



**UNIVERSITÀ
DI TRENTO**

**Dipartimento di
Economia e Management**



Cooperative enterprises facing the new socio-economic environment

Worker takeovers, circular economy, digitalization

Monday 12 September and Tuesday 13 September 2022

University of Trento, Departments of Economics and Management

Via Inama 5, Trento (Italy)

In collaboration with the University of Ferrara, Department of Economics and Management.
Organizers: Ermanno Tortia (Trento University), Marco Lomuscio (Ph.D. candidate - Trento University), Massimiliano Mazzanti (Ferrara University), Asia Guerreschi (Ph.D. candidate - Ferrara University)

Contacts

Dipartimento di Economia e Management
via Inama, 5 - 38122 Trento
email: adm.dem@unitn.it

For practical details, see the attached program of the workshop. For additional information about the workshop, the venues and the accommodation, please contact local organizers Ermanno Tortia (ermanno.tortia@unitn.it) and Marco Lomuscio (marco.lomuscio@unitn.it)

The workshop

The recent economic and financial crisis, along with climate change and the pandemic, have drastically altered the socio-economic context in which we live, thus stimulating both economic and non-economic organizations for alternative coping strategies and proactive responses to this new environment. This altered context calls for new analyses and tools that go beyond what has traditionally been used in the study of non-conventional enterprises. Among the main challenges on the table are the preservation of jobs in business activities in distress, the need for new production processes to address climate change and SDGs, and the use of new technologies and innovations, among which digitization plays a central role in the transition to a green and social economy. Cooperatives have proved flexible and resilient organizational models throughout crises thanks to the involvement of multiple and diverse stakeholders, and the proactive adaptation to new conditions. However, challenges still loom and the effective implementation of proactive measures and appropriate organizational responses is still at stake. The Trento workshop opens to young scholars and their research initiatives and calls for contributions at the leading edge of scientific research.

Program of the workshop

Monday, September 12^{ve}

VENUE: Conference Room – Department of Economics and Management, Via Rosmini, 44, Trento

10:00-10:15 - Welcome and official opening

Ermanno Tortia, Massimiliano Mazzanti, Marco Lomuscio, Asia Guerreschi

10:15-11:15. Keynote speech

Ignacio Bretos Fernández (online). Workplace democracy and emancipation in the cooperativisation of capitalist firms: Some evidence from Mondragon

Discussant: Paola Raffaelli

11:15-11:30 – Coffee break

1.1. Worker cooperatives and worker buyouts in Italy and France

11:30-13:15 - Chair: Marco Lomuscio

Andrea Cori. *Worker cooperatives in Italy. A snapshot from Legacoop data*

Discussant: Marco Lomuscio

Marco Lomuscio. *Cooperative strategies for business regeneration: Italian worker takeovers*

Discussant: Roger Spear (online)

Thibault Mirabel (online). *Do sunk costs nip worker-owned firms in the bud?*

Discussant: Ermanno Tortia

13:15-14:45 – Lunch

1.2. Cooperatives in the community

14:45-16:30 - Chair: Michele Bianchi

Michele Bianchi. *Italian Community Co-operatives: Features of Sustainable Community Development*

Discussant: Valerii Saenko

Valerii Saenko. *Good intentions vs competitive edge. Acknowledging a cooperative's successes, but more work needs to be done*

Discussant: Michele Bianchi

Elif Tugba Simsek (online). *New Cooperatives Based on the Solidarity Economy-insights from Hungary*

Discussant: Cian McMahon (online)

16:30-16:45 – Coffee break

16:45-17:45. Keynote speech

Paola Raffaelli. Political engagement and activism in workers' cooperatives: A performative view of solidarity

Discussant: Thibault Mirabel (online)

SOCIAL DINNER

19:30 to 22:00

Tuesday, September, 13th

VENUE: Kessler Conference Room – Department of Sociology and Social Research, Via Verdi, 26, Trento

9:00-10:00. Keynote speech

David Ellerman. The Coop-ESOP: A structure for gradual worker buyouts

Discussant: Ignacio Bretos

1.3. Worker cooperatives, productivity and the circular economy

10:00-11:10 - Chair: Asia Guerreschi

Asia Guerreschi. *Integrated innovations for the circular economy and decarbonization in production cooperatives for environmental, economic, and social sustainability*

Discussant: Camilla Carabini

Camilla Carabini. *Cooperative financial innovation against the Fetich of Liquidity*

Discussant: Asia Guerreschi

11:10-11:25 – Coffee break

1.4. Self-managed cooperatives and humanistic governance: case studies

11:25-13:10 - Chair: Francesca Martinelli

Francesca Martinelli. *Pegasus company: the self-management cooperative tackling job insecurity*

Discussant: Aingeru Ruiz

Cian McMahon (online). *Humanistic governance in worker cooperatives: unlocking collective capacities*

Discussant: Elif Tugba Simsek (online)

Aingeru Ruiz (online). *Regeneration process in large cooperatives: a case study of Mondragon*

Discussant: Francesca Martinelli

13:10-14:40 – Lunch

1.5. Worker cooperatives in the digital economy

14:40-16:25 - Chair: Pietro Ghirlanda

Federico Piovesan. *Platform cooperatives: dilemmas and challenges of building an alternative platform economy*

Discussant: Pietro Ghirlanda

Pietro Ghirlanda. *An Alternative Organisational Model for the Future of the Digital Economy: A Literature Review on Platform Cooperativism*

Discussant: Federico Piovesan

Francesco Gentilini. *Workers' buyouts and the subject of labour*

Discussant: Marco Lomuscio

16:25-16:40 – Coffee break

16:40-17:15. Concluding roundtable and remarks: Ermanno Tortia, Massimiliano Mazzanti, Paola Raffaelli, Ignacio Bretos Fernández, David Ellerman, Roger Spear (online)



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Ermanno Tortia

ermanno.tortia@unitn.it

BIO: Ermanno Tortia is an associate professor at the University of Trento, Department of Economics and Management. His research activity focuses on institutionalist enterprise theory, organizational studies, personnel economics and HRM, applied to research on third sector organizations (social enterprises, nonprofit organizations and cooperative enterprises). He also does research on local economic development (development of local systems and welfare). He is head of the DELOS (Development Economics and Social Systems) PhD program in Trento, where he teaches Institutional Economics. He collaborates with the SusTEEM (Sustainability: Economics, Environment, Management and Society) doctoral program and Euricse (European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises) in Trento. Finally, he is associate editor of the Sustainability journal (MDPI, <https://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability>) and JEOD (Journal of Entrepreneurial and Organizational Diversity, <https://www.euricse.eu/jeod/>).



Marco Lomuscio

marco.lomuscio@unitn.it - marco.lomuscio@unifi.it

BIO: Marco Lomuscio is a PhD candidate in Development Economics and Local Systems, a joint PhD programme of the Universities of Trento and Florence, Italy. He holds a BA in Philosophy and an MSc in Sociology. He specialized in economic sociology, organizational studies and regional economics, and he is interested in cooperatives, employee ownership and worker takeovers. He was visiting PhD fellow at the Euricse Institute in 2021 and at the Copenhagen Business School - EGB department in 2022. He worked at the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) as a trade union official and social security consultant.

ABSTRACT: In Italy, job-threatened workers facing companies' crises have the chance to safeguard employment levels, productive know-how and companies' assets from their dissolution. Indeed, workers can leverage cooperative, self-managed organizations to take over distressed or insolvent companies, and turn them into democratic enterprises, while achieving remarkable economic and financial performances. However, despite decades of innovative and effective recovery experiences in emerging socio-economic crises in Italy, the entrepreneurial, organizational and managerial mechanisms of worker-led business takeovers are under-researched and, partially, unclear. Via a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this research sheds light on the praxis of converting investor-owned enterprises into cooperatives. The research delves into patterns, rationales, resources and governance schemes of companies going collective, and unfolds how these collective undertakings ground in the local socio-economic fabric to access the necessary resources, support and solidarity. Findings confirm the potentiality of worker-led business takeovers for the survival and development of companies, territories and communities in crisis.

Keynote speakers



Ignacio Bretos Fernández

ibretos@unizar.es

BIO: Ignacio Bretos is Assistant Professor at the Department of Business Organization and Management, University of Zaragoza. He received his PhD in Business Economics and Management from the University of Zaragoza (Spain) in 2017. He is also a research member at the GEZKI Institute of Cooperative Law and Social Economy attached to the University of the Basque Country. Ignacio's research primarily explores the intersection of business and society, with particular interest in the role of social enterprises and Social Economy organizations in the promotion of workplace democracy, social inclusion and sustainable development.

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the cooperativisation of two capitalist firms belonging to the well-known Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (MCC). Drawing on an interpretative study based on two waves of data collection, we had a unique opportunity to trace over ten years the development and implications of these cooperativisation projects from an actor-centred perspective. Our findings reveal that the change to worker ownership did not automatically lead to greater workplace democracy and workers' emancipation. Indeed, the early development of the cooperativisation projects was marked by great division, conflict, and workers' dissatisfaction. However, our second wave of data collection uncovered significant changes at the firms after about a decade operating under the co-op formula. Worker-members reported greater levels of autonomy, self-management, and identification with the co-op culture. Informal learning processes taking place both within the co-ops and through inter-cooperation, as well as the institutionalisation of education and training in the co-op values, were found to be paramount to the formation of a co-op identity among worker-members and their active involvement in decision making.



Paola Raffaelli

paola.raffaelli@fek.lu.se

BIO: For the last 10 years, Paola Raffaelli has been researching the social economy –first focused on cooperatives, and then expanded her interest into voluntary organisations, community organisations and charities in different settings in Europe and Latin America. After gaining her PhD from University of Roehampton, London, United Kingdom in 2018, she worked in Copenhagen Business School, and joined Sten K. Johnson Centre for Entrepreneurship, Lund University as a post-doctorate fellow. In her current research project, she studies collective economic innovations in the social economy, particularly in the form of community currencies.

ABSTRACT: In this paper, we discuss political solidarity as fundamental characteristic of cooperative identity, which holds a transformative force that may trigger and sustain resistance and inspire social change. In particular we focus on different performances of solidarity, as these were observed in two workers' cooperatives in Argentina and the UK, to articulate how cooperatives enact novel forms of mobilizing alternative forms of organizing, and spaces of hope. The article proposes that the atomization and individuality fostered by neoliberalism result in romanticized notions of solidarity and limit cooperatives' capacity to develop an effective and collective response to market-driven organizing. As the antithesis of this, we provide evidence that cooperatives' transformative potential lies on their capacity to partake in broader social movements that resist dominant economic relations and strive for alternative futures.



David Ellerman

david@ellerman.org

BIO: David Ellerman has written about the theory and practice of worker cooperatives and other forms of democratic worker ownership for 50 years. In the late 1970s, he co-founded the Industrial Cooperative Association that adapted the Mondragon model of a cooperative to the American legal system. In the early 90s, he was the founder and President of EOS/Ljubljana d.o.o. in Ljubljana, Slovenia that promoted the privatization of companies in Eastern Europe with substantial worker ownership. In 2020 he returned to live in Slovenia and co-founded the

Institute for Economic Democracy. He is the co-author of the generic Coop-ESOP model currently being implemented in Slovenia and that can be implemented (without special legislation) anywhere with standard cooperative and company law. His writing on economic democracy and democratic firms can be downloaded from his website: www.ellerman.org as well as book-sites such as www.memoryoftheworld.org

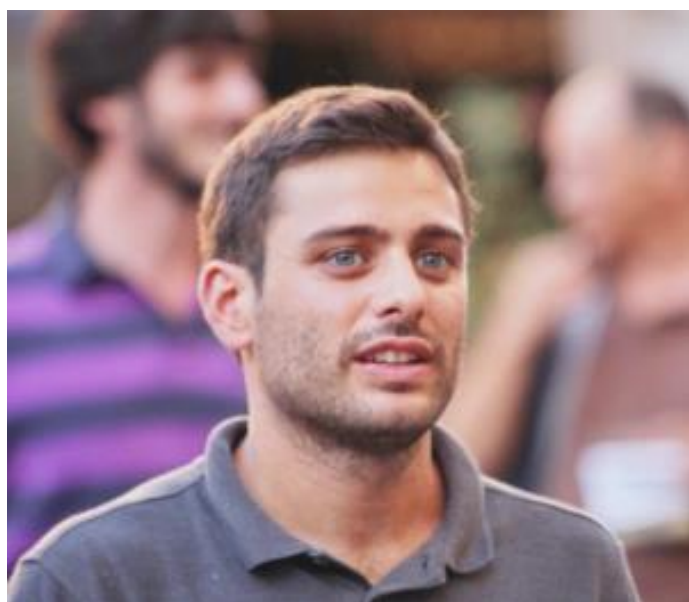
ABSTRACT: There are a number of barriers to the usual approach to worker buyouts such as: lack of a standard model; organizing workers to buy into the buyout; problem in raising capital for a 100% cooperative startup or buyout; entry/exit problems: new workers buying in and exiting workers being bought out; risk problem if workers have savings and current job tied up in one entity.

The Institute for Economic Democracy (IED) has developed and is implementing a Coop-ESOP model for gradual worker buyouts that addresses these problems. The model is based on the American Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) but makes several crucial improvements. Firstly, the US ESOP holds the shares in a separate trust where the employees in the underlying company are only beneficiaries (as if they were children) so the Coop-ESOP replaces the trust with a new type of cooperative, an Employee Ownership Cooperative. Secondly, the US ESOP is a pension plan so the employees don't actually see any cash from their ownership until they near retirement so the Coop-ESOP model uses an innovative "rollover plan" so the oldest shares in the employee accounts are bought back after a few (3-5) years and redistributed to all current employees (including new employees after a probationary period and excluding retired workers). The Coop-ESOP retains the crucial aspects of the US ESOP: all permanent employees are automatically included; the employees have individual share accounts in the ESOP (not common or social ownership); the company finances the buyout of the old owners so the employees do not pay for their shares out of payroll or their savings; and the buyout can be financed by seller's credit (getting paid back over a period of years) or by a loan secured by the credit of the company (not the employee savings or pledges).

When the Coop-ESOP's share of ownership in the underlying company reaches 100%, then the companies can be combined into a Mondragon-style worker cooperative. Even without special legislation, the Coop-ESOP model should be implementable in any country with cooperative law and limited-liability companies that are typical for small and medium-sized companies. With authorizing legislation, the model could also be used in joint-stock companies.

Speakers

(in order of presentation)



Andrea Cori

a.cor@areastudilega.coop

BIO: Andrea Cori is researcher for Research Institute of the Italian Cooperative Federation, "Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative e Mutue - Legacoop" from 2018. He is also co-founder of the slow-journalism community magazine "Il Ventriloquo". He has previously worked as a researcher for Roma Tre University. He has published essays and articles on issues related to cooperatives and the social economy, the study on development models for Latin American indigenous cultures and the sustainable management of water resources. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3190-4726>

ABSTRACT: The worker cooperative is the most widespread form of cooperative enterprise in Italy. The paper aims to represent the Italian labor cooperation as a whole, to describe its geographical and sectoral characteristics and to show its evolution and weight within the Italian production system.



Thibault Mirabel

thibaultmirabel@yahoo.com

BIO: Thibault Mirabel has defended his thesis on May 2022 at the University of Paris-Nanterre, France. His thesis titled "Performance and Rarity of Worker-Owned Firms: Evidence from France" is composed of three empirical analyses of French worker-owned firms. One chapter of his thesis has been published in the Journal of Participation and Employee Ownership. Thibault Mirabel has also published a review of the empirical literature on worker-owned firms in the Journal of Participation and Employee Ownership."

ABSTRACT: I analyze the interaction effect of the sunk cost of physical capital and of human capital on the entry of worker-owned firms (WOFs) and conventional firms (CFs). I estimate a logit model and use a comprehensive dataset of new French firms in manufacturing sectors with proxies of sunk costs defined at the sector level. The results show that the likelihood of

WOF entry is the highest when the sunk cost of human capital is dominant while the sunk cost of physical capital is negligible, as predicted by Mikami and Tanaka (2010). The interaction effect between the types of sunk costs is stronger for worker buyouts than for newly created WOFs. These results are robust to different estimation methods and to endogeneity concerns. These results contribute to the general understanding of the rarity of WOFs in manufacturing sectors and are relevant to policy initiatives supporting cooperative modes of firm organization.



Michele Bianchi

michele.bianchi@unipr.it

BIO: Dr Michele Bianchi is a post-doc researcher at the University of Parma. His main areas of expertise are community co-operatives and the third sector. He has recently joined the Horizon 2020 EU project MATILDE which assesses the impact of international migration on European rural and mountain areas. He previously worked at the Yunus Centre at the Glasgow Caledonian University on the analysis of hybrid organization functioning with Prof. Michael Roy and Prof. Simon Teasdale. In 2020 he obtained his PhD in Sociology of Governance, Social Participation and Citizenship at the University Carlo Bo - Urbino. To complete his thesis, he was visiting PhD student at the University of Toronto under Prof. Marcelo Vieta's

supervision. Previously, he obtained his Master in Social Work at the University of Trento under Prof. Carlo Borzaga's supervision.

ABSTRACT: Italian community co-operatives are the most recent evolution of the Italian co-operative movement. They operate to carry out community development processes, which involve the local population in the re-thinking of socio-economic models for local development. Furthermore, they create business opportunities using local resources and assets with particular attention to cultural aspects, local environments, and people's needs. Generally, these co-operatives expand the mutualistic benefits – typically shared among the co-operative members – with other community members because of the common belonging to the same place. Therefore, community co-operatives develop “community economies” for the general interest. What is less known about this phenomenon is whether and how community co-operatives consider the sustainability of their missions and activities; this research proposes a comparison among 17 Italian community co-operatives based on semi-structured interviews with workers. The examination happened through a coding process that extrapolated the main information about their work for implementing the sustainability of their communities. The theoretical framework to examine the results is the Sustainable Community Development theory. Findings show how members use the co-operatives as an agency to foster sustainable development in their communities.



Valerii Saenko

valerii.saenko@sns.it

BIO: Valerii Saenko is a PhD candidate at the Scuola Normale Superiore. His background is in development studies and business administration. In his thesis he employs critical perspective in political and social sciences to create an understanding of market-based development initiatives in rural communities within the agricultural sector. His work suggests the argument that by taking the mantle of sustainable and ethical business, market-based organisations tend to interpret themselves as bringers of positive social change as a default. Valerii's comment is that such default makes these organisations lose focus of social change and seek the resources to finance change creating a vicious cycle of economic growth orientation. Valerii suggests that the ethical mantle directs their actions away from

making positive change and recreates old patterns rooted in capitalism and market system instead of social justice foundations.

ABSTRACT: This paper looks at cooperatives as one of the forms of organising development processes. Approaching cooperatives from the critical perspective of development studies suggests a framework that is sceptical of economic growth orientation. Through this lens this paper describes the case of a cooperative Libera Terra in Palermo. Using Spivak's critique of intelligencia claiming to be able to listen to the subaltern I suggest that cooperatives can also be deaf to outside voices. This research uses interpretivist approach setting a goal to understand how the cooperative describes itself and how do people within the cooperative reason for their actions. The conclusions show that while the ideological and mostly leftist vision is not lost on the cooperative's understanding of itself, especially within the framework of helping local population to get out of oppressive mafia control. At the same time Libera Terra positions itself as a business and invests a lot of energy and resources into the business side of things like competition on quality of their goods, brand, cost optimisation. This leads to refocusing of the cooperative to address its economic goals rather than social.



Elif Tugba Simsek

eliftugbasimsek@gmail.com

BIO: Elif Tugba Simsek is a PhD candidate in sociology at Eötvös Loránd University (Hungary), originally from Turkey. She is interested in alternative, solidarity-based economies and currently working on new wave cooperatives linked to the solidarity economy. She received her MA in labour economics and industrial relations from Marmara University (Istanbul). Before she started her PhD, she had worked in the Petrol-Is Union (Petroleum, Chemical, and Rubber Workers Union) as a reporter and researcher for more than two years in Istanbul

ABSTRACT: This research focuses on new cooperatives based on the idea of the solidarity economy in Hungary. Today, there is a new wave of cooperatives linked to the solidarity economy, which have become both greater in number, and in terms of the influence they wield, especially since the economic crisis of 2008. The literature shows the possibility of enhancing this wave, allowing for a solidarity-based social and economic design in the world. However, research and conceptualization studies continue on these alternative practices, and it is still unknown where the new wave will evolve and its limitations and potential. Especially it is unknown outside of pioneer solidarity economy movements of the French/Spanish speaking and the Anglo-Saxon worlds. Hungary is one of these countries where solidarity economy networks and the new cooperative movement have just begun to form. On this basis, the overall aim of the research is to contribute to the conceptualization studies on the solidarity economy with the data collected on new cooperatives from Hungary. I intend to determine how new wave cooperatives differ from their older counterparts and clarify what organizational and economic alternatives they present to respond to today's socio-economic crises. I also expect to reveal new cooperatives' potential and limitations to develop this alternative socio-economic model. The methodology of the study is grounded theory and the study uses qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews and content analysis to accomplish its purpose. The interviews were held with members from two new cooperatives, two earlier cooperatives, and two cooperative alliances in Hungary. I expect that the findings of this study based on concrete examples will uncover new cooperatives' potential and limitations to make the necessary deductions in Hungary.



Asia Guerreschi

asia.guerreschi@unife.it

BIO: Asia Guerreschi is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University Of Ferrara studying production cooperatives towards innovative circular economy strategies and decarbonization measuring their environmental, economic, and social impact. With a background in communication, she then completed a Master of Science at King's College London on Physical Geography with a final research on observing cloud cover effect on in-canopy and ambient temperature through Arduino based sensors. In 2020 she founded a youth-led organization called Rethinking Climate with a mission to revolutionize environmental communication towards effective climate action and after a specialization course on circular economy has also been

collaborating as circular economy advisor and research.

ABSTRACT: Cooperatives play an important role towards a just society. Born to tackle the struggles of governments, markets, and businesses, cooperatives' objective is meant to close the gap on untapped spaces that derive in society from economic, social and cultural differences. The final objective goes beyond simply profit and production. Considering the ongoing shift towards an attentive use and disposal of resources, this paper tries to identify the current literature present focusing on co-operative application of circular economy strategies. Throughout an initial analysis of books and publications, fourteen academic papers using Scopus database identifying co-operative and circular economy as keywords have been analysed. The results identified that while circular economy can be successfully achieved through cooperation and a catalyst to sustainable development, co-operatives can support application of circular economy strategies in poorer countries. Certainly, there are limitations that for further research in this field, since currently partial attention is looking downstream the supply chain with a focus on waste management, waste pickers workers, and industrial symbiosis. Further attention should be expanded to other supply chain processes and environmental goals investigating how it redefines the way we currently produce and consume resources, including a prospective suggestion to insert circular economy, and environmental sustainability, as an additional co-operative principle.



Camilla Carabini

camillacarabini@gmail.com

BIO: Economic anthropologist interested in money, finance, digital currencies and cooperatives. She obtained a bachelor's degree in Economics from the Bocconi University in Milan and a master's degree in Anthropology from La Sapienza University in Rome. She is currently a PhD student at the Bicocca University of Milan, with a research project on Central Bank Digital Currencies. She is a member of the steering committee of the Ethical Finance Foundation. As a freelancer she does research and writes on several blogs on anthropology and cryptocurrencies. Expert in international cooperative development, she worked as director of Coopermondo - Confcooperative, an NGO engaged in the promotion of social enterprises and cooperatives in Africa and Latin America. Before embarking on the PhD program, she also worked at Laterza

publishing house.

ABSTRACT: This paper explores the role of co-operative finance in the evolution of financialization of the global economy building upon the Italian context. Whereas financialization of daily life has globally affected many individuals around the world in the last decades (Martin 2002), this has also re-shaped the role of financial institutions in society. Earlier research has suggested that private banks have shifted from providing intermediary services between savers and lenders, towards investing in short term investments and preferring liquidity (Mehrling 2010). Economists suggest that as a consequence of this, the main social relation of the economy –between debtor and creditor– has been torn apart (Amato and Fantacci 2012, 2014). In turn, anthropological studies have added more nuance, bringing to the forefront the fact that credit/debt relationship generates social bonds even in a context dominated by the market ideology that pretends to be apolitical or neutral (Graeber 2011). Thus, social bonds take a more disaggregated shape and now include new middle men that trade other's debt under the form of derivatives (Zaloom 2010). Drawing on this, we turn to the Italian co-operative and ethical financial sector and its capacity to (re)establish social relations through practices that counteract this global trend. Employing ethnographic methodology, we highlight three practices that are instrumental –although imperfect– in bringing creditor-debtor social relation back to the centre of the economy, namely: prioritizing classical banking activity (savings and lending), humanising credit risk, and promoting financial education.



Francesca Martinelli

info@centrostudidoc.org

BIO: Francesca Martinelli, after a Master Degree in Philosophy and Ethics, got in 2017 a Ph.D. in “Human Capital Formation and Labour Relations” at the University of Bergamo in co-tutorship with Paris VIII Vincennes-St.-Denis. Now, she is in charge of institutional communication and international relations at the Italian cooperative Doc Servizi, and she is in the board of Doc Creativity. By the end of 2018, she is the director of the Centro Studi Doc Foundation, where she is in charge of research and development and advocacy. In 2018 she was awarded the prize “Astrolabio del sociale – Pierre Carniti” announced by Centro Studi CISL with an essay about new forms of representation in a European perspective, that she

described as Pegasus company. In 2020, she wrote a chapter dedicated to Pegasus company for the book Cooperative bene commune (RomeTre-Press) and in 2021 wrote a report for CECOP on cooperatives' response to undeclared work, published in English, Italian and Spanish. She presents her research in conferences and seminars all over the world.

ABSTRACT: The COVID-19 pandemic showed the essential role of social protection in the current context, and the relative difficulties of the “grey zone” workers who usually do not receive health insurance, pension, family and sick leave, and unemployment benefits. This paper brings the case of self-management cooperatives and studies their role in addressing this situation in Europe. Self-management cooperatives are an attempt by workers isolated in the labour market to find an alternative to the business logic of individualisation and competition in favour of peer-to-peer exchange and democratic, collective working practices. Through the self-management cooperatives workers self-organise to obtain better working conditions and access to social protections. From the 11 case studies it emerges that the model of the self-management cooperative can be an important tool to regain control over work, through the reappropriation of one's own work dynamics, means of production and “voice”.



Cian McMahon

cian.mcmahon@smu.ca

BIO: Cian McMahon is an International Centre for Co-operative Management (ICCM) postdoctoral fellow at Saint Mary's University (SMU) Halifax, where his research centres on participatory democratic cooperative governance systems (FWO SB-project S006019N). Prior to this, he completed a PhD on the topic of worker cooperatives and sustainable development at the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG), where he also taught courses on heterodox economics and radical political economy. He has published in the *Review of Political Economy*, the *Community Development Journal*, and the *Régulation Review: Capitalism, Institutions, Powers*. He is co-editor (with Terrence McDonough and David M. Kotz)

of the *Handbook on Social Structure of Accumulation Theory* (Edward Elgar, 2021). McMahon worked previously as a Policy Analyst with the Irish progressive left Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC). He subscribes to a public role for academics through involvement with labour and community activist education.



Sonja Novković

snovkovic@smu.ca

BIO: Sonja Novković is Professor of Economics and the Academic Director of the International Centre for Co-operative Management (ICCM) at Saint Mary's University, Canada, as well as Research associate at the University of Eastern Finland. She served as Chair of the International Co-operative Alliance Research Committee (2013-2021), and is a member of the National Cooperative Business Association's (NCBA-CLUSA) Council of Economists. She serves on the advisory board of the World Cooperative Monitor and the UNRISD project on "Sustainability performance indicators", having also contributed to the work of the Committee for the Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) "Task force on cooperative statistics". Her research and writing encompass theoretical work on the theory of cooperative firms, cooperative networks, multistakeholder cooperatives, and democratic governance, as well as applied work on participation and diagnostic tools in worker cooperatives. Her coedited works include *Co-operatives and the World of Work* (Routledge, 2019); *Cooperativism and Local Development in Cuba: An agenda for Democratic Transformation* (Brill, 2018); *Co-operative Governance Fit to Build Resilience in the Face of Complexity* (ICA, Brussels 2015); *Co-operatives for Sustainable Communities: Tools to Measure Co-operative Impact and Performance* (University of Saskatchewan Press, 2015); and *Co-operatives in a Post-growth Era* (Zed books, 2014).

cooperative networks, multistakeholder cooperatives, and democratic governance, as well as applied work on participation and diagnostic tools in worker cooperatives. Her coedited works include *Co-operatives and the World of Work* (Routledge, 2019); *Cooperativism and Local Development in Cuba: An agenda for Democratic Transformation* (Brill, 2018); *Co-operative Governance Fit to Build Resilience in the Face of Complexity* (ICA, Brussels 2015); *Co-operatives for Sustainable Communities: Tools to Measure Co-operative Impact and Performance* (University of Saskatchewan Press, 2015); and *Co-operatives in a Post-growth Era* (Zed books, 2014).

ABSTRACT: This paper elaborates a paradox perspective on organisational governance to analyse eminently successful worker cooperative case studies. Drawing on an interdisciplinary heterodox literature from across the economics, management, psychology, and sociology disciplines, we propose a humanistic and context-dependent theory of good cooperative governance that dignifies organisational structures, participatory processes, and their dynamic interplay and change in response to internal and external contingent developments. In particular, we supplement the paradox literature with more explicit humanistic microfoundations and institutionalist macrofoundations to ground and place, respectively, our understanding of the way that cooperatives navigate their complex (socio-economic and socio-ecological) purpose.

A subset of longstanding, flagship worker cooperatives is identified from across North America, Northern England, and Continental Europe. Each of the studied cases holds a reputation for adherence to the cooperative identity – i.e. co-op purpose, values, and principles – particularly in respect of participatory democratic governance. Suma worker co-op is a vegetarian wholefoods wholesaler based in Halifax, West Yorkshire; Just Us! Coffee Roasters Cooperative is based in Halifax, Nova Scotia; Unicorn Grocery is an ethical wholefoods retailer in Manchester, England; Isthmus Engineering & Manufacturing Cooperative is a custom automation technology specialist based out of Madison, Wisconsin; and COMEBO Industries resides in Bressuire, France. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with co-op-affiliated governance experts, past and present, and internal documents are examined alongside publicly available resources.

We explore the degree to which these worker co-op cases adhere to the design principles of humanistic governance, whether or not this is an important contributing factor to their success, and the limitations and challenges that are presented into the future. We find that, while the studied cases display a significant degree of context-dependent diversity, commonalities illustrative of a humanistic approach to co-op governance are also evident. These shared characteristics emerge time and

again, if in different manifestations reflecting circumstantial peculiarities. Such practices both reflect and further enhance radical social innovation on the part of dignified worker-members participating democratically, ably, and effectively in the governance of their cooperatives.



Aingeru Ruiz

aingeruruiz06@gmail.com

BIO: Aingeru Ruiz is predoctoral researcher at GEZKI - University of the Basque Country. He researches large work cooperatives and their democratic governance

ABSTRACT: The economic crises of recent decades have made society question the current capitalist system, in this sense, worker co-operatives have been seen by many scholars and activists as an alternative to the current model. Using a qualitative case study methodology, this research shows the keys to one of the biggest cooperative regeneration processes of recent times: the "Process of Reflection on Experience" of one of the most influential cooperative networks in the world: the Mondragon Group. The process, which takes place in a large co-operative network made up of a considerable number of large co-operatives, is expected to evolve differently from those occurring in small and medium-sized co-operatives. With its analysis, the article addresses two points that require further study: first, the literature has mainly focused on the ways in which cooperatives prevent degeneration before it occurs, paying little attention to how they overcome degeneration once it has occurred. Secondly, empirical studies to date on these processes have been based on small and medium-sized cooperatives, leaving a large gap on how these regenerative processes unfold in large organisations. The article takes as its theoretical framework the degeneration and regeneration thesis, as well as new perspectives emerging in the field of cooperative life-cycle theory. The study provides an intricate picture of the evolution and consequences of the regeneration process carried out by this network of cooperatives. On the one hand, the results show how cooperatives are trying to emerge from a situation of degeneration. On the other hand, it shows the particularities of a regeneration process and its consequences in a large organisation.



Federico Piovesan

federico.piovesan@polito.it

BIO: I am a post-doc researcher in Sociology of Media and Communication at Politecnico di Torino. My main research focus is platform cooperativism, and especially the role of digital technologies on the interactions between people, enterprises, and territorial communities.

ABSTRACT: With this contribution, my goal is to explore how digital technologies play a role within the promises of platform cooperativism. Many platform cooperatives were born in response to the unfair practices and negative externalities of platform capitalism, proposing alternative business models that integrated cooperative principles – such as democratic governance, caring for communities, and putting people before profit – into the digital economy. Like in platform capitalism, digital technologies play a crucial role in platform cooperatives, albeit a significantly different one. As they try to reappropriate the opportunities and values associated with digital technologies, what challenges do platform cooperatives face? I start from the role digital technologies played in the rhetoric of the “sharing economy”. In the late 2000s, sharing economy companies maintained that ubiquitous connection would enable new opportunities of sociality through disintermediated exchange, which would increase utility for users while also disrupting business models that had proven unfit for the digital age. A decade later, as few companies achieved dominant market positions and their profit-driven business models were gradually revealed, it became clear how the “sharing economy” was less about bringing the digital revolution to life, and more about integrating more traditional tactics – like locking customers into proprietary solutions and raising barriers to entry for competitors – with the new opportunities offered by ubiquitous connectivity – such as monetizing personal information, or marketing precarious jobs as flexible opportunities for extra income. In contrast to this, what roles do digital technologies play in platform cooperativism? What challenges need to be resolved for these roles to be fulfilled? What dilemmas and contradiction characterize these challenges? My work is based on a hands-on ethnographic experience that I conducted within Fairbnb.coop, a platform cooperative that created an on-line marketplace for short-term rentals. Fairbnb.coop operates in a sector where dominant platforms have not only failed to deliver on their rhetorical promises, but also generated negative externalities on territories and their socio-economic fabrics – including the distortion of the housing market, the loss of territorial identity, and the precarization of work. As a response, Fairbnb.coop offers an alternative vision for tourism based on three pillars: cooperative governance, community-powered decentralization, and a fair tourism model that incorporates both legality and sustainability principles. Through my engaged positionality and insider’s perspective, my goal is to share partial reflections about the reality of running a platform cooperative. In turn, I hope this can contribute to wider debates about both the cooperativism movement and the viability of alternative business ventures within a socio-economic system dominated by capitalist logics.



Pietro Ghirlanda

pietro.ghirlanda@unimi.it

BIO: I am a PhD Candidate in Law, Ethics and Economics for Sustainable Development at the Department of Italian and Supranational Public Law of the University of Milan. Moreover, I am a Research Fellow at the Institute for the Cooperative Digital Economy of the New School led by Trebor Scholz. I am trained in ethics and political philosophy, having a Bachelor's in Philosophy from the University of Verona and a Master's in Philosophy of the Contemporary World from Vita-Salute San Raffaele University (Milan). My research topic is the study of platform cooperatives as an alternative organisational model to extractive commercial platforms from a social justice perspective.

ABSTRACT: Platform cooperatives, namely, "businesses that sell goods or services primarily through a website, mobile app, or protocol" and "rely on democratic decision-making and shared platform ownership by workers and users," have been recently proposed as a more sustainable, equitable and even efficient alternative to the organisational model of mainstream commercial platforms and its negative features, e.g., precarious working conditions, bogus self-employment, thorough algorithmic control and data extraction. Nevertheless, the literature on platform cooperativism is still characterised by the antagonism between proponents of different concepts and the lack of a holistic framework capable of connecting all the studies that analyse single actors of the network, assessing the competitive advantages that platform cooperatives have and

critically presenting the challenges they face. This research gap moves the first systematic review of the literature. The authors' findings can benefit both other scholars, by identifying and framing the main trends of the literature, and practitioners, by contributing to developing ecosystem-oriented thinking and recognising potential complementarities between actors. The number of theoretical and empirical evaluations is limited, however, and the topic still emerging, magmatic and interdisciplinary. Therefore, the review opens the path for future updates and better-quality assessments, and the application of the same methodology to the mapping of other alternative models of platforms besides platform co-ops.



Francesco Gentilini

Francesco.gentilini@unifi.it

BIO: Born in Bologna, Italy, in 1992, Francesco Gentilini holds a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from the University of Bologna, a Master's Degree in Economic Analysis from the Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management and is currently a PhD candidate in Sociology of Labour at the University of Florence with a thesis on Workers' Buyouts (WBO).

ABSTRACT: Following the debt crisis and consequential default declared by the Argentinian government in 2001, some organized workers decided not to surrender to the industrial desertification affecting vast areas of the country: they occupied their factories and restarted production on a cooperative basis, following the motto "Occupy, Resist, Produce" of the Brazilian "Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra" (MST). Urged by the growing unemployment and by the lack of social security measures, these workers unified their skills, wisdom and craftsmanship to reboot the activity of factories otherwise doomed to become industrial waste due to the escape of managers, technicians and clerks. That's how the "Recovered Factories" movement began. Such denomination quickly spread through the world while similar experiences popped up in different countries as a response to various global and local crises. A similar phenomenon is the one defined as "Workers' Buyout", where workers still end up running the business themselves, but through the acquisition, and not the occupation, of the company. This is the most common case in the Italian context, where in 1985 the Parliament approved a law to support such experiences of cooperative recovery of failed companies (Legge Marcora - L. 49, 27/02/1985). An interesting (while usually not much investigated) aspect of such experiences is the impact that the recovery of the factory has on the workers' subjectivities. The questions are: how do these people change following their new role and network of relations within the cooperative (where they become co-entrepreneurs)? Also, how does this change reflect on those aspects of their lives who are external to the workplace? Moreover, it is interesting to analyze what are the necessary collective and individual preconditions to boost the cooperative recovery process, on one hand, and, on the other, to ensure that individuals accept to take part in it. The relationship between labor, images of the world (translating Max Weber's concept of "Weltbild") and horizons of meaning is the core of what shapes all the case studies that could be found within the Workers Buyout experience.



Roger Spear

spear@ruc.dk

BIO: Roger Spear is Emeritus Professor of Social Entrepreneurship, Member of Ciriec Scientific Committee, and founder member and ex-vice-president of EMES research network on social enterprise. He taught innovation, organisational systems and research methods at the Open University, where he is emeritus professor linked to Systems and Complexity, and Innovation Knowledge & Development. He is currently guest professor in the Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at Roskilde University (Copenhagen, Denmark), contributing to International Masters in Social Entrepreneurship, specialising in measuring social impact. Recent research projects: Cities, the social economy and inclusive growth; EC project: Map of social enterprises and their eco-systems in Europe.