



Journal of Co-operative Studies Special Issue: *Journalism and the co-operative movement*

Guest editors: Andrew Bibby, Alex Bird, Mitch Diamantopoulos, Rebecca Harvey, and Siôn Whellans.

Established in 1871, *Co-operative News* began as the (mainly) consumer co-operatives' weekly newspaper and now produces a monthly magazine, together with a global news website, covering all types of co-operatives and issues of interest to the co-operative movement. It is from this rich local, national, and international heritage that this themed special issue of the *Journal* celebrates and takes as its starting point the 150th anniversary of *Co-operative News*.

There were periodicals that pre-date *Co-op News*, such as the *Co-operative Magazine* (1826) and William King's *The Co-operator*, a monthly magazine started in May 1828, which Mercer (1922, p. xxii) states was a timely publication to 'make the principles of co-operation "intelligible" to a wider populous and to encourage the development of co-operative societies in 'every place where men [sic] read *The Co-operator*'. In North America, within a similar time frame, the Associated Press, now a co-operative global network of news organisations, was established in 1846. Additionally, in the UK, there were local, albeit in some cases short-lived, co-operative publications such as the *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator* (1831-1832) as well as a range of political and co-operative commentators and journalists, including George Jacob Holyoake (editor of the *Reasoner* and later the *English Leader*), George Mudie (editor/publisher of the *Economist*); Ada Elizabeth Jones (aka. John Keith Prothero/ Sheridan Jones); and Annie Tomlinson (née Bamford; editor of the *Co-op News* women's section and first editor of *Women's Outlook*).

The special issue is also a response to the question 'why should we care about the future of [co-operative] journalism?' This question was put forward by the UK Cairncross Review (2019) in the context of a shrinking sector, accelerated by both increasing technological innovation and now the global pandemic, and fuelled by continued cost-cutting, debt reduction, and increasing precarity of employment in the sector. Of particular concern is the threat to written journalism and public interest news where areas of investigative journalism and democracy reporting are seen to be most at risk. Yet, an independent media is seen as central to 'a properly functioning society and democracy' in that it 'supports participation in local and national society and safeguards the public-interest by reporting on the activities of the powerful and the workings of the state' (Cairncross, 2019, p. 14); its civic function (Public Policy Forum, 2017).

On the one hand, commentators put forward the view that online news and social media feeds, blogs, forums, and influencers, enable widening access to and democratisation of the media. At the same time, there is distrust of (increasingly, social) media and many people worry about the ability to spot fake news, avoid clickbait and algorithm pushed headlines, and do not know how to verify the sources of information they find online (Edelman, 2021). In the US, coalitions,

associations and partnerships are seen as increasingly important in countering these concerns by offering alternatives to large corporate online platforms and favouring a growing focus on community-centred approaches (Jenkins & Graves, 2019) 'for the betterment of their organisations, their product and their audiences' (Stonbely, 2017, p. 17).

In the UK and elsewhere, there has been a growing number of co-operative and non-profit platforms such as *Bureau Local*, *The Ferret*, *Bristol Cable*, *Propublica*, *Institute for Nonprofit News*, *Groupe Capitales Médias*, which support open and collaborative reporting. There has been renewal of 'hyperlocal' sites and publications such as the *Meteor* (Manchester, UK), *Sheffield Co-operator* (UK), *Prairie Dog* (Saskatchewan, Canada), and magazine formats such as *Stir* (UK) and *Médor* (Belgium) There are still others like *Co-op News*, *New Internationalist*, and *Calverts* with a rich history of journalism and publishing. Equally, there are sector specific co-operative publications that nevertheless support a wider distribution of co-operative related news - *Co-operative Grocer Magazine* (US) and *The Japan Agricultural News*. Increasingly too, are film and digital media co-operatives (e.g., Blake House Filmmakers' Co-operative), platform co-operatives for publishing for literary fiction (e.g., Dactyle Foundation) and marketing co-operatives for authors (e.g., Gritstone Publishing Co-operative).

If, as Boyle (2013, p. 45) suggests, 'necessity is the mother of co-operation', then we can learn from the past to inform current and future practice and we need to consider what are the conditions, ideas, and practices that can support stronger, co-operative journalism and media.

This special issue invites papers exploring the past, present and future of co-operative-owned media and media about co-operatives. Topics for papers may include, but are not restricted to, the following themes/ questions:

- Does the co-operative movement need a dedicated publication? What is the purpose, role and value of an independent media channel in raising awareness of and promoting co-operation, of communicating co-operative principles and activities?
- How does co-operative journalism counter media bias and neglect of co-operatives? How does it make co-operative sectors visible? How are co-operatives treated in the media?
- How can reporting on co-operatives locally, nationally, and internationally offer a looking glass to co-operatives to reflect on their role and impact in communities?
- Can a co-operative platform model of publishing help small, independent presses, and authors?
- How do co-operative models of organising and co-operative principles support the social and democratic role of the media?
- What is the appeal of co-operative or employee-owned organisations for independent journalists?
- What can we learn from worker recuperated enterprises of e.g., Argentina, France, Uruguay?
- Can co-operatives and employee-owned models help to recover failing media outlets?
- How has the pandemic accelerated moves to digital and on-line platforms and with what implications for co-operative media?
- How effective is social media as a route to citizen journalism? What are the opportunities and tensions between online influencers and expert co-operative journalism?

- Examination of key historical and contemporary contributors to co-operative news - King, The Bamfords, Holyoake
- Research, case studies and profiles of media-based co-operatives internationally - print, publishing, film and video production, digital and social media

The call is open to all academics, practitioners, co-operators.

Papers/reviews should follow the author guidelines for the *Journal*:

<https://ukscs.coop/journal-of-co-operative-studies/submission-guidelines/> and can be submitted immediately.

Deadlines for submissions: July 5, 2021

You may also submit a **pre-submission inquiry** (an abstract of between 500-800 words) if you want to check its suitability for the special issue before submitting a full paper. Pre-submission must be submitted before **31 March 2021**.

All submissions should be emailed to: editor@ukscs.coop and include 'Submission for Special Issue' in the subject line.

References

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