space and decisional power. There is therefore a tension between the centralising aims of the producers' co-operative, whose directing manager was originally put in place by Investissement Québec to manage the transition from a private company to the CN2i (Tremblay, 2020), and the autonomous aims of the six local newspapers, which have all formed a multistakeholder co-operative to retain power within their organisation.

It should be remembered that CN2i relies on the interdependence of member co-operatives, while the autonomy of each co-operative is enshrined in the fourth co-operative principle (International Co-operative Alliance [ICA], 2018). This duality is embodied in strategic choices, but also in operational decisions and practices. For example, it is easily conceivable that a first-tier co-operative might find unfairness in the assignment of one of the shared services to another co-operative, making the central-local balance difficult to determine and maintain.

CN2i also faces several learning paradoxes, as encompassed by the tension between stability and change. Each first-tier co-operative is a product of its own history and strong local roots. Each must maintain and strengthen its ties to its readers and build on the history that has made it successful over time (for example, *Le Soleil* was founded in 1896). Additionally, each must adapt to the current reality of the news industry, including to digital transformations and evolution of advertising revenues. While this paradox is obviously not unique to CN2i, it is exacerbated by the press group change of ownership and legal structure. Furthermore, the speed of these fundamental structural and organisational changes must be emphasised. Under the threat of bankruptcy, these changes had to be adopted very quickly, while the timeframe to allow for the much-needed training and education of the new collective owners of the organisation was slow and must be seen as an ongoing process.

This learning paradox thus takes place in several ways, three of which are worth reflecting on. First, the transition from salaried workers to workers who collectively own their enterprise requires education and training, which is aligned with the fifth co-operative principle (ICA, 2018). Individuals must distinguish their different and oft-conflicting roles of worker, member, and patron, which requires a deep understanding of the co-operative model, but can also lead to identity conflict and tensions in the organisation (Mamouni Limnios et al., 2018). Second, the advent of the Internet as well as the dominance of GAFAM have completely changed the way information is produced, consumed, and funded. Traditional media are forced to react to this fundamental change in their environment, and must find, for example, a balance between general and public interest information and the quest for exclusivity in an age of immediacy. Third, the role of the news media in a democratic context must be reassessed, and relearned. In the era of fake news and other political changes, the fourth estate must question the place of the media and make them rethink their mission as pillars of democracy.

Lastly, CN2i must manage several performing paradoxes, notably between the conflicting aims of social and economic success that must be simultaneously pursued. On the one hand, first-tier co-operatives belong to their members, including worker-members whose individual objective is to maintain their jobs and working conditions — this corresponds to (one of) the social poles of the paradox. On the other hand, as a producer co-operative, CN2i and its members all strive to ensure their profitability — the economic pole of the paradox. This tension is embedded in all levels of the organisation. For example, at the individual level, worker-members must reconcile their need to secure their job and their will to fulfil the organisation's mission regarding information, while at the same time taking into account the multiple costs associated with the management of their enterprise. At the network level, CN2i must support the development and sustainability of all its members while remaining profitable itself. Thus, the multiple objectives in place, namely the profitability of each co-operative, that of the group, the sustainability of local and national information procurement, and the preservation of quality jobs, overlap and compete with one another.

Moreover, the various partners (e.g., citizens, unions, government, financial institutions) have different expectations, which might be mainly economic (e.g., return on their investment) or social (e.g., maintaining local information and jobs). Hence, partner expectations can take many different and even conflicting forms. In this regard, the dual role of the trade unions/labour fund is of particular interest. As financial partners, they seek to make their investment profitable to ensure asset growth. However, this involves pressure on employees to modify, or even reduce, their working conditions and access to pension funds — modifications that are usually opposed by unions. The CN2i case thus demonstrates a possibility to reconcile various and conflicting objectives when actors pursue broader and longer-term purposes; in this case, the survival of media dedicated to local and regional information.

For other investors such as Desjardins Capital, La Fiducie du Chantier de l'économie sociale, and the Réseau d'investissement social du Québec, supporting CN2i represents an opportunity to exercise their role as partners in Québec's economic and social development. While the project involves obvious risks, mainly related to the fast-changing context of information in a digitised world, it is considered as acceptable thanks to the number, variety, and high-level of commitment of the actors involved. However, investors obviously face a tension between their search for financial performance and their willingness to share risk-taking for a business whose social role is widely recognised.

Conclusion

The paradox perspective provides a way of understanding the complexity of managing organisations, particularly co-operatives (Audebrand, 2017). The case of CN2i offers a rich illustration of the tensions embedded in an organisation whose mission is the production and dissemination of local information. CN2i is a young organisation squeezed between several seemingly conflicting interests as well as amid uncertainty related to the news media environment. Despite those tensions, the CN2i co-operatives "are like a survivor recovering after almost dying. Their good health is reassuring and pleasing" (Roy, 2021, para 4).

It is important to note that the paradoxical tensions presented above are not independent from one another; each interact and exacerbate each other (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). For example, the organising paradox between centralising and autonomising tendencies spills over into the learning and performance paradoxes. Indeed, the tension between the need to establish a group-wide strategy and the desire to respect the autonomy of member co-operatives exacerbates the tension arising from the rapid changes to which co-operatives and their members must adapt. This same tension between centralisation and autonomy is also fuelled by the potential conflicts between first-tier co-operatives, each of which seeks to maximise its performance to ensure its survival while accepting sacrifices for the benefit of the group. In this sense, the CN2i situation is a good example of an organisation facing a nexus of knotted, intricate paradoxes (Sheep et al., 2017).

However, the paradoxical tensions described in the previous section should not be seen as necessarily leading to the downfall of the new entity. To ensure the sustainability of CN2i, some ways of reacting to paradoxes are more mature than others and must be put forward by the actors. The first and most important step for management teams and co-operative members, is to acknowledge and admit the presence of paradoxes. These paradoxes are not dilemmas or problems that can be solved once and for all, but ongoing challenges with which organisations and individuals must learn to live — and even to love. The second realisation is to accept that the two poles of a tension are neither good nor bad, and that they both have value when considered independently as much as there is value in their interdependency. In doing so, maintaining the tension, and respecting the interdependency of the two poles must become the mandate of all members of the organisation.

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The *Journal of Co-operative Studies* is a peer reviewed international academic journal which aims to promote research, knowledge and innovation within the co-operative sector. The *Journal* is published by the UK Society for Co-operative Studies in Manchester, England, a city strongly associated with the co-operative movement since the days of the Rochdale Pioneers. It is distributed in Canada in partnership with the Canadian Association of Studies in Co-operation and in Ireland in co-operation with the Irish Society for Co-operative Studies.

The editors welcome contributions on most aspects of co-operation, co-operative management, governance and leadership and related subject areas in relation to a range of co-operative sectors. This includes worker, consumer, retail, housing, credit, insurance, information technology, environmental and other forms of co-operative endeavour; international co-operation; and other sectors within the social economy including mutual businesses, co-operative banks and building societies, community businesses, and member-based non-profits.

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While one role of the *Journal* is the dissemination of the results of research, we are keen to ensure that its contents should also reflect the role of the UK Society for Co-operative Studies in acting as a bridge between academics and practitioners in advancing knowledge and understanding of co-operation. There are four ways of contributing:

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2. **Shorter articles, generally of around 2,000 words** which are assessed on the basis of their general interest and readability. Such articles are not subject to formal peer review although the editor may seek comments and suggestions from members of the Editorial Advisory Board which would be discussed with the author as part of the editing process.

3. **Think Pieces:** we invite prospective contributors to submit very short (maximum 1,000 word) articles which may be controversial or somewhat speculative in character. Their purpose should be to stimulate discussion and possible future new directions for co-operative research.

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