

Editorial

The final issue of the *Journal of Co-operative Studies* for 2021 ends on both a note of sorrow and one of subdued celebration, which we know will be experienced by all of us in the 'co-operative world'. In June, it was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Johnston Birchall, a great friend and champion of the co-operative movement. Johnston served as editor of the *Journal* (from 1995). He was instrumental in changing the face and content of the *Journal* from a news and member-oriented bulletin to an academic-practitioner journal with international reach.

We also wish to celebrate his academic life and legacy and our first issue of 2022 will include a more in-depth tribute acknowledging his considerable contribution to the field. He has left us with a hugely valuable body of work that will continue to influence and inform co-operators and co-operative researchers. It is very rare that we publish an article in the *Journal* that does not cite one of more of Johnston Birchall's many publications whether on the history of the co-operative movement, co-operative values and principles, resilience, governance, policy, or specific member-owned organisations — there's a lot of rich work from which to choose and learn. In his own words from his ResearchGate profile, "I have always been fascinated by the idea of member-owned, as opposed to investor-owned, businesses. It seems to me that the co-operative business model is a serious alternative to corporate capitalism" — it is a fascination and passion that has inspired many, and he will be greatly missed.

Towards the end of this year was another significant event in UK if not the wider co-operative landscape — the 150th anniversary of *Co-operative News*. To mark this landmark event, we — with the help of guest editors and contributors — have put together a special supplementary issue on journalism and co-operation to be published alongside our regular third issue.

Turning to this winter issue, we have some recurring themes on member control, power, trust and accountability. There is a mix of research and practitioner papers providing much food for thought and different perspectives from different industry sectors and standpoints.

Our first paper from Ghauri et al., focuses on awareness of and adherence to co-operative principles. The authors describe a paradox in that on the one hand the co-operative values and principles are fundamental to co-operative identity and operation and on the other that the "presence and adherence" to them is weak (p. 7). In this paper, the authors explore the congruence between the "talk" and the "walk" through interviews with long-serving members, managers and executives in four large Australian co-operatives. Attention is given to greater participation and engagement of members when individual and organisational values align, the potential for improved organisational performance, and exemplifying the 'co-operative difference' in long-term strategies and decision-making. The relationships between members and the co-operative proved to be somewhat transactional, which may be partly due to the type of co-operatives included in the study. Nevertheless, the relationships were built on trust and reciprocity between members and managers/executives, which provided a sense of membership ownership and control and, as shown in Barraud-Diddier et al.'s (2012) study of agricultural co-operatives, "trust is the starting point" (p. 16), which can help to explain positive behaviours (commitment and participation) in co-operatives. The authors conclude with suggestions for future research.

The second paper also considers the differences between investor-owned firms and co-operatives as well as the issue of convergence also present in Ghauri et al.'s research paper. As part of the argument presented in this paper, Altman suggests that adherence to co-operative principles does not necessarily mean that co-operatives will be self-regulating regarding price and quality of outputs, or in decisions taking that would be in the general interest of co-operative members. The focus of the paper is therefore to consider the conditions under which self-regulation occurs. To do this, Altman considers multistakeholder co-operatives (such

as U.S. co-operative rural power suppliers) as vehicles for self-regulation. The model and argument put forward makes the case that “certain types of co-operatives can efficiently and effectively self-regulate and can do so in a more equitable fashion as compared to the state regulating investor-owned firms or nationalising these firms as a means of regulating them” (p. 24). Central to this is the quality of co-operative governance, adherence to co-operative principles, and key aspects of accountability, transparency, and trust.

The third paper continues themes of trust, control, and multistakeholder perspectives through research conducted in the UK to explore the experiences of independent living and personal assistance from the perspectives of both people with disabilities requiring personal assistance and people employed to provide assistance. In this paper, Graby explores some aspects of how personal assistance could be “changed and improved for those on both sides of the relationship” (p. 34). Drawing on practice examples from personal assistance co-operatives in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, Graby suggests some alignment between co-operative values and principles and those of the Disabled People’s Movement specifically, but not only, regarding collective social responsibility married with self-determination and autonomy. From this standpoint, Graby suggests that co-operatives and multi-stakeholder co-operatives in particular, have potential in resolving some of the tensions and practicalities surrounding power, choice and control in personal assistance as well as removing some of the more onerous administrative and regulatory tasks of directly employing personal assistants. However, multi-stakeholder co-operatives are seen as complementary to public service provision, not as cost-cutting alternatives or as wholesale solutions. While they might provide differentiation of roles between legal employer (co-operative) and “boss” or “work leader” (disabled person) — shared ownership, and user control — asymmetries between the interests of different stakeholder groups would need to be accounted for in multistakeholder co-operative governance and operation. Graby suggests a possible solution in weighting decision-making to reflect the power balance of the personal assistance relationship in the development of co-operative alternatives to personal assistance provision in the UK.

The next three papers have been selected from those initially submitted for the 52nd annual UK Society for Co-operative Studies conference. The theme of the conference was politics, policies, and practice of co-operative movements acknowledging that even with agreed values and principles, co-operatives have always wrestled with a range of political agendas, policy environments, and management practices. Workshops were organised around specific themes: co-operatives, capital, and accountability; policies and politics of co-operatives; and what works in co-operatives. The papers have been chosen by the conference organisers and UKSCS members, Francesca Gagliardi, Elisavet Mantzari, and Rory Ridley Duff.

The first of the three papers, from Adderley et al., looks at whether there is a need for a specific accounting and reporting framework for co-operatives in the UK. Building on the idea that mainstream accounting and accountability practices fail to take into account co-operative differences in relation to the values and principles, the authors suggest the need for a more systematic approach through the development of a Statement of Recommended Practice (akin to the UK charities SORP in the UK). Adderley et al. note that because, in the UK, there is a certain flexibility as to their legal structures, co-operatives look to the uniting aspects of their values and principles, suggesting that the development and use of a specific SORP for co-operatives could add “greater clarity on co-operative definition and purpose” (p. 46) both for members and the wider public. The paper outlines the work of a working group responsible for developing a co-operative SORP and points to the background work by the Centre of Excellence in Accounting and reporting at Saint Mary’s University in Canada. The paper clearly sets out the complexities of report for co-operatives as opposed to investor owned firms, including the importance of non-financial reporting. It concludes with a proposal for Co-operatives UK to act as lead organisation for the development of a UK Co-operatives SORP.

The second of the three papers is a short paper that describes the development to date of a new co-operative bank for Wales: Banc Cambria. The initiative has the support of the Welsh Government and in this paper, Bird chronicles the early conceptualisation of a publicly owned

bank and the ideas behind the project. The project took inspiration from the work of Ellen Brown, founder of the Public Banking Institute and champion of community banking even though the decision was not to emulate the state-owned North Dakota model. Instead, a co-operative mutual model was preferred following the Community Savings Bank association's 'bank-in-a-box' model. There's still a ways to go in sorting out the overall governance and practicalities of the Banc, although as we go to print, the Welsh Government has confirmed its intent to develop full retail banking services with a planned launch for Banc Cambria in 2023.

The final paper from the 2020 online conference is a short opinion paper. In this think piece, Parnell argues that the practical and important essence of self-help and mutual action, which the author terms 'genuine co-operatives' and self help enterprises are being overwhelmed by the largely academic interest in and all-encompassing concept of the social and solidarity economy (SEE). SEE is, however, a term that has been adopted internationally and inscribed in national laws as well as for some being rooted in labour organising and community development (for example, the work of Chantier de l'économie sociale in Québec). Yet, Parnell draws on his personal experience to make a case for the disaggregation of 'incompatible organisations', to avoid co-operative capture and diversion of resources away from self-help enterprises, primarily co-operatives, credit unions, building societies, friendly societies, community enterprises, and mutuals. As with other opinion pieces, we encourage further contemplation and debate, and welcome submissions on the issues raised.

To round off this issue, we have a contribution that provides an opportunity for Rose Marley, chief executive officer, Co-operatives UK, to reflect on her first 100 days in office. Rose — whose eclectic career has thus far spanned the arts, digital media, industry, social enterprise and community action — joined Co-operatives UK in January 2021, replacing Ed Mayo who, after over ten years in the role, moved to become CEO of a London-based charity. Wistow's interview provides the space for Rose to tell the reader about her background, her passion, and her commitment to realising the power of co-operatives. Her words underpin the aim of the Journal in linking theory and practice, and Rose comments on the need for research grounded in practice demonstrating, for example, how co-operatives make a difference by distributing power; distributing wealth.

Finally, François Deblangy provides a review of Worker co-operatives in India, by Kerswell and Pratap (2019), which details findings from a series of fieldwork studies carried out across India.

We would like to thank subscribers, authors, reviewers, editorial teams for their support and contributions to the Journal content, publishing and printing, and distribution, and to wish everyone best wishes for the new year and 2022.

Dr. Jan Myers
Editor

Reference

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