



UKSCS Annual Conference 2022

Consumer co-operatives: past, present and future

UKSCS is back with an in-person conference for 2022. The conference will be held on the 26th-28th August at the University of Lincoln. More details on registering for the conference will be made available in the coming months, meanwhile please see the below call for papers.

Conference co-chairs:

Dr Francesca Gagliardi, University of Hertfordshire
Prof Rory Ridley-Duff, Sheffield Hallam University

Call for presentations, papers, panels and practical activities

The UKSCS 2022 Annual Conference provides a forum for scholars and practitioners to advance the conversation on the history, current perspectives and future direction of consumer co-operation. We also welcome contributions on the position/contribution of consumer co-operation in the wider co-operative movement at regional, national or international level.

We invite submissions of proposals for presentations, papers, panels and practical activities that focus on consumer co-operatives. Proposals can be oriented towards generating debates and engaging members, facilitating experiential learning activities or reporting the findings of research studies.

We particularly welcome contributions by practitioners who wish to share developments within their co-operative enterprise and/or network on:

- the emergence of new thinking;
- how new thinking has been applied to accounting, management, marketing, governance and other issues in co-operatives;
- how new practices have impacted on consumer co-operative members but also on members of producer and worker co-operatives, and other organisations who organise as societies for mutual benefit.

Consumer co-operatives

Consumer co-operative organisations are key players in the co-operative movement, both nationally and globally, not only in terms of turnover but also with regards to number of members, as well as various other economic and social indicators. Existing histories of consumer co-operatives tend to narrate the evolution of these organisations in a pattern of rise and decline. On one hand, this narrative captures the development of most consumer co-operatives across several countries. It is, for example, descriptive of the British consumer co-operative movement in the pre- and post-war period. On the other hand, however, the rise and decline tale tends to neglect the consumer co-operatives that managed not only to defend but also to strengthen their position during that period. An example of this comes from the Norwegian consumer co-operative movement (Ekberg, 2017). Exploring the interplay between the overall development of consumer co-operatives and significant

changes in the competitive and societal environments in which these organisations operate is therefore of relevance for both practitioners and scholars.

In the UK, there is a particularly strong tradition of consumer co-operation not just because of the early successes of the Rochdale Pioneers, but also because political actors in the late C19/early C20 (particularly Beatrice and Sydney Webb) actively promoted consumer over worker co-operatives. From the end of the C19 up to WW2, British consumer co-operation grew rapidly, reaching a level of market dominance now enjoyed by retailers such as Tesco's (Wilson et al., 2013). However, after WW2, supermarkets based on capitalist principles usurped the market domination of co-operative retailers, triggering mergers that reduced the number of independent consumer co-ops. Following the Myners report in 2014, the largest co-operative retailer weakened the principle of democratic member control by increasing the power of managerial / board level influence over board level appointments through new screening processes, and reducing the number of member-nominated board places.

However, alongside periods of consolidation and decline in co-operative retailing, there have been new cycles of expansion (and contraction) across multiple sectors. According to the Association of British Credit Unions (ABCUL), credit union membership has grown 41% in the UK in the last decade (see ABCUL, 2022), and the World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU) reports levels of market penetration near or above 50% in many developing and developed economies (e.g. Canada, 42%; Nepal, 46%; the USA, 56%; Togo, 62%; the Caribbean, 66%, and notably Ireland, 100% - See WOCCU, 2020). There has also been expansion and contraction in sectors like energy, particularly in Denmark (Wierling et al., 2018); schools, notably the UK (Thorpe, 2011); and sports (Jones, 1989).

Consumer co-operation in the UK remains dynamic, introducing telephone and internet services through for example, The Phone Co-op (<https://broadband.yourcoop.coop/>) and CoTech network (<https://www.coops.tech/>). After passing the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, new community benefit societies evolved to support local activities, protecting postal services, pubs and opening corner shops. Larger co-op retailers continue to develop Fairtrade through new purchasing strategies. New forms of member engagement have supported campaigns against modern slavery, climate change and loneliness.

References

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- Wierling, A., Schwantiz, V.J.; Zeiß, J., Bout, C., Candelise, C., Gilcrease, W. & Sterling Gregg, J. (2018). Statistical evidence on the role of energy cooperatives for the energy transition in European countries. *Sustainability*, 19(9), 3339 (1-25). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10093339>
- Wilson, J.F., Webster, A. & Vorberg-Rugh, R. (2013). *Building co-operation: A business history of The Co-operative Group, 1863-2013*. Oxford University Press.
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Tracks in the UKSCS 2022 Conference

We call for presentations, papers, panels and activities that advance our understanding of the issues covered in this year's conference tracks, as described below.

T1 – The context of consumer co-operation

The first track addresses the context of consumer co-operation and covers issues such as:

- 1) The policies and politics of consumer co-operation;
- 2) The response of consumer co-operatives to the changing nature of work;
- 3) The issue of capital accumulation in consumer co-operatives;
- 4) Inter-cooperative structures supporting consumer co-operatives at regional, national and international levels.

T2 – Consumer co-operatives across time, space and sectors

The second track looks at consumer co-operatives from a temporal, spatial and sectorial perspective. Examples of the issues covered include:

- 1) Consumer co-operatives across regions and/or countries;
- 2) Consumer co-operatives across economic sectors;
- 3) Historical accounts of consumer co-operation;
- 4) Future challenges and opportunities for consumer co-operatives and co-operators.

T3 – Lessons learnt: what works in a consumer co-operative

The third track focuses on the identification of effective co-operative practices, including:

- 1) What best practices can be found in real life consumer co-operative examples?
- 2) What works in (and for) consumer co-operatives? (i.e. what should they do, and who should they do it for?)
- 3) How can young people be persuaded to form cooperatives rather than (other) enterprises?

T4 – Open Track

Proposals for presentations, paper panels or practical activities that do not fit naturally into one of the above tracks/themes, should be submitted to the Open Track. This will give maximum flexibility to make a presentation, discuss work or arrange impromptu discussion throughout the conference.

How to make submissions to the UKSCS 2022 Conference

We welcome proposals from both scholars and practitioners engaged in the study of co-operative movements. Please prepare an abstract (maximum 750 words) that proposes a presentation, paper, panel or practical activity and submit it by **17 JUNE 2022**.

Submissions are made online at:

<https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=2022ukscsconference>

If you have submitted previously, login with the same account details.

If you are submitting for the first time, click 'Create an account' and follow the instructions to confirm your account.

After logging in or registering your account, choose 'Enter as an author' to make a conference submission.

If you have any problems submitting online, please send your submission directly to the conference co-chairs at: f.gagliardi@herts.ac.uk and/or r.ridley-duff@shu.ac.uk

Ensure you provide contact details for presenters/authors, a title, abstract (or summary) and keywords. At least one presenter/author will need to register for the conference for the submission to be accepted.

Please do not make a submission if you have no plans to attend the conference, which will be held at the University of Lincoln.

Accepted conference proposals have the opportunity to be considered for publication in an issue of the Journal of Co-operative Studies. Should you wish for your accepted proposal to be considered for this, please submit a full paper by 15 August 2022.

Abstract format (suggested):

Please organise your proposal/abstract so that it provides details that can be peer-reviewed (maximum 750 words):

- Title (for your presentation, paper, panel or practical activity);
- Corresponding author;
- A short statement about the issue/question your submission addresses;
- A summary of the approach you are taking to study the issue/question you raise;
- A summary of your findings and/or contribution to knowledge;
- References to previous papers/studies (max 6).

If you wish to upload a full paper with your abstract, please set the filename to:

UKSCS2022-FirstAuthorName-StreamNumber-SubmissionType.pdf

Examples:

UKSCS2022-Green-T2-Paper.pdf

UKSCS2022-Plum-T3-Presentation.pdf

We look forward to your submission.