

2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the UK Society for Co-operative Studies and likewise the Journal. To celebrate this achievement, our Winter issue will feature a retrospective of some of the articles published over the last 50 years.

We are also making available all back issues of the Society for Co-operative Studies Bulletin and the Journal on the UKSCS website — it is a significant job as each article has been individually scanned and saved as a PDF and once we have been able to upload each copy on to the website we will have a public archive from 1967. We will provide a flavour of the first 10 years or so in the next issue. Meanwhile you can visit the archive (still in development) at www.ukscs.coop.

In this, the first issue of our anniversary year, we present a special issue comprising papers from the 3rd annual conference of the Co-operative College, and a special thanks to our guest editorial team for putting together an eclectic and interesting mix of papers.

Jan Myers — Editor

Guest Editorial

The UK Co-operative College's Co-operative Education and Research Conference is always a stimulating event giving attendees the opportunity to join in the conversation, increase their knowledge and network with a broad range of co-operative thinkers, and 2017 was no different. The theme of the conference was 'Learning for Co-operative Transformations' with a focus on:

- Young people
- Communities
- Society

The two-day conference was packed with content, ranging from panels, workshops, presentations and plenary sessions. On the first day, conference participants chose from a wide selection of topics, from credentialling co-operative character to housing co-operatives as learning spaces, co-operative leadership in education, and co-operative renewal and place-making. Sessions on the second day covered different aspects of co-operative social care, co-operative higher education, co-production in schools, co-operatives and decent work, mutuals and credit unions, co-operatives and the solidarity economy and co-operative youth engagement. This special issue of the *Journal for Co-operative Studies* reflects the themes of the conference and includes 3 peer-reviewed papers and 4 commentary pieces. The issue is concluded with a review, by John Maddocks, of Münkner's book detailing the work of the Institute for Co-operation in Developing Countries (University of Marburg, Germany) and specifically the setting up and co-ordination of a degree course on the theory of co-operation and co-operative science.

In the first peer-reviewed paper, *Learning in, from and for co-operative life in Rural Malta: two case studies*, Mario Cardona gives a fascinating account of how two rural co-operatives have enabled people to work and learn together to preserve their right to a rural life in the face of competition and external decision-making. In addition, co-operation has provided alternative learning spaces which have allowed co-operative members to develop both as individuals and a collective, gaining political and social influence as well as educating members of the public and changing external perceptions.

Our second peer-reviewed paper, David Backer's *Making the co-operative school a challenge alternative: Social Reproduction Theory Revisited* argues that there needs to be more of an explicit emphasis that co-operative schools can prepare students to participate in alternative

economies as adults. He recommends that in order for co-operative schools to become real challenge alternatives to the social reproduction of the dominant capitalist hegemony, these schools need to progress from merely promoting values to production and making the structural link between co-operative education and the co-operative economy.

In this issue's final peer reviewed paper from Anita Mangan and Steve French, *Small is beautiful? Exploring the challenges faced by trade union supported credit unions*, the authors discuss how the difficulties faced by many people in accessing affordable credit reflects the limitations of often small and under-resourced credit unions. Examining 3 case studies, the paper recognises the many positive attributes of credit unions, but also outlines the reasons behind their limited development and the legal restrictions they work under, as well as the problems caused by the restricted scale and ability to effectively recoup repayments. They argue that whilst trade unions promote credit unions to their members as a means to reduce financial exclusion, there are tensions that would benefit from a greater understanding through further research.

In the first of our shorter articles *Confessions and Reputations*, Chris Dankwa's think piece uses the analogy of Schrödinger's Cat to illustrate her concern that mutual societies are not as transparent as they should be. Her argument is that, unlike some other organisational forms, they risk losing public trust as they are not legally obliged to display financial information on an open public register, such as Companies House or the Charity Commission. Our second short article, Jo Taylor's *The Development of a Women's Economy in North Syria* charts the remarkable expansion of women's rights and agency in North Kurdistan and emphasises that this offers important learning for the UK. She succinctly captures the historic and political context for this move towards a new form of pluralistic direct democracy that is underpinned by a co-operative economic system, and shows how women are coming to the forefront of a 'mature and reflective society'. The third short article comes from Mandy Tilson-Viney and Adrian Roper, *Home care — a systems thinking approach*, and underlines the need for a new approach to care which uses co-operation and co-production. This they suggest can improve people's experience, reduce needless waste and move away from a 'command and control system' that result in poor outcomes for commissioners, workers and those receiving care. In our final shorter article, *Transforming a social care charity into a multi-stakeholder co-operative: some insights from Cartrefi Cymru Co-operative*, Adrian Roper adds further context to the previous article and charts the ongoing conversion of a top-down structure into a member-led bottom-up co-operative. The article discusses both the legislative and economic context. Roper emphasises how giving voice, control and access to power to the people they support, workers and the local community underlines commitment to co-operative values and principles. He strongly argues that care co-operatives do not have to mimic the competitive for-profit sector and can offer a meaningful alternative to the 'market rat-sack' where a race to the bottom is inevitable.

All these papers and short articles demonstrate how co-operatives are increasingly relevant to reducing the widening inequalities in our society, whilst simultaneously underlining how much more needs to be done to increase their visibility as an alternative to the dominant neo-liberal paradigm. The movement needs to be bolder in asserting the 'co-operative difference' and be unafraid to tackle individualistic approaches that leave people isolated and disenfranchised. The examples in both Cardona's and Taylor's articles show how the power of the collective has not only preserved a traditional way of life, but also reinvigorated and united a community with new resolve to build new enterprises for the future, proving that co-operatives are an agile and innovative driver for change.

We would like to thank all the authors for their contributions, both to the conference and to this special issue of the journal. It has been a privilege to take part in the guest editorship of this special issue, and we look forward in anticipation to next year's conference.

Dr. Amanda Benson, Dr. Cilla Ross and Dr. Sarah Aildred from the Co-operative College.