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LOCAL REGENERATION AND COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING PLACE MAKING: CO-OPERATIVES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

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LOCAL REGENERATION AND COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING PLACE MAKING: CO-OPERATIVES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Purpose: This article provides an introduction to how worker co-operatives and other organisations based on principles of participatory economy have been adopted in a range of international contexts as a vehicle for transforming places with strong aspiration to address location-specific social challenges.

Design/methodology/approach: Through a presentation of four narrative cases the article exemplifies international experiences of co-operative approaches to place making. It critically reflects on the philosophical and strategic underpinnings of the projects implemented in Rochdale, Preston, Bologna, Rome and Cincinnati.

Findings: The practical experiences of a number of local projects of place making involving co-operatives are conceptualised. The research has identified the importance of institutional, organisational and legal constraints for transformative cooperative-based place making initiatives. It shows a strong relevance of the place's historic legacy and communal governance for the choice of place making approaches.

Practical and social implications: The paper highlights cases that incorporate place making practices involving co-operative organisation and municipal participation and considers their transferability potential.

Originality/value: The article advances an important conversation relevant to researchers, educators, co-operators, politicians and local officials on diverse contemporary approaches in towns and cities that seek to reshape and regenerate local socio-economic fabric by engaging tradition, principles and organisation models developed within the co-operative movement.

Keywords: Co-operative place making, Co-op Cincy, Co-Cities Project, Preston model, Rochdale, inclusive development, new municipalism.

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Introduction

Civic leaders around the globe are experimenting with radical place making models as they aspire to establish resilient wealth-generating communities attached to a particular place. This is because place making, understood here as the process of forging the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution (Project for Public Spaces, no date), can advance social inclusion by offering a sense of socio-economic belonging and historic attachment (Hayden, 1994; Thomas et al., 2015). Research shows that success in such endeavours is determined by the presence of a unifying framework for mobilizing collective efforts (Martin, 2003; Toolis, 2017) and by securing appropriate channels through which the host community can participate and express own preferences (Ellery and Ellery, 2019; Grabow, 2015). We enrich this perspective by drawing attention to the role of co-operatives in place making as potent local actors.

Co-operatives are driven by values, not just profit, they share internationally agreed principles putting fairness, equality and social justice at the heart of the enterprise (UN, 2013). It is in the nature of the co-operative as a form of participatory organisation to bring people together in a democratic and equal way (ICA, no date). Concern for community is one of the fundamental tenets of the co-operative movement (ICA, 1995), encouraging co-operatives around the world to take an active stance towards initiatives strengthening community wellbeing and improving environments in which they are embedded. In this article, we examine a number of collaborative community projects where co-operatives are involved as place making agents. There are two reasons for having this conversation. Firstly, co-operatives have not been the focus of most place making research despite their otherwise powerful social and community-building impact (UN, 2013; Stiglitz, 2009; WCM, 2018). Secondly, the distinctive co-operative approach allows often hidden perspectives to emerge, for example, the role of value-based and communal principles in place transformation and municipal initiatives. Our aim is to provide a reflection on some important initiatives involving co-operatives to further place making debates regarding the role that co-operatives may play in municipal projects in different socio-economic contexts.

Research Background: Setting the Scene

Community participation has been central to modern approaches to urban regeneration and place development focusing on 'community wealth building'. In the United States it is led by Project for Public Spaces, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build strong communities. In the UK it is closely associated with the Manchester-based think tank and pressure group the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), who formulated five principles for developing local economies and making local wealth building work (CLES, 2019a). Firstly, a broad spread of local economy ownership is needed to ensure the fullest dissemination of the wealth generated by local economic development. Vital to this is the local recycling of the wealth, rather than it being syphoned out of the locality by profit-seeking external commercial actors with no vested local interest. Secondly, relations with financial institutions which prioritise local development are essential, including the creation of new local and bespoke financial institutions. Thirdly is a commitment to reducing local poverty and inequality by ensuring strong employment rights and opportunity and fair levels of pay. Fourthly, is service procurement by local institutions which benefit local suppliers. Finally, is the prioritisation of land and other available assets for purposes which benefit the local community socially and economically (CLES, 2019b). Given the record of co-operatives in developing democratic commercial governance structures and their commitment to equitable distribution of wealth, it is unsurprising that attempts to implement these five principles have renewed interest in encouraging the co-operative economic and social model.

The financial crisis of 2008 lent a new impetus to local economic initiatives worldwide in which non-mainstream capitalist organisations played a prominent role following the retreat of the state from the provision of social services. For example, in the UK from 2010 onwards, the government implemented the most draconian retrenchment of public services and local authority funding since the 1930s (Webster, 2017). This had the effect of encouraging the 'third sector', including co-operatives and social enterprises, to step into the breach left by a retreating state. When the COVID-19 crisis has destroyed many of the 'givens' of social and economic structures and of the societal fabric in general, leaving a gap to be

mended, the promptest interventions addressing regeneration of place and communities, as the international evidence shows, happened to come from co-operative organisations (UNTFSSE, 2020). It is within this context of the 'third sector' seeking to reaffirm its position within the social economy that the place making initiatives discussed in this paper emerged. What these initiatives have in common is prioritising to a large extent of a 'bottom-up' approach to place making through the creation of new co-operatives and similar participatory opportunities as central components of respective strategies to rebuild local economy and society. The examples we consider have emanated from Britain (Preston and Rochdale), Co-Cities Project in Italy (Bologna, Rome) and the US (Cincinnati). They are persuasive in underlining the extent to which co-operatives are seen globally as a way of rebuilding place affected by economic and social adversity.

Despite the rich evidence of the success of place making through democratic participation and democratic ownership solutions (Co-Cities, no date; Preston, 2009), little has been done in terms of the international cross fertilisation of ideas on the potential of using co-operative organisations in place formation. Perhaps, only the Preston model so far widely demonstrates the ideas and principles of co-operative place making applied on a broader scale (Molina and Walton, 2012; *The Guardian*, 2017). However, the appeal of involving co-operatives in place making rests on the co-operative sector's track record in sustainability and resilience. The research from Canada, for example, where cooperative economy contributes approximately 3.5 % to the country's GDP (Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada, no date) shows that *ceteris paribus* co-operatives have a higher survival rate than traditional businesses (MEDIE, 2008), they have a stronger record of enabling wealth retention in neighbourhoods (NCGA, 2012), which makes co-operatives a visible and active constituent impacting societal dynamics.

The selected cases reveal some successful but as yet not well-covered in the literature practices of place development based on the value system, organisation and principles developed within the co-operative movement. They show that the approach based on the co-operative tradition is most flexible and immediate in response to local demands and conditions. The cases also show that there is a tension

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between leadership by large players driving major initiatives to change the local economy (e.g., local or city authorities) and the essential nature of co-operatives, which have always been strongest as organisations built from below by active and committed memberships. We observed that the place making initiatives intent on embracing the co-operative tradition are most likely to encounter a common problem of how to equip and enthuse citizens so that they become activists and leaders in building new co-operative enterprises and institutions with a place-transformative potential. This mirrors the 'top-down' vs 'bottom-up' underpinning philosophies of the Moses vs Jacobs approaches (Walser, 2016), which will be considered as a key element in each of the respective case studies. The cases are not intended for comparative purposes; instead, they explore and illustrate a range of workable options of municipal place making with co-operative organisations as a lead agent. The cases have been selected to stimulate practitioners and scholars to consider the transferability, applicability and promise of various place making attempts involving co-operative organisations.

Literature Review

There is a complex debate about how to 'place make' and build 'community wealth'. Place-focused scholarship generally agrees that place making is a participatory endeavour resting on socio-spatial relationships and inclusivity (Capitanio, 2018; Kalandides, 2018a; Omholt, 2019; Roberts et al., 2017). However, as Omholt (2013) shows, place-making policy and politics do not always reflect the contextual complexity and stakeholder variety appertaining in different places. This point is highly relevant to decisions on how to approach a place transformation.

Some of the ethical and strategic differences in place research were first expressed in the debates between Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs over the urban development of New York in the 1960s. Moses, a leading urban planner known as the 'master builder' of mid-20th century New York City, is associated with 'top-down' urban planning, in which central city or state authorities modernise and reshape cities through centralised urban planning. This prioritises economic efficiency through major

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building projects driven by an overarching 'birds-eye' view of what is best for the city. In contrast, Jacobs is seen as the ultimate advocate of 'bottom-up' organic urban development, in which ordinary citizens shape the urban environments, prioritising needs based on their personal experience, reflecting real-world individual and community requirements (Jacobs, 1961). These perspectives have shaped place making debates ever since in addition to the discourses about urban planning (Larson, 2009; Walser, 2016). Jacobs' emphasis upon community participation as being essential for effective and sustainable programmes of place making is now widely accepted, even by those who prioritise large-scale redevelopment projects (Strydom et al., 2018). Ridley-Duff and Bull (2011) show how an emphasis on decentralisation of policy has inadvertently opened the way for alternative forms of enterprise to flourish. According to Billis (2010), 'third sector' organisations such as co-operatives usually have a strong identification with a community ethos characterised by having local roots, engaging voluntary effort, providing charity, and promoting the protection of civil society values and institutions. However, the debate continues about the community participation of the type envisaged by Jacobs (Kalandides, 2018b).

Other reasons have reinforced interest in co-operatives as motors of local regeneration. The 'top-down' approach to place making is meeting growing criticism for its tendency to rely on banal and stereotyped interpretations of urban spaces and to apply standardised recipes according to global models (Salone et al., 2017). As the neo-liberal orthodoxy has faltered following the 2008 financial crisis, a nascent set of community-friendly democratic solutions relying on 'bottom-up' initiatives have grown in scope. These include collective decision-making (community participation), community social control over key activities, altruism and compassion and a desire for social change entailing a more inclusive future (Dacin and Dacin, 2019). As a result, increasingly academic debate highlights a trend of 'localism' as a platform for issue-specific community-led development (Jarvis, 2015). In this paper, we expand the literature by investigating attempts to localise *and democratise* place making to include participation of co-operatives and other socially-oriented enterprises.

Research Design

Methodologically, we position this study as exploratory research that aims to provide insight for further examination. It is based on a range of cases examining established exemplars of co-operative place making. Geography, traditions and institutions impose limits on transferability of place-making practices. Accordingly, our objective is not to make comparisons in order to pick winning practices. Instead, we are concerned with highlighting the ability of co-operatives to make a contribution into place making under a variety of conditions. The choice of cases was motivated by two considerations. First, the selected project had to be at a reasonably advanced stage as evidence of its sustainability. Second, considering that place making practices reflect unique circumstances of the place in question (e.g., historic legacy, policy, resource endorsement, cultural tradition, etc.), cases had to be pooled from a variety of national and local environments.

The cases were created using data presented and discussed in February 2019 at the practitioner-focused academic workshop "Building local economies, communities and identities: Co-operatives and the social economy in the North West" organised by the Co-operative Early Researchers Network (CERN) in collaboration with Co-operative College UK, Institute of Place Management and Manchester Metropolitan University[1]. Each narrative was developed through desktop research, input of expert knowledge gained during actual involvement in place making actions and policy development, field visits and group discussions by the participants of the workshop aimed at revealing commonalities and differences in the international experiences of co-operative approaches to place making. This design, combining inductive and deductive elements and resulting in a narrative case, constitute a tool particularly suited to research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate (Rowley, 2002). Above all, this format is useful when investigation focuses on a contemporary set of events within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context require clarifications (Yin, 1994). This characteristic of the case-based enquiry, i.e., an opportunity to undertake an investigation into a context-immerged phenomenon, has determined our choice of the method for this exploratory study. It was

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particularly helpful in isolating and inspecting the potential of co-operative organisation to enhance the

participatory constituent in place making initiatives. The structured summary of the discussion and

findings is presented in Table I.

Table I about here

Cases and Findings

The Co-Cities Project in Bologna and Rome: Two Experiments (Italy)

The uniqueness of the Co-Cities Project is in the use of the 'caring for commons' platform (Ostrom, 1990;

Shareable, 2018). The urban commons in this social experiment are public spaces, assets, infrastructures

and buildings capable of being used to facilitate urban regeneration. This model aims to transform cities

through the enhancement of civic commons by deploying specific local community assets and targeting

localised priorities within bigger urban spaces, thereby enabling a different, collaborative, highly focused

and inclusive approach to urban management. Although Bologna and Rome are parts of the same Co-

Cities Project implemented by the Laboratory for the Governance of the City as Commons (LabGov, no

date), the outcomes in the two cities were quite different in terms of composition of groups of the

population that the project managed to mobilise, illustrating the different implications of the 'top-down'

and 'bottom-up' approaches. In Bologna, co-operative and social economy actors were involved on a

smaller scale than in Rome and this prevented the initiative to make enough impact at a grassroots level.

This was a peculiar omission given that co-operatives are central to the Emilia-Romania economy, of

which Bologna is the capital, producing 30% of the region's GDP (Dyda, 2016). The Bologna experiment

turned out to be essentially an elite-led ('top-down') resulting in the less affluent but majority group of

community members being 'led' agents rather than active and equal contributors.

        In Bologna, the initiative hinged on the introduction of a target regulatory framework, the Bologna

Regulation on Civic Collaboration for the Urban Commons. It provided legal guidance and structure for

the collaborative managing of urban commons and empowered collaboration between local authorities,

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citizens and key community-based organisations (SMEs, charities, universities, etc.) through the mechanism of 'pacts of collaboration' prioritising local needs. Since the approval of the Regulation, more than 400 pacts have been signed to seek innovative approaches to urban commons and to secure the commitment of all place stakeholders to the principle of civic collaboration. The experiment involved three neighbourhoods of Bologna: Pilastro, Bolognina and Croce del Biacco. For each district, strategies were devised to make best use of location-specific assets and address major needs. The experiment helped to redesign the city while remaining relevant to specific localities: it focused on developing infrastructures for the 'making together' of urban commons (in Pilastro), incentivised social innovation for 'living together' (in Bolognina), and aimed at facilitating collaborative economy for 'growing together' (in Croce del Biacco).

Although the experiment in Bologna has achieved a high degree of participation, its success was only partial. Firstly, those involved in pacts of collaboration were already active citizens from socially homogenous groups enjoying high levels of income and showing high levels of participation in similar initiatives. While the key goal of active participation to improve urban commons was realised in principle, poorer members of the community were heavily underrepresented. Secondly, most of the pacts of collaboration were bi-lateral rather than multi-stakeholder, which limited the ability of these pacts to transform communities cohesively along polycentric governance lines (Carlisle and Gruby, 2019), As a result, the aim of changing the delivery of collaborative services through digital and social innovation with a wider community value has not been achieved.

The project in Rome had different aims and outcomes. Initiated by the LUISS Guido Carli University in 2015 and involving university students, local community organisations, individuals, national co-operative movement and businesses, the project focused on some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city. A project working group composed of local stakeholders was involved at all stages, including debates, mapping, prototyping, modelling and testing (Co-Cities, no date), devising solutions leading to the recovery and development of key local historical/heritage and urban cultural

assets, including an archaeological park containing Roman ruins. Although the physical renovation of the site was central, the development of public gardens and local libraries providing heritage and cultural community value for the park was crucial. These assets were intended to provide hosting spaces for local community organisations where they could meet, lead and organise. The Rome experiment is ongoing, and has been an engagement success so far. It has secured engagement by a wide spectrum of the local population, especially those from poorer backgrounds. Significantly, it did not rely on the involvement of the city's authorities. As a result, compared to Bologna it is a 'bottom-up' venture, which was very well designed and carefully staged. It started with mapping key stakeholders, resources and needs of the neighbourhoods, eliminating from the outset dependency on the local authorities. Instead, the establishment of a neighbourhood community co-operative was the chosen means of linking stakeholders, negotiating preferred priorities and spreading the benefits of the project. This was a challenge for two reasons. Firstly, for a place with the lowest Human Development Index in the City of Rome and secondly, the co-operative economy in this region is not established as firmly as in Bologna. From this perspective, the creation of a community for the care and regeneration of a commons area (Comunità per il Parco Pubblico di Centocelle) is a definite milestone in the co-operative place making experience.

The initiatives in Bologna and Rome invite important observations. They demonstrate the sensitivity and delicacy of selecting between place making options. The Bologna experiment suggests that unless some special measures are put into place citizens with time and resources tend to dominate the governance of collaborative provision aimed at the enhancement of civic commons to the exclusion of citizens who are poorer in time and resources. As a result, there is a danger that urban commons may not benefit all members of the community equally. The Rome project is especially interesting in this respect for its success in persuading under-represented groups to establish a working co-operative - a challenge confronting co-operative movements all over the world. What remains to be seen, of course, if this proves to be sustainable in retaining and recruiting active members, and in developing income flow

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that provides the basis for the long-term economic survival.

The Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative (USA)

The 'union co-ops' model in Cincinnati is an example of addressing structural problems stemming from the long-term decline of older industries in major cities, as well as issues associated with labour's precarity. The Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative (CUCI), now known as Co-op Cincy, was originally inspired by the Mondragón Corporation in Spain. US Trade Unions have been interested in co-operatives since the post-Civil War period when the 'Knights of Labour' supported worker co-operatives (Leikin, 1999). In Cincinnati, during the 1980s, one non-governmental organisation - the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Centre - sent delegations to Mondragón, and the idea took root of developing co-operatives to revive the city in the context of deindustrialisation. In 2009, the United Steelworkers (USW), a trade union with almost a million members took the lead, responding to the impact of the 2008 financial crisis in Ohio. Mondragón advised USW to support co-operatives to reverse economic decline and growing unemployment and in 2012 the 'Ohio Employee Ownership Centre' (OEOC) was established, dedicated to the promotion of USW supported co-operatives. At the same time in Cincinnati, CUCI was established and began to work closely with OEOC. CUCI came to provide an 'incubation service' for new co-operatives based upon a 'union co-operative' template, devised jointly by OEOC, CUCI and Mondragón.

What makes the Union Co-operative model important in place transformation are its key principles and structural elements. Central is a principle common to many co-operatives: worker-owners each owning an equal share of the business and commanding an equal vote in determining its activities. However, union co-operatives combine the democracy of the co-operative with the collective solidarity of the trade union (Witherell et al., 2012) through co-operative governance and union representation of worker-owner members. This seeks to balance priorities in local transformation with employment considerations. CUCI has worked with local communities to regenerate Cincinnati since 2009, by empowering residents to establish their own co-operatives. Prominent examples include *Our Harvest*,

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which grows and sells food, generating a living wage for worker owners and employees on its farms. It also partners with private farms, requiring them to pay decent wages (e.g., *Sustainergy* which installs and repairs home insulation). It also pays high wages for the sector. These are two among many co-operative enterprises that have transformed Cincinnati through their outreach, social capital, infrastructure, business culture, networks and income generation.

The building of co-operatives from below as a part of the CUCI promotes co-operative culture and identity in local communities and forms agents with a vested interest in the place. Co-op Cincy aspires to more than the purely economic. In addition to providing employment, CUCI supports cultural transformation and revives the most deprived areas of the city as the local people build a resilient and sustainable economy. CUCI works on creating a stable environment in which individuals can plan long-term within a collective ethos of solidarity and place attachment. It seeks to instil a widespread understanding of co-operation as social glue, which allows residents to become more personally invested in the area they live in, creating a sense of place ownership. Characteristically, in accordance with co-operative democratic values, CUCI offers bespoke support for ideas that emerge from the community itself, rather than imposing a readymade template, thus adhering in practice to 'bottom-up' philosophy of place making.

The Preston Model (UK)

Although Preston has suffered economic decline since the 1960s (Lockey and Glover, 2019), not all aspects of the local economy are bleak. Preston is a hub of local and regional administration, a position underlined by the granting of city status in 2002. Moreover, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), with its 33,000 students, has helped boost the local economy, as does the proximity to the city of major plants owned by BAE Systems and the Westinghouse Electric Company. Despite this, life expectancy is below the national average, and there are higher rates than the national average of anxiety, depression, long-term mental illness and suicide (Lockey and Glover, 2019). Plans to modernise the city were

abandoned following the 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing hiatus required a determined response if the fortunes of the city were not to deteriorate further. In 2011, the City Council sought a new strategy (CLES, 2019b). One important input was by The Democracy Collaborative, a Cleveland Ohio (USA) based think tank, which had developed strategies to promote local regeneration by working with 'anchor institutions', large organisations firmly embedded in the locality and unable to relocate (universities, schools, hospitals, local government institutions). A second input came from Mondragón.

In 2011, Preston City Council committed to developing co-operatives and supporting co-operative networking to achieve place transformation. Local anchor institutions were persuaded to procure services locally. This was achieved by reducing the size of contracts for work, which local suppliers could meet and which would be less attractive to larger private sector corporate players seeking economies of scale. The model's supporters stressed the benefits of local purchasing, for example retaining local wealth and creating employment opportunities. Efforts were directed at encouraging new co-operatives in several economic sectors to meet the procurement requirements of anchor institutions, in the process creating the basis for a co-operativised local economy, decent incomes and a strong civic co-operative culture. The aspirations are similar to those of Co-op Cincy and the Co-Cities Project. Preston' strategy has also built on the work of UCLan academics (Manley and Froggett, 2016).

The Preston model has gained momentum and purchase on the wider political imagination. This is shown by Preston's success in securing Open Society Foundations funds, and the burgeoning international and national interest in the model, including from senior politicians (Insider Media, 2019). The new procurement strategy has produced impressive results with tangible benefits for the city and region. The value of total anchor institution procurement from businesses in Preston have risen from £38.3 million in 2012/13 (5% of total spend) to £112.3 million in 2016/17 (18%). Moreover, 4,000 more workers received the real living wage (Lancashire Post, 2019). Greater economic diversity has also been achieved, e.g., in sustainability-oriented faming, Preston's Co-operative Grocery and a co-operative of educational psychologists who supply their services to local schools.

The approach to place development in Preston has been helped by major changes in key stakeholders such as anchor institutions, which have transformed their procurement practices. However, there are tensions. As an ongoing assessment of the progress shows, developing a co-operative culture in which there is widespread awareness of, and enthusiasm for, co-operatives and co-operative principles, is proving to be painfully slow (Lockey and Glover, 2019; Manley and Froggett, 2016). Nor is it at all clear that the message and momentum behind building co-operatives are reaching the very poorest in Preston who arguably need them most.

The Preston model also offers lessons on the role of politics in place making. The model's close association with the Labour Party both locally and nationally risks inciting hostility from rival parties. This could endanger it if a hostile political party took control of the council, or even if a hostile government took measures which might undermine the model. The best defence against this is, of course, the model's success in boosting the local economy. This which might make even the most hostile council leadership review its position; however, it might be tempted to 'cherry-pick' the local procurement strategy and drop the more difficult and ideologically contentious co-operative element. In this respect, the partisan enthusiasm for the model might prove double-edged. A further concern is that a localised approach such as in Preston, if replicated, might create a highly parochialised and 'Balkanised' economic landscape, with each locality pursuing what amounts to protectionist or even isolationist strategies.

The Rochdale Experience (UK)

In 2016, a number of organisational stakeholders in Rochdale started forging in-depth connections with the local authorities in order to advance place transformation and revival projects that aspired to take advantage of the town's rich co-operative heritage. These efforts have resulted in Rochdale Stronger Together initiative (RSTI).

Rochdale's problems are considerable. It is among the 20 most deprived local authority areas nationally, with one of the highest unemployment levels. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019) shows

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that 29.9% of Rochdale residents live in 10% of most deprived areas in the country (Ministry of Housing, 2015). RSTI seeks to address these difficulties. As with Preston, this initiative is a response to social and economic hardship. Rochdale explicitly intends to learn from Preston, from which many key aspects have been copied (Carpenter, 2019): such as local procurement by anchor institutions and local co-operative economy development. Uniquely, however, the emphasis is on a physical celebration of the Rochdale co-operative traditions (Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers was the 19th century co-operative that became the prototype for societies in Great Britain) and renovation of the town, including its famous Town Hall. Although the local administration supports the Rochdale place making initiative, it is neither 'top-down', nor grassroots. It is an example of a 'lateral' or local stakeholder-led approach where a key player is the town's mutual social housing provider Rochdale Boroughwide Housing.

Rochdale has started small with finding a way to celebrate its co-operative history through street names, architecture and the Rochdale Pioneers Museum. At the same time, it is seeking to enhance its strategic infrastructure by blending the past with the aspirations of contemporary society. The £50 million redevelopments of the Town Hall are an example of this, bringing together in a classical building modern public services, including the council, NHS and police. Further developments are expected to reconnect different parts of Rochdale in a way that co-operative heritage can reinvigorate the town. At the heart of the strategy to improve the town centre is a large housing scheme which includes community-led co-operative housing solutions to diversify tenure options, improving the affordability of quality dwellings. Cross-sector stakeholder partnerships are central, with a range of organisations engaged in the initiative, including the Rochdale Borough Social Enterprise and Co-operative Forum, providing a vital link to the town's voluntary sector. However, more effective community engagement is a priority. The involvement of the Co-operative Heritage Trust and the Heritage Action Zone bring vital links to the town's heritage and tourism assets such as the Rochdale Pioneers Museum. This partnership approach seeks to mobilise human and social capital to foster a sense of belonging to Rochdale.

While co-operation remains embedded in the physical and cultural fabric of Rochdale, the institutions and support networks needed to promote a vibrant co-operative and social enterprise sector have degraded since the heyday of Rochdale's co-operative history. There are plans to revive a culture of co-operation through the creation of a co-operative development 'Hub'. The Hub is expected to support those seeking to develop co-operatives, with a keen focus on supporting young people, investing in the next generation of co-operators. Empty properties will be earmarked for use as 'meanwhile spaces', offering pop-up opportunities for start-ups and enabling business growth.

Raising the aspirations of young people through co-operative ideals is a priority. Physical improvements to educational infrastructure will support plans for a 'Youth Parliament' to promote co-operation. A co-operative restaurant in the Town Hall (to be run by young people) is proposed together with other schemes to strengthen life and employability skills in the new local economy. The creation of local businesses (specifically co-operatives) to generate inclusive economic growth and community wellbeing this forms the core of the initiative. The aim is to encourage investment in Rochdale while localising consumer and public spending.

Rochdale's plan to overcome formidable social and economic challenges builds upon the town's co-operative history to create a co-operative future. The strategy is to break out from long-term post-industrial decline by generating growth based upon the ethos and principles of co-operation, which are embedded in the town. While physical changes are evident, social regeneration is at an early stage. The activities of the Co-operative Development Hub are still quite limited. Overall, community engagement is still in an embryonic state despite the efforts of the Co-operative College UK located in Manchester to involve local youth in training in matters related to organising and running co-operatives. Although many of the potential pitfalls identified in the case of Preston also apply to Rochdale, the latter is facing more uncertainty, as the commitments by investors and authorities can be curtailed by the worsened general economic conditions in the UK. Currently, the Borough Council is encouraging the development in Rochdale of its own co-operative identity. However, the project might stall if its promoters fail to mobilise

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grassroots supporters.

Discussion and Final Remarks

This paper expands the place scholarship by exploring the transformative potential of the co-operative organisation and organisations in a variety of national settings and their ability to act to enhance place making initiatives. An international perspective is important given that the Cincinnati, Preston and Rochdale initiatives have drawn ideas and inspiration from celebrated international examples of co-operative organisations making a substantial impact on place, especially Cleveland and Mondragón. All the initiatives we studied display determined leadership to effect co-operatively oriented local change and regeneration. In Preston, Rochdale and Bologna, the first co-operative place-making initiatives were driven by research organisations, the national co-operative movement, universities and local political authorities advocating change. In contrast, in Cincinnati (Co-op Cincy) and Rome it is trade unions and the voluntary and community sectors which take the lead. All initiatives stress the importance of support for co-operators through networks (CUCI, PCDN, the Co-op development hub, LabGov) and all try to draw input from local higher education establishments. All aspire to develop a place that embeds co-operatives in the community and individually claim that they represent a distinctive approach to the local economy and wealth building at variance with neo-liberal economic principles.

Drawing firm conclusions about the initiatives is perilous, given that they are all less than ten years old. However, the 'top-down' vs 'bottom-up' dilemma of the place making debate is evident in all these cases. All are led by bodies with complex agendas and motives. While in the Preston, Rochdale and Bologna cases civic authorities are committed to local regeneration, they all face additional pressures, notably the political requirements of re-election and courting popularity. With Co-op Cincy and Rome, the participant trade unions and the Roman community co-operative are motivated by maintaining membership and resources at a time of declining employment and union funds. While there is no obvious evidence of this leading to compromised or conflicted leadership, the youth of all the initiatives means

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that such a possibility cannot be ruled out.

Several questions arise in respect of the initiatives reviewed here. One is how successful these initiatives will be in generating self-sustaining local co-operative cultures, which develop a transformative momentum of their own. Post-industrial societies, with their disintegrating class allegiances and privatised family lives and communities, require sophisticated efforts to build and sustain community and co-operative identities. Moreover, reaching and mobilising the poorest and least endowed in terms of time, resources, social and educational capital is even more difficult. The Rome initiative seems to have produced the most interesting results in this study, where some of the least endowed members of local society seem to have been engaged. Closer scrutiny of this might well yield important clues upon which to base future strategies to carry the co-operative message to parts previously unreached.

A second point is the question of transferability: to what extent are the approaches exposed here capable of transplantation elsewhere? The international exchange of ideas is evident in all these initiatives. However, caution and flexibility are required. Co-operative principles are successful when they combine clear ethical values with practical and easily understood strategies which address immediate problems for ordinary citizens. Implicit is a need to adapt strategies to local circumstances, especially where there exist successful social actors as willing partners.

The cases presented in this paper demonstrate that incorporating co-operative values and organisational principles may add capacity to place making in terms of both design and implementation. They also invite further conversations regarding the practicality of 'shared administration' of place making and enabling citizens to pursue activities of public interest (Maltoni, 2002). As place sharing becomes more complex (Jordan et al., 2018), running places calls for innovative participatory solutions and more sophisticated forms of governance with multiple centres of decision making. Although place making solutions very much depend on place specific combination of factors, circumstances and needs, even context-focused strategies, the experimentations like those described in this paper ought to be studied to identify transferable practices and approaches that need to be expanded and shared.

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Research presented in this paper is based on cases of the economically developed countries. This may be seen as a limitation. Further exploration is needed to establish whether co-operatives have the same driving force potential in terms of local regeneration and community wealth building place making in non-Western contexts and less developed locations.

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Table I. Characteristics of place making agency in selected examples: an overview

Co-Cities Model		Cincinnati	Preston	Rochdale
Bologna	**Rome**			
Approach to place making				
Urban regeneration of urban commons: authority dependent	Urban regeneration of urban commons: non-authority dependent	Incubation and support for co-ops	Procurement from co-operatives within the local economy	Celebration of co-op heritage, procurement within local economy
Priorities driving place-making				
Participation of residents				
High levels of participation Homogenous (agents) participation	High levels of participation Non-homogenous (agents) participation	High levels of participation Homogenous (agents) participation	Through primary workers' co-operatives Non-homogenous (agents) participation	Low levels of participation Non-homogenous (agents) participation
Involvement of co-ops				
Not enough involvement of co-ops	Establishment of community co-op	Union co-op	Through procurement and anchors' institutions, including co-operatives	Establishment of the hub for support for co-operatives and Rochdale Stronger Together
Reaching poorest section of communities				
Elite-led, not sufficiently inexclusive of poorer communities	Very inclusive	Very inclusive	Inclusive Supporting jobs opportunities in most disadvantaged areas	Social regeneration at its core but too early to say
Pre-conditions to the place making initiative				
Support of local authority: legal regulatory framework Co-operative tradition	Community buy-in Heritage factors	Stakeholder driving the creation of co-operative culture and identity in local communities	Local authority's strategy to create a co-operative culture Co-operative tradition	Organisational stakeholders driving the creation of co-operative culture and identity in local communities Heritage factors Co-operative tradition
Top-down or Bottom-up				
Top-down and Bottom-up (mixed)	Bottom-up	Bottom-up	Top-down	Lateral (initiated by a local stakeholder) with elements of the Top-down