

# Beyond Public and Private: A Framework for Co-operative Higher Education

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## Introduction

Our research seeks to develop a framework for co-operative higher education (Cook, 2013; Winn, 2015) that is grounded in the social history of the co-operative movement, the practice of democratic governance and common ownership of social institutions, and the production of knowledge at the level of society. These objectives are derived from the premise that the existing organisation of public higher education is being overwhelmed by a free-market and corporate model to the detriment of the production of critical-practical public knowledge. This is occurring when the market-based model of social development is being called into question following the Great Crash of 2008-2009. The response to the crash in the UK, was to intensify the process of neo-liberalism across all areas of public provision, including higher education. This is evidenced by the Browne Review (2010) and the HE Green Paper (2015), which have worked towards creating a market-based system of higher education. A key objective in these government reforms is to open the sector to 'alternative providers'. Up until now, this has been interpreted as providing a space for market-based provision, accentuating the principle of the policy. Our point is that it opens up a 'crack' (Holloway, 2010) for a real alternative, neither private nor public, that undermines the policy and resists the logic of the capitalist state on which it is premised.

The research project, funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF), adapts and extends an established model of economic and social development: the co-operative enterprise, to higher education, based on an already existing co-operative for higher education, the Social Science Centre, Lincoln (SSC). The Social Science Centre (Social Science Centre, 2013) was conceived in response to the UK Coalition government's changes to higher education funding which involved an increase in student fees up to £9,000 and defunding of teaching in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. It emerged during a time when students were occupying their universities in protest against these changes and the model of public higher education in the UK was undergoing rapid marketisation and financialisation that was undemocratic and imposing a pedagogy of debt (McGettigan, 2013; Williams, 2006). The SSC has been in existence since 2011, based on a co-operative constitutional model in the form of a democratic member-run organisation that is the common property of its members.

Our research into co-operative higher education began with an initiative called Student as Producer (Neary and Winn, 2009). Student as Producer recognises that both academics and students are involved as academic workers in the production of critical-practical knowledge. With other participants, we seek to develop a framework through which the organising principle for a co-operative university can be reconstituted. Student as Producer reconstitutes the ownership of the means of production so that academic workers own and control the means of production of the institutions in which they are working.

## Review of Co-operative Higher Education

A review of English-language literature reveals a small number of articles and conference items that specifically discuss co-operativism and higher education.<sup>2</sup> The idea of a 'co-operative university' has been around for many decades and gained traction again when it was discussed at the Co-operative Congress in 2011 in light of the Coalition government's changes to the UK HE sector. There is, of course, a great deal of existing research into various forms of co-operatives, co-operative governance, co-operative history and education. There is also a large amount of literature that specifically discusses the theory and practice of 'co-operative learning', but its authors usually use the term 'co-operative' without reference to the social and historical movement that has developed since the mid-19th century.

In 2011, there was also a special issue of the *Journal for Co-operative Studies* (44:3), which focused on co-operative education, and a growing number of articles have been written about co-operative education in the state school system (Woodin, 2014; Woodin 2012; Facer *et al*, 2012). This reflects the growth of co-operative schooling in the UK since 2011, where over 850 state schools have been constituted on co-operative values and principles (Woodin, 2012; Facer *et al*, 2012; Wilson, 2013). It is out of this intense activity that the Co-operative College sponsored a report on 'Realising the Co-operative University' (Cook, 2013). The report discusses how and why universities in the UK might become co-operatives, what might appeal about it to academics and students, and the extent to which co-operative values and principles are already aligned with what we might think of as academic values and principles.

Cook's report is mainly focused on the conversion of existing universities to co-operative universities i.e. universities whose Governors, Senior Management Team and Academic

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<sup>2</sup> A bibliography is currently maintained by one of the authors: <http://lncn.eu/coophe>

Board decide to formally constitute the institution according to co-operative values and principles. In summary, he regards the co-operative university as “an institution *in potentia*”:

“My investigation shows that in many ways the Higher Education sector already is co-operative. Many of the preferences, assumptions and behaviours preferred in universities are co-operative ones. Despite this the possibility of a co-operative university has not been considered by the sector. I suggest that this can change, and must change: the challenges universities face are too great, and the opportunities co-operative working offers are too pregnant with potential, to do otherwise...” (Cook, 2013, 59)

Cook’s report is important for helping us understand the range of practical considerations and further research questions when pursuing the idea of a co-operative university. It builds on preliminary work that was undertaken by Juby (2011), Ridley-Duff (2011) and others during and after the UK Co-operative Congress in 2011 and reinvigorated discussion around the idea of co-operative higher education in a practical way.

Working as researchers within the HE sector, Boden, Ciancanelli and Wright’s work specifically focuses on the ownership and governance of a ‘trust university’. They seek a “programme for reform” and propose “the creation and implementation of a Trust University model” (Boden *et al* 2012, 22-23), inspired by the John Lewis Partnership Trust. (Boden *et al* 2011) In their work, they discuss the problems of university governance at the state and institutional levels, and identify two “hazards” facing the higher education sector in the UK: the private appropriation of public resources and the manipulation of university degree programmes to serve the interests of business. The origins of these hazards, they argue, “lie in the governance failings of ownership, control, accountability and regulation.” (2012, 17) The adoption of a Trust model for universities would respond to these failings and resultant hazards by provoking “imaginative responses to the challenge of securing universities and their knowledge products as social rather than private assets.” (2012, 17) At the heart of the Trust University is “a model in which all university staff and employees, as beneficial owners, hold the organisation in trust on behalf of society as a whole.” (2012, 20) The property of the university would be held in a non-revocable trust and all employees (academic and non-academic) as well as students, would be designated as beneficiaries.

Furthermore, they argue for an “accountable social compact” between the university and its “surrounding society” so as to underscore the common ownership of the university. (2012, 21) They recognise that such a compact is problematic in practice: Who is meant by

'society'? How will that dialogue be maintained? How are 'stakeholders' accountable to each other? They propose that techniques of participatory action research may be helpful, as well as "search conferences" run by representatives from both the institution and the community, where each hold each other to account and "cultivate increased understanding of each others' work life, hopes and worries." (2012, 21-22) They also propose that the university would be regulated, first by trust law, and second by creating professional standards bodies, such as a national Council of Scholars, in the same way that the General Medical Council in the UK, regulates the practice of doctors. Such an arrangement "would place scholars rather than managers at the heart of higher education policy." (2012, 22)

Boden, Ciancanelli and Wright's work is important in that it identifies a number of key issues relating to what they regard as problems of neo-liberal reform: Managerialism, privatisation and associated abuses of power. They point to the trust model "both as a legal form and as an aspect of social relationships" (2012, 17), which could potentially combat these problems. While they argue that all employees and students (and presumably some members of the local community) should become governors of the trust, they say little about how democracy would work in the Trust University, referring instead to the "complex and sophisticated system of partner-democracy" found in the John Lewis Partnership. However, they do not discuss the effect that this form of democracy would have on the respective roles and relationships between academics and students, nor do they question how the subsequent pedagogical relationship would connect to the meaning and purpose of the university as an institutional form for higher education. In summary, neither Cook (2013) nor Boden *et al* outline a coherent framework for co-operative higher education that seeks to integrate the history of co-operation as a social, political and economic movement, the defining values and principles of co-operative organisations, and a compatible theory of knowledge production.

## Theoretical Framework

### The Capital Relation:

The relationship between labour and capital was a pressing concern for early co-operators, who sought to overturn that relationship, "making capital into a hired servant of theirs rather than their continuing as hired servants of capital." (Yeo, 1988, 2) This basic reversal in the capital relation remains a key feature of co-operative theory and practice (Egan, 1990; Jossa, 2014; Vanek, 1977) Co-operatives do not presume to abolish the capital relation, but to turn it on its head. We have argued that co-operatives can be understood as "both

positively prefigurative and as negative, immanent critical practice” (Winn, 2015, 46) and “not undertaken on the basis of what is but of what could be, as a potential immanent to the existent society” (Postone, 1993, 90) In order to develop this dialectical form of critical praxis, grounded as it must be in theoretical categories adequate to capitalist society, we should begin by outlining three key categories, essential to understanding the capitalist social world. They form part of our overall framework for co-operative higher education which we discuss later in this paper.

## Labour

We regard the category of labour to be the “pivot on which a clear comprehension of political economy turns” (Marx, 1996, 51). Marx’s discovery shows how the role, character and measure of labour is central to political economy and therefore to the total ‘logic’ of capitalism’s social world. Marx’s discovery was not simply that labour is useful and can be exchanged like any other commodity, but that its character is “expressed” or “contained” in the form of other commodities. What is expressed is that labour in capitalism takes on the form of being both concrete, physiological labour and at the same time abstract, social, homogenous labour. We are paid for our concrete, useful labour but the price of our labour is determined socially by its abstract, homogenous form. It is therefore the abstract character of labour that is the source of social wealth (i.e. value) and points to a commensurable way of measuring the value of commodities and therefore the wealth of capitalist societies. So often, the central category of labour is overlooked, under-theorised, or avoided. In our work and understanding of the social world, it is a fundamental category.

## Property

The division of labour was recognised by Marx and Engels as contributing towards the alienation of labour from its product and producing the institution of private property: “The various stages of development in the division of labour are just so many different forms of ownership” (Marx and Engels, 1975, 32). Many co-operatives aim to overcome the division of labour through the rotation and sharing of elected roles, and through the concept of solidarity among co-operatives. Where the subjectivity of individuals is determined not by the division of labour (the ‘academic’, the ‘cleaner’, the ‘student’, etc.) but rather by their free association as ‘members’ of a co-operative, the objective form of property held and produced by those social individuals is necessarily altered, too. A ‘common’ form of property is an alternative to the paradigms of private and public property. ‘Common ownership’ is not private property shared among a designated group of people, but rather the antithesis of “the right of free alienability” which distinguishes capitalist private property. Common property is characterised by “non-distribution upon dissolution” (Axworthy and Perry, 1989,

660), ensuring that this form of property is particularly durable. It gives property a peculiar social life of its own. Co-operatives should be understood as a transitional form of association that socialise property and go one stage further than joint-stock companies by socialising the ownership of capital among the association of members, rather than a small class of capitalists. Yet Marx is clear that it is only because of the capitalist mode of production that co-operatives could develop and they, too, should be seen as a transitional form that will “sprout” something new. (Marx, 1991, 571) We must be absolutely clear then, that changes in the historical form of labour (e.g. serf labour, wage labour) have corresponding changes in the form of property. Today, wage labour and private property is the organising principle of the capitalist social world and how labour and property are organised is determined by the historical form of social wealth: value.

## Value

Value, as category of political economy, refers to a historically specific and temporally determined form of social wealth. It is not simply an economic category and we do not use it as a moral category either. “Value is what holds society together under capitalism. It is a force that nobody controls.” (Holloway, 2010, 65) It is a social category that points to a form of life determined by a specific type of exchange relation. “Value is a commodity’s quantitatively determined exchangeability.” (Hudis, 2012, 7) A commodity is anything, material or immaterial, that has a use-value and an exchange-value. A commodity (e.g. knowledge or bread) is exchanged for another commodity: usually the ‘universal commodity’ we call ‘money’. As a general principle, the value of the commodity being exchanged is measured by the ‘socially necessary labour time’ plus the rate of exploitation contained in the commodity. For example, if you produce a commodity in one hour and I produce the same commodity in half an hour, the value of your commodity is measured by my labour time, not yours due to the principle of competition in capitalist society. This ‘logic’ of competition extends around the world, so that widgets produced by Chinese workers determine the value of the same widgets produced by British workers. What this means is that value is not a qualitative category, but rather a quantitative one determined by the productivity of ‘living labour’ (social individuals) and ‘dead labour’ (science and technology in the form of machines). What is important to recognise here, is that the *more productive* labour becomes, the *less value* a single commodity contains, requiring more of the commodity to be produced to achieve the same mass of ‘surplus value’ (i.e. profit). The ‘logic’ of value produces a “treadmill effect” that we are all bound to, even the capitalist. “The value-form of wealth is constituted by and, hence, necessitates, the expenditure of human labor time regardless of the degree to which productivity is developed.” (Postone and Brick, 1982, 636) Value is a historical dynamic that now automatically determines human life and



its overcoming is our greatest challenge if we wish to stop the rampant destruction of the natural and social world that we are all caught up in. “Value is the enemy, but it is an invisible enemy, the invisible hand that holds capitalism together and tears the world apart.” (Holloway, 2010, 70) We need a new form of social wealth and to advance towards this requires that we develop new co-operative forms of labour and property.

## The False Dichotomy: Public and Private

The relationship between the University and the State, is highly significant. Our starting point is not that higher education should be provided by the state as a form of public good, against the rampant privatisation of essential services unrestricted by market forces. Rather, the concept of private and public are not antithetical, but are complementary forms of regulation in a marketised society based on the productive process of value creation (Clarke, 1991). The presentation of the power of Money and the power of the State as providing fundamentally oppositional political and economic outcomes is a false dichotomy. It is important to note that Money and the State are not functionalist and instrumental devices which can be repurposed depending on whose interests they serve; rather Money and the State are the institutional forms in which the contradictions are the core of the value relation played out in public.

The history of the co-operative movement provides a labour based social movement that does not expect the capitalist state to deliver socialism through the politics of redistribution. Rather, the co-operative movement was based on ownership and democratic control of the means of production at the level of the individual enterprise, linked to the movement as a whole as a transition to revolutionary forms of association (Yeo, 1988). These new forms of association would be based on new forms of social value (i.e. a new form of social wealth), grounded in the needs and capacities of their members.

## Research Design

The research methodology for our project was participatory action research organised around a series of five workshops which took place in the city of Lincoln, UK, over a period of one year. They were themed sequentially as follows:

1. Pedagogy for co-operative higher education
2. Governance models
3. Legal and regulatory considerations
4. Business models

## 5. Global solidarity and federated co-ordination of co-operative higher education

The workshops were intended to provide a critical forum to discuss, debate, deconstruct, detail and discover a new paradigm for co-operative higher education.

We understand the term 'action research' in its broadest meaning as "simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out." (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 162) More specifically, we approached it as a 'critical participatory action research' project, which is defined (Kemmis, 2008) as having the following six attributes:

1. Participatory and collective research to achieve effective historical consciousness in and of practice as praxis
2. Research for critical (self-) reflection
3. Research that opens communicative space
4. Research to transform reality
5. Research with a practical aim
6. Research with emancipatory aims

The three research instruments were: face-to-face workshops, individual unstructured interviews, and online focus groups taking place two weeks after the respective workshop. Each workshop constituted an iterative cycle of 'action' for this action research project and aimed to follow a "spiral of self-reflective cycles" (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000, 595-6): Planning, acting, reflecting, re-planning, acting, etc. These correspond to four cycles of: research design, data gathering, data analysis, communication, research design, and so on. (Stringer, 2004) In this way, each action informs and builds upon the last to achieve, through the praxis of action and research, the theoretical, practical and emancipatory aims of the project.

The research group comprised members of the Social Science Centre as well as others not directly involved with the SSC, including researchers of co-operative enterprise, historians, legal specialists, online educators, worker-members of co-operatives and academics and students involved in the free university movement; as well as supportive organisations, including the Co-operative College. The research attracted 48 different workshop participants, five online focus groups involving 19 participants, and 12 interviews. The workshops and focus groups were open to anyone who wanted to participate and were

advertised in advance on the SSC website and social media. We also invited specific people to the workshops who we felt had valuable expertise to share on the given workshop theme (e.g. co-operative learning, co-operative governance, social enterprise, etc.). A project mailing list<sup>3</sup> was established and now has over 90 subscribers with active interest in the research from participants in England, Scotland, Wales, Sweden, Canada, USA and Greece. Interest in both the project and the idea of co-operative higher education continues to grow and inspire students, academics and co-operators around the world.

## Summary of workshops<sup>4</sup>

### Pedagogy

Our first workshop sought to explore pedagogies for co-operative higher education, starting from the practices and principles of Student as Producer, the foundational pedagogy for the Social Science Centre, Lincoln. The main themes for the workshop were the curriculum, assessment, the learning environment, technologies for teaching and co-operative learning.

Participants agreed that the relationship between students and academics as well as other members of the co-operative is the central issue from which all other considerations arise. These relationships will be complex and fluid depending on the nature of activities, but should be grounded within a constitutional framework that confronts issues of power, difference and desire, as well as (in)equalities, while at the same time recognising the importance of deliberative leadership. Co-operative learning develops in a context within which the relationship between the individual, 'I', and the collective 'We', is brought into sharp relief: as the social individual, or radical individuality.

The curriculum should be open and enquiring, based on outcomes that are not predetermined. At the same time there should be a sense of progress and structure. The curriculum should be embedded in the real lives of the members as well as the communities within which the co-operative is situated. This community extends to the community of co-operatives engaged in related social and public issues: housing, health, employment etc. The content of the curriculum should reflect the nature of co-operative society: critical political economy, the history of the workers movement, working class intellectuality and philosophy, gender studies (co-operative women), making links between the natural and the

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<sup>3</sup> <https://lists.mayfirst.org/mailman/listinfo/cooperative-higher-education>

<sup>4</sup> Extended summaries are available on the Social Science Centre website: <http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/blog/category/projects/co-operative-university-projects/>

social sciences and not merely as versions of interdisciplinarity but as ‘troublesome’, ‘useful’ and ‘critical-practical’ knowledges.

## Governance

At the second workshop, among participants with experience in the co-operative movement, there was a strong sense that a ‘co-operative’ refers to an organization that identifies with the International Co-operative Alliance’s statement of identity, values and principles (ICA, 1995):

“A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.”

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Co-operation among Co-operatives
7. Concern for Community

The co-operative movement is a social, historical and political movement that, beyond the identity statement, is not prescriptive. For some it is simply a better way of doing business; for others it is a radical social movement. When developing a framework for co-operative higher education, we need to be clear about what ‘co-operative’ means to us. For those at the workshop, there was general agreement that we wish to draw on the radical, social and political history of the co-operative movement.

We questioned what we mean by ‘governance’ and noted that it involves relationships of power and is politically situated. We discussed governance as:

1. The mechanisms through which an organisation is accountable to its stakeholders/members.
2. Systems and processes ensuring overall direction, effectiveness, supervision and accountability of an organisation.
3. Broader politics and social processes that define and organise – relational – addressing issues of power.

Related to this, we questioned the difference between ‘stakeholders’ and ‘members’ and noted how we need to use language carefully and consciously to avoid reproducing the neo-liberal status quo.

The governance workshop focused primarily on the creation of a new university, allowing participants to imagine co-operative higher education in an ideal democratic form. However, the question of converting an existing institution was not lost as we recognized the need to respond to the possibility of a worker takeover of a failing institution, as has often happened in other industries past and present in the UK and elsewhere.

## Legal

At this workshop there was a strong sense that higher education needs to be embedded within the co-operative movement as one of its core values, not only to support commercial activities but as foundational aspect of co-operatives as a social movement and a significant matter for a ‘new co-operativism’ (Vieta, 2010). We discussed whether to use the title of ‘university’ or ‘higher education’ for our new institution and, in what was to become a main theme for the day, to what extent we work inside or outside national higher education regulatory frameworks. Working from recently published HEFCE documents we looked at the requirements in the UK to become a legally recognised university. This route to becoming a ‘university’ requires a threshold level of higher education students and already attained degree awarding powers. An attraction of the HEFCE framework is the funding that is associated with the student numbers.

We thought about credible organisations deeply embedded within the co-operative movement, the Co-operative College and the International Co-operative Alliance, which might become primary coordinating institutions based on the HEFCE model of ensuring quality assurance and good governance, organised around a confederated secondary network of co-operative higher education centres/universities. We agreed that there was no legal reason why a co-operative university could not be established under the HEFCE

regulations, via the established gateways. A constitutional framework could be created that would meet HEFCE stipulations concerning quality, financial sustainability and good governance.

There was a greater interest in creating an alternative form of co-operative higher education that was not dependent on HEFCE validation and funding. We learned that there are organisations, other than HEFCE, through which courses and programmes of study could be validated. These alternative awards remain government regulated and participants were interested in looking at the full range of possible awards, including diplomas and certificates.

All of this raises the question about the relationship of this new form of co-operative higher education to the local and national state as the main arbiter of legal matters and source of public provision. This is a highly practical matter but should also be considered as a form of intellectual inquiry through, for example, a critique of political economy and critical legal studies.

## Business Models

The fourth workshop focused on how to finance and resource a new co-operative university that did not rely on public funding. Participants found inspiration in Evergreen Co-operatives,<sup>5</sup> as well as the growing 'new co-operativism' (Vieta, 2010), one feature of which is 'platform co-operativism' (Scholz, 2016), which proposes a democratic form of ownership and governance of online services. One important concept that emerged throughout the day was the idea of 'social value' as opposed to economic value, and how that might be generated and expanded.

There was a recognition of the need for different types of funding: seed funding and continuing funding. The co-operative might be financed by a members' levy from co-operative enterprises to support education (Principle 5) as a contribution from the global co-operative movement; or by operating a scheme of Community Shares, or FairShares (Ridley-Duff, 2015) or investing through a Loanstock share offer. Another way of generating income could be by individual subscriptions or by setting up a Solidarity Fund. We discussed the possibility of approaching the Co-operative Bank as well as other philanthropic donors and Educational Trusts. Other income generating ideas included publishing, consultancy, research contracts, residential courses – cooking, living and eating together, overcoming 'community deficit', doing foundation programmes and having 'edventures'.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://community-wealth.org/content/cleveland-model-how-evergreen-cooperatives-are-building-community-wealth>

The co-operative might find another form of social wealth not based on money but on labour, as a form of labour bank, that could generate its own currency. Or, in the form of barter/gift economy. Or through a scheme of co-operative work experience making links with local co-operative schools. It might also be that courses are donated by scholars for free. It was felt that these ideas to generate social wealth and work less are part of a much larger political project around the themes of Universal Basic Income and the Reduction of Working Hours that the new co-operative university should recognise and respond to. Some felt these ideas might be too utopian, while others felt a utopian frame of mind is what is required in the current crisis.

There were no firm conclusions about what the definitive output or product of this co-operative version of higher education would be, but it would involve being part of a radical democratic social experiment which enables members to be debt free, and that it should be for the production of social value in the form of knowledge and science. We struggled with the word 'product', suggesting as alternatives: 'interactions' or 'experience' or 'curriculum' or 'pleasure' as part of a 'sensual' and 'intellectual life' in a way that amplifies the intellectual and human/physical capabilities of each individual member and the collective group. Members of the co-operative must have freedom to learn, freedom to create/critique – to create a way of living – or make a living: a 'livelihood', a concept that was preferred to business plan. Other concepts felt to support this philosophy were 'surviving well', 'etre pour soi' (being-for-itself) and 'Ubuntu' (humanity towards others).

Membership does not have to be time limited to three or four years, as in mainstream university programmes. It was felt that people most likely to be members of this new co-operative for higher education would be adult and mature, the group most disadvantaged by the current funding regimes in England, who want not only to gain a qualification, but be part of a meaningful social experiment. There was a consensus that the membership must be able to incorporate various needs and capacities of stakeholders while maintaining a sense of common purpose and solidarity. The co-operative does not need to be only locally focused and would make use of digital technologies, e.g., to operate as a platform co-operative, taking advantage of already existing co-operative protocols, e.g., Somerset Rules.<sup>6</sup> There was much support for the idea that the co-operative for higher learning would need to connect to a wider membership of co-operatives, e.g., housing co-ops and across other social movements around the world.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.somerset.coop/p/somerset-rules-registrations.html>

## Transnational Solidarity

The final workshop was concerned with 'co-operation among co-operatives' and other international organisations providing higher education. We sought to identify the features of a transnational network for co-operative higher education as well as acknowledge existing models and organisations to learn from. Not only were the well-established organisations such as the ICA, CICOPA and UNESCO mentioned, but also the various student co-operative groups in the UK, USA and elsewhere, the national co-operative colleges that already undertake research and coordinate educational activities within the movement, like-minded institutions such as Antioch College, the WEA, Northern College, and other worker education initiatives, the Trade Unions, and national and international campaigns within higher education such as #RhodesMustFall. This activity highlighted how participants understood the role and purpose of co-operative higher education as connecting to and serving a broader concern with social, political, economic and ecological issues. It emphasised both the breadth of existing organisations and campaigns that share similar values and principles with the co-operative movement, as well as the need for the co-operative movement to address a long-standing need for higher education provided by and for its members.

This message came through too, when we discussed what the actual features of a transnational organisation for co-operative higher education might include. Participants felt that institutionally, it would be a 'secondary co-operative'<sup>7</sup> consisting of people who were elected by its member co-operatives to coordinate activities among members, promote its members' interests and the overall idea and purposes of co-operative higher education. This facilitating organisation could exist virtually and take advantage of technologies to allow people from different countries to work together as part of the organisation. There was a strong sense that the transnational organisation would be driven by the active participation of its member co-operatives, rather than simply representing them from a distance. It was suggested that in countries where co-operative colleges already exist, such as the UK, those colleges would also be members and continue to take a lead role in coordinating activities at the national level. Other forms of associate membership would be a way for non-educational co-operatives and like-minded organisations to play a part in the development and activities of the international co-operative higher education network. What was clear is the need to recognise the local character of co-operative 'universities', which reflect their members' needs and capacities, while also having democratically run organisations at both the national

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<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperative\\_federation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperative_federation)



and international levels, coordinating exchanges of students, academics, arranging events and representing their members both inside and outside the co-operative movement.

Out of these discussions, participants questioned what the purpose of co-operative higher education should be. Here, there was a strong sense that it should primarily integrate into and serve the needs of the co-operative movement, rather than attempt to compete with mainstream universities. Both academics and student members would consciously choose a co-operative university because of its distinctive features as an organisation that is democratically owned and controlled by its members. It should focus on the identity, values and principles of the co-operative movement and the varieties of social concerns that members of the movement have. That is not to say it would be inward looking, but seek to present co-operative higher education as a real alternative to the crisis of mainstream higher education, which is reflective of the broader crises in society. Significantly, it was felt that the international co-operative movement is lacking adequate research organisations that can offer the variety of critiques that the movement needs to ensure that the values and the principles of the movement are maintained and practiced. The role of education within the co-operative movement needs to be 'reconfigured' to clearly establish the role and purpose of higher education and as such the development of a transnational solidarity for co-operative higher education would be to strengthen and reconfirm the movement's commitment to Principle 5.

Finally, it was suggested that the co-operative Mondragon University in Spain should be invited to play a key role in forming the network and also in helping establish new co-operative universities, perhaps by providing accreditation during their formative years. The question of whether a new co-operative university should seek to integrate itself into the national regulatory framework for higher education or partner with an existing university elsewhere, such as Mondragon, remains a key issue for some participants in these workshops.

## Interviews

Ten individual interviews and three group discussions have been conducted. The purpose of these conversations was to draw on specific expertise as well as reach people who were unable to attend the workshops or focus groups. Individual participants were therefore either self-selecting, offering to be interviewed for the project, or selected because of their related experience. We interviewed researchers of pedagogy, of co-operatives, of social movements, and of alternative education. We also interviewed a lawyer specialising in UK

higher education; someone involved in supporting the conversion of co-operative schools in the UK; a founding member of UniCoop, a new co-operative university in Mexico; a senior member of Mondragon University; members of the Social Science Centre; members of the Worker's College in South Africa; and members of the UK network, Students for Co-operation.

Discussions have been wide-ranging. Most interview participants (and workshop participants, too) declined anonymity and are happy to be individually quoted. This suggests a high level of personal interest and engagement with the research; perhaps a sense of wanting to be identified as being part of something exciting.<sup>8</sup>

The interviews were sent for transcription and have been initially coded by ourselves. The most common themes are those of membership, pedagogy, the 'creation' route, size and scale of the co-operative, and governance.

The first principle of a co-operative is 'voluntary and open membership'. Interviewees recognised that membership should be open to all staff (academic, non-academic and supporting services) and students. We were reminded that in the UK Chartered universities such as Cambridge, have always been member organisations and this includes students, although the contractual relationship has since taken precedence as "the main route by which [students] exercise their rights." The transiency of students was raised as a problem of active *participation* rather than *membership*, with one interviewee stating that "...you have to figure out how they can have ... responsibility and at the same time pass it on." The same interviewee thought that some of the most active members would be "middle to lower level staff" who "keep the institution afloat... under lousy conditions." And another interviewee pointed to the same issue of encouraging active participation, which often becomes delegated to a "core" of individuals. Participation among members is always a key issue for co-operatives and one of the current aims of the global co-operative movement is to "elevate participation within membership and governance to a new level." (ICA, 2013, 4) One interviewee told us that in schools that had converted to multi-stakeholder co-operatives, sometimes teaching staff were reluctant to become members at first, perhaps due to existing low morale. Though "in the best examples, staff are very active members". Ideally, positions of responsibility in a co-operative university would be elected positions, including those of the governing body and 'Vice Chancellor' (were that position to exist). In the example of co-

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<sup>8</sup> Notes from each workshop were written up and published on the SSC website, including the names of all participants who declined anonymity. <http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/blog/category/projects/co-operative-university-projects/>

operative schools, they still maintain non-elected leadership posts, although trustees and governors are elected. We also heard how Mondragon University is a multi-stakeholder co-operative with three membership types: workers, students, and 'collaborators' from the local community (parents, local authorities, businesses, etc.), and through a system of representative democracy and one-member one-vote, the university is governed by a general assembly comprised of one-third of each membership type.

Interviewees spoke about pedagogy as a "social-human relationship", that it should be understood as an "organisational pillar", and that care for others can itself be pedagogic. This corresponds to one of the ethical values of the 'co-operative identity'. Similarly, pedagogy should not be knowledge centred, nor student centred, but focused on the relationship between teacher and student. One interviewee saw the role of teacher as "researchers with time for others", inspiring students to undertake their own research. Another interviewee acknowledged the relative freedom they currently have to teach in innovative ways, but that while "almost anything is possible ...nothing has necessarily a great deal of significance." All interviewees who discussed the theme of pedagogy made positive reference to the traditions of 'critical' and 'popular' pedagogy, but were also keen to go beyond and "revise" these established progressive forms of teaching and learning. One interviewee spoke about their research into intentional communities which revealed that the process of consensus decision-making among members can be understood as a form of pedagogy. In the organisational context, the responsibility of active membership and participation is itself a form of pedagogy and "people have to enter the process with a willingness to be transformed and to change their attitudes and their beliefs I guess."

Interviewees expressed curiosity and excitement over the idea of creating a co-operative university, referring to it as both a "dream" and driven by "discontent". The national legal regulatory framework was identified as being a potential barrier to creating a co-operative university but also in the UK's recently deregulated context, a legal expert told us that "it's probably easier than it ever has been."

Size, scale and governance were invariably discussed together, with most participants acknowledging that as the size of an organisation grows, its form of governance should change, too. Participants recognised the need for co-operative higher education to be open and inclusive yet retain small, democratic structures. Examples were given of co-operatives that had grown too large and collapsed or became "capitalist organisations". Counter to this, we were given the examples of Mondragon and the Italian Social Co-ops, where co-ops are split when they reach a certain size so as to maintain high levels of member participation

and good governance. One interviewee referred to ‘Dunbar’s number’ of 150 members for a stable and cohesive group, and this was repeated by workshop participants, too. In a university with potentially thousands of student and staff members, a ‘co-operative of co-operatives’ (along the lines of Mondragon), would be a way of maintaining local autonomy and high quality governance within Departments and Faculties, with delegated member representation at the level of the ‘secondary’ co-operative university. In one interviewee’s experience, consensual forms of decision-making can rarely exceed fifty members and should be “replicated” and “networked”, responding to local need and capacities, rather than scaled up in size.

## Framework for co-operative higher education

Throughout our research, we made audio recordings and took notes. Summaries of each workshop (which we have drawn from above) were drafted shortly afterwards, shared with participants for comment and development and then posted on the SSC website.<sup>9</sup> In our initial analysis of the data, we have attempted to abstract and synthesise from it a conceptual framework for co-operative higher education. Our method has been both deductive and inductive, applying existing concepts from our earlier related work, as well as identifying new concepts that came out of the workshops, focus groups and interviews. The framework is therefore not only proposed as the *basis* of co-operative development but also the *result* of theory and practice identified throughout our research. We have grouped the concepts into six parts of the framework which, after some deliberation, we arranged into concentric circles to represent outwards movement and contracting tension between the centre and the outer circles.

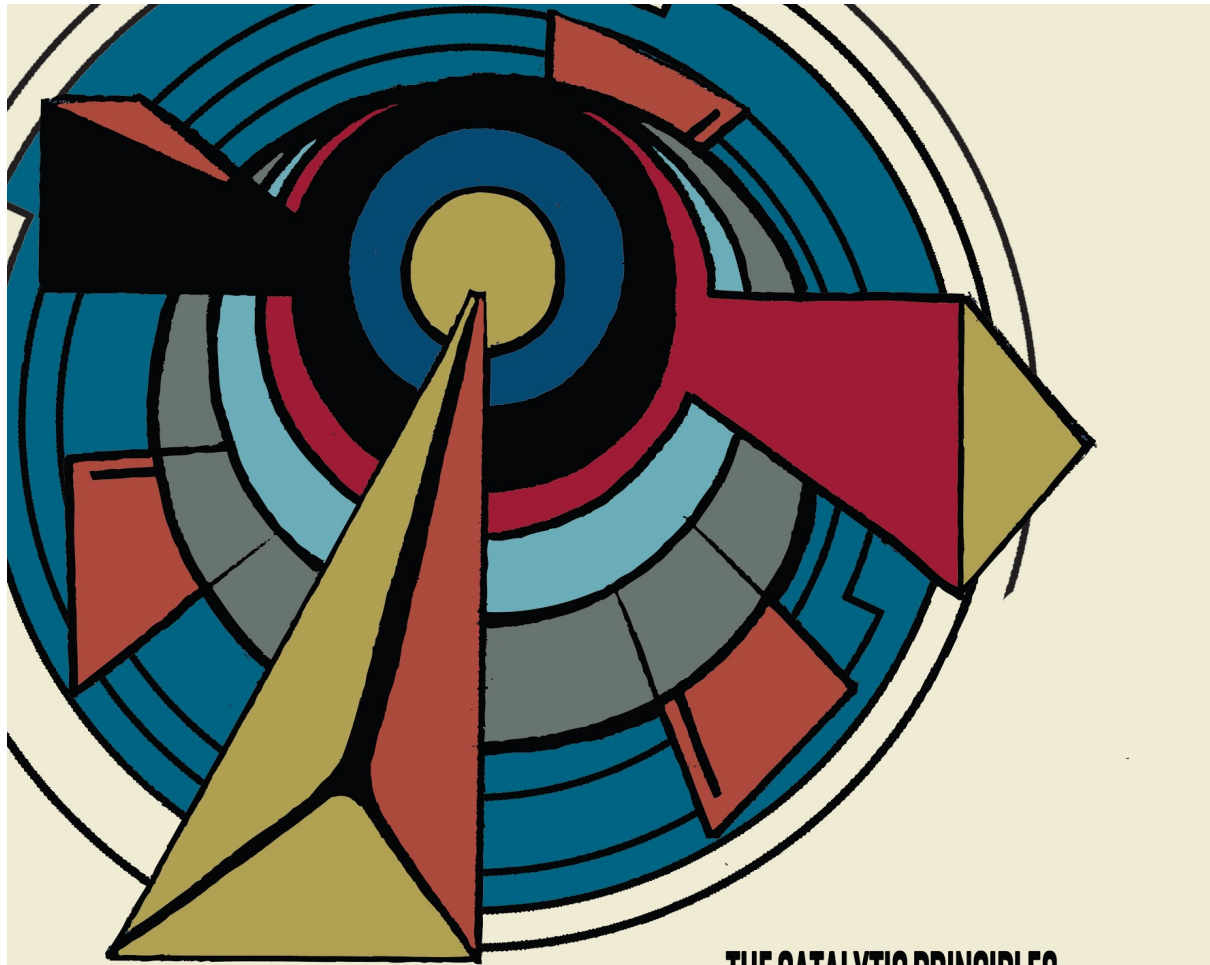
The framework is held together by the contradictory relationship of labour and property, the most basic categories of political economy. This ‘capital relation’ is a source of dynamic energy and of destructive crises, of wealth and impoverishment, that historically, has been partially contained by the distinction between private and public, a dichotomy that we find unhelpful and increasingly problematic. We emphasise the concept of the ‘social’ as the dissolution and overcoming of this ‘false dichotomy’. Trying to move away from this dichotomy, we establish three primary categories that we refer to as a ‘universal model’. It is universal because each of the categories are deemed applicable beyond the context of higher education and their integration is fundamental to any form of desirable social organisation. It situates the social intellect in an organisational setting that is rooted in its social history. Next, we identify five ‘catalytic principles’, which closely relate to the five

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<sup>9</sup> <http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/blog/category/projects/co-operative-university-projects/>

workshop themes but have been modified to better reflect the breadth of ideas that were discussed. Those principles are put into practice via one of three 'routes' to co-operative higher education, which we identified from the literature and have been used and discussed throughout our series of workshops. Finally, we propose three 'transitional themes' for any project that aims to establish co-operative higher education. They are intended to encompass the desires and hopes of the research participants by focusing on the co-operative production of social knowledge, the building of solidarity through co-operative institutions, and the movement towards a new form of social wealth, beyond the "determinate logic" (Postone, 1993, 285) of value.

The framework is intended to complement existing research on co-operatives and higher education and we anticipate it being extended to include other more specific conceptual frameworks and empirical research (e.g. Neary and Winn, 2009 (Knowledge); Bernstein, 2012; Novkovic and Miner, 2015 (Democracy); DuGay, 2000 (Bureaucracy); Ridley-Duff, 2015 (Livelihood); Develtere, 1996; Curl, 2010 (Solidarity), etc. Needless to say, each of the co-operative values and principles are either explicitly included in the framework or their mapping can easily be recognised.



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**THE CAPITAL RELATION**  
 LABOUR  
 PROPERTY  
 VALUE
- 
**THE FALSE DICHOTOMY**  
 PUBLIC  
 PRIVATE
- 
**THE UNIVERSAL MODEL**  
 SOCIAL MOVEMENT  
 SOCIAL ORGANISATION  
 SOCIAL KNOWING

- 
**THE CATALYTIC PRINCIPLES**  
 KNOWLEDGE  
 DEMOCRACY  
 BUREAUCRACY  
 LIVELIHOOD  
 SOLIDARITY
- 
**THE ROUTES**  
 CONVERSION  
 DISSOLUTION  
 CREATION
- 
**THE TRANSITIONAL THEMES**  
 SOCIAL CO-OPERATIVES  
 SOCIAL WEALTH  
 ONE SCIENCE

# CO-OPERATIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

We have chosen to illustrate our proposed framework for co-operative higher education by adopting the aesthetic and principles of Vorticism, the modernist art movement of the early

20th century that grew out of Cubism and in response to Futurism. Vorticism appeals to us, not least because of its use of abstraction, but because of the artists' attempts to incorporate a sense of movement into their painting and sculpture through the use of angular and contrapuntal lines. This desire for dynamism is not surprising given the period that Vorticism was directly responding to: the social turmoil of the industrial revolution, the fragility of bourgeois subjectivity, and the destruction of the First World War. It must be emphasised that a sense of colour and movement in our illustration is essential to what could otherwise be interpreted as a static framework, and the always immanent contradiction of the capital relation at the centre of the framework is a reminder of the ever-present crisis of capitalism. We recognise that co-operatives have always been a response to and existed within the social world of capitalism, yet are mindful that early co-operators saw their activities as the means towards a post-capitalist form of common social wealth.

## The Universal Model:

### Social Movement

This framework emphasises co-operative forms of higher education that are conscious of their connection to and engagement with the historical and logical development of the co-operative movement(s). These are co-operative forms of association where members are collectively aware of its place and role in history as well as society, and encourages individual critique concerning how the co-operative responds to local needs and capacities. Today, this is best represented by 'the new co-operativism' which is 'rupturing' "from prevailing ways of organising economic life". (Vieta, 2010, 2; Curl, 2010) We must recognise that "co-operatives were developed and are situated within social movements that shape their co-operative vision, praxis and organization". (Develtere, 1996, 22) Rather than focus simply on the organisational features of co-operation, we advocate the idea that co-operativism as distinct social movements with their own local social history has at all times overlapped with other social movements (women, worker, religious, nationalist, etc.), and "do not hinge exclusively upon one single major social movement but receive impulses from different social movements at the same time or over time." (36) A recognition of this situates the co-operative university as both a living historical subject, and an object of research for all its members. We should remember that co-operative history is not just a history of institutions but first and foremost a social history of social individuals, and that the vitality of the organisation is dependent on the development and sustaining of the social movement. (Fairburn, 2001; Diamantopoulos, 2012)

## Social Organisation

The institutional form of co-operative higher education substantiates the political, moral and ethical values of the co-operative movement, set within an educational context. The institutional form is the objective form of co-operative association in its historical and social context. The organisation also provides the material basis that enables co-operative knowledge production to occur within a commonly held “safe space” (Egan, 1990) that is constituted on the values and principles of the co-operative movement. As a social organisation, the co-operative university should sustain each of the catalytic principles of this framework. In that sense, the organisation represents the height of what is possible at any given time and prefigures what might emerge. For us, today, the ‘social’ or ‘solidarity’ or ‘multi-stakeholder’ model of co-operative’ organisation represents the most advanced transitional form of social association between individuals. It goes further than the single-member co-operative forms in constituting a dialectical response to capital and offers a more socially encompassing “safe space” against the determinate logic of value.

## Social Knowing

The pedagogy will be grounded in the practices and principles of co-operative learning, recognising that much can be learned about how to be a co-operator-student/teacher (i.e. ‘scholar’), while at the same time acknowledging that co-operative practices are already endemic in radical social interactions. Social knowing extends beyond what can be known by students and teachers, as if knowing was a matter of acquiring knowledge, and even beyond the Freirian idea that teachers and students should be involved in a dialectical and dialogical relationship. Rather, social knowing is what emerges from the recognition that students and teachers are the *specific* expression of a general *intellect* that appears as knowledge which is produced, in whatever form, e.g., curriculum, article, artwork or object, out of whatever kind of space, e.g. classroom, workshop, lecture theatre, studio, laboratory, during which time our identity as teachers and students is dissolved. This is not to assume, following Ranciere, an intellectual equivalence, but rather a non-equivalence, recognising that each member of the intellectual action are able to make a contribution as social individuals. The form of the knowing does not have to have a preordained outcome, only that it is necessary and required by its producers.



## The Catalytic Principles:

### Knowledge

Knowledge emerges from social knowing. We have developed the idea of social knowing through the concept and associated practices of Student as Producer (Neary and Winn 2009; Harney and Moten date) This current research enabled us to look at Student as Producer within a more socialised frame, which means conceptualising the relationship not in terms of the collective 'we' and the individual 'i' but more dialectically as the 'social individual' and 'radical individuality'. The most profound learning emerges by grounding ourselves in historical movement of co-operatives, along with the particular intellectual thought, critical political economy, that seeks to detonate the social relations of capitalist production, clearing the way for democratic ownership and control, in the meantime, before the establishment of a post-capitalist future (Hudis, 2012; Marx, 1989) This is not a model on which critical pedagogy is imposed, but the practice of building radical democracy, e.g., through consensual decision-making, where we all learn and teach each other how to make a new form of social institution based on non-alienated social relations.

### Democracy

Co-operatives are based on the concept of democratic control and member ownership. The fundamental issues are power and how members can be accountable to each other and their co-operative organisation. We favour a model of consensus decision making, rather than voting, as part of a learning process where members would come to understand through debate and dialogue the essence of the issue to be decided, so that effective decisions could be made. All decisions should be based on the principle of subsidiarity or radical devolution so that decisions are made at the appropriate level rather than centralised. Of central concern was the issue of size and scale so that co-operatives would not have more members than could operate based on subsidiarity and radical devolution. The feeling was that for effective power-sharing cooperatives would have no more than 150 members, although they might exist as part of a larger confederated network of similarly sized enterprises.

### Bureaucracy

This principle emerged out of our consideration of legal matters involved with establishing a co-operative enterprise, including co-operative law. Without disregarding these matters the concept of bureaucracy emerged from out of the research as a less legalistic approach to co-operative administration. Bureaucracy is usually regarded in negative terms, as a limit on

innovation, where 'red-tape' stifles creativity. We have sought to take a different approach, grounded not in the logic of instrumental rationality, but rather to regard bureaucracy as the process by which we agree and put into practice our moral and ethical principles, grounded in the principles of the co-operative movement and the social political and economic values that we espouse. Following the work of Max Weber, bureaucracy is "a site of substantive ethical domain" (Du Gay, 2000, 2) and "a particular ethos ... not only an ensemble of purposes and ideals within a given code of conduct but also ways and means of conducting oneself ... the bureau must be assessed in its own right as a particular moral institution and the ethical attributes of the bureaucrat be viewed as the contingent and often fragile achievements of that socially organised sphere of moral existence" (Du Gay, 2000, 4). In this way, the bureaucratic environment contains its very own rationality and sense of purpose (Du Gay, 2000, 75). We would want to counterpose our version of bureaucracy against the amoral financial corporate world, where ethical and moral principles can only ever be a secondary consideration behind the requirement to make profits. There is a strong congruence between academic and co-operative values, including collegiality and peer production (Cook, 2013).

## Livelihood

The co-operative movement tends to focus on matters of democratic organisation and collective ownership. These are key issues but there is more to co-operation. What is at stake is the creation of a new form of social wealth, based on transforming the social relations of production. This was discussed in detail during the business planning workshop. We considered ways in which capitalist value: money, could be socialised to support co-operatives through various forms of financial schemes: Community and Fair Shares, Loan Stock and a Solidarity Fund. We also looked at how alternative money schemes might be utilised based on shared labour schemes. These more socialised way of resourcing co-operative activity seemed against the notion of a business plan, with its commercial and profit making imperatives, so we decided on the notion of livelihood, as a more vital and vibrant way to present our work. There was general support for the concept of 'social value', recently described by one of the workshop members (Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2015), grounded in a social accounting of the public impact and consequences of co-operative activity.

## Solidarity

Solidarity is the general political principle of co-operation, not only within a particular co-operative enterprise but across the whole transnational co-operative movement, as part of already established world-wide organisations that support co-operative development. In our case solidarity should extend to support other movements, beyond higher education,

involved with matters of public and social concern. This transnational solidarity should not compromise commitment to people and places at a local level. Methods should be found to connect the local to the transnational in ways that are appropriate to the context. We are aware of the crucial importance of cultural difference and the need to learn from a variety of local and national approaches in the global north and south.

## The Routes:

Taken as a whole, efforts around co-operative higher education can be understood in terms of three routes: Conversion, dissolution, and creation. By this we mean the wholesale *conversion* of existing universities to co-operatives; or the gradual and possibly subversive *dissolution* of university processes into co-operatively governed equivalents; or the *creation* of new institutional forms of co-operative higher education. We want to make clear that if our aim is a broadly conceived co-operative higher education, we should be trying to pursue all three routes of conversion, dissolution and creation without prejudice of one over another. The success of each should not be measured against the apparent success of existing mainstream universities, but rather on the participants' own terms and the type of higher education they need and desire.

### Conversion

This route focuses on how to convert an existing university into a co-operative, either through a planned 'executive' decision or out of necessity, as in a worker takeover of a failing institution. In the UK, this route would seek to maintain any remaining public sources of funding and the 'university' title.

### Dissolution

This route focuses on how to create a co-operative university from the 'inside out', through the gradual increase of co-operative practices, such as co-operatively run research groups and departments; programmes of study in aspects of co-operation, social history, political economy, etc.; the conversion of student halls into housing co-ops; changes to procurement practices that favour co-operatives, and so on. Through this route, the university might eventually become a 'co-op of co-ops'.

### Creation

This route focuses on how to create a new co-operative form of higher education. It is the least compromising of each of the routes and in some ways the most ambitious. Discussions of this route are intensely practical in their focus and unashamedly utopian, too. This route

draws inspiration from the huge numbers of actually existing worker and social solidarity co-ops around the world.

The creation route intends to rethink not only the organisational and constitutional form of higher education but also its institutional, physical and spatial and pedagogic forms, too. It seeks to develop a co-operative higher education which recognises and builds on a long tradition of working class, self-managed, alternative, open and radical education.

## The Transitional Themes:

Here we offer three themes or long-term projects for the transition to co-operative higher education.

### Social Co-operatives

Since the 1970s, a new form of co-operative model of governance has been developed called the 'social', 'solidarity' or 'multi-stakeholder' co-operative. Our research concurs with Cook (2013), that the 'solidarity co-operative' is the most appropriate, modern organisational form for the co-operative university. Historically, it constitutes an advance on the traditional corporate form in terms of the socialisation of capital (beyond public and private) and promotes and protects the collegial forms of governance that are still evident in higher education, despite their gradual dismantling since the 1980s (Shattock, 2006). This can be viewed negatively, in terms of institutional and academic autonomy, but also indicates a broader set of stakeholders and interests in higher education; one that can be characterised not simply as a shift from public to private higher education, but rather to a more socially embedded form of organisation that serves a variety of interests that within each institution might be redefined by the concept of 'solidarity'.

In the past four decades, and particularly since the 1990s, there has been growing recognition of the solidarity co-operative organisational form, both in law and through increasing adoption worldwide. In 2011, the 'World Standards of Social Co-operatives' was ratified after a two-year global consultation process.<sup>10</sup> There are essentially five defining characteristics, at the heart of which is the multi-stakeholder membership structure. Solidarity co-operatives are therefore distinct from the traditional 'worker' or 'consumer' co-operative forms, which recognise just one membership type. Solidarity co-operatives' are constitutionally democratic forms of enterprise comprising two or more types of membership. Typically, membership will comprise of workers, consumers, volunteers, and supporters from

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.cicopa.coop/IMG/pdf/world\\_standards\\_of\\_social\\_cooperatives\\_en-2.pdf](http://www.cicopa.coop/IMG/pdf/world_standards_of_social_cooperatives_en-2.pdf)

the community. Each of these stakeholder groups is formally represented in the governing structures of the organisation on the basis of one-person one-vote. This type of co-operative was first established in Italy in the 1970s and soon thereafter in other countries. Legal recognition for solidarity co-operatives was first achieved in Italy in 1991, and in the UK, such 'multi-stakeholder co-operative societies' are now regulated by the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 or Companies Act 2006. The multiple forms of membership reflect the combined interests of the organisation within its social context and not surprisingly, solidarity co-operatives typically pursue social objectives through the provision of social services, such as healthcare and education. For example, since 2011, over 850 schools in the UK have become multi-stakeholder co-operatives. This particular model of democratic ownership and governance is an increasingly popular form of co-operative organisation and there are successful examples of different sizes and services provided, demonstrating its flexibility as a modern organisational form.

## Social Wealth

Social wealth goes beyond the concept of social value (Duff and Bull, 2016). Social value is an accounting device to record where co-operative enterprises are adding value to social and public situations. Social wealth is a more profound and ambitious concept, seeking to transform the nature of capitalist wealth to a new principle of material or social wealth based not on profit making but on connecting the needs and capacities of social individuals. If profit making wealth is related to the law of the market, scarcity drives value. When social wealth is based on connecting the needs and capacities of society the principle of abundance drives value. Social wealth does not have to be created anew, it already exists within profit making economics but is contained and restricted by the law of the market and the state. "The state of abundance is not a Utopian vision, but the real possibility of conditions already in existence." (Kay and Mott, 1982, 1). In a state of abundance the market and the state would cease to exist. The law of capitalist value is not derived from market exchange or state oppression but is founded within the processes of capitalist production where labour is the main source of value. In order for social wealth to be unlocked there needs to be a transformation of the capitalist law of labour in way that accommodates the connection of needs and capacities. This means finding ways to take control of the value produced by our own labour. Since the foundation of the co-operative movement "their object was the emancipation of labour from capitalist exploitation" (Holyoake quoted in Yeo, 1988, 63). This control of value and the means of production can be regarded as a period of transition towards the ultimate abolition of capitalist work, to a condition where work is not simply a means to an end, but rather an end in itself alongside other life enhancing activities (Marx, 1989).

## One Science

There was a strong feeling from the workshops that the substantive content of what is taught and researched should include subjects across all disciplines: interdisciplinarity. But more than that, there should be an attempt to develop a curriculum and research projects which seek to challenge the fundamental distinctions between the sciences, arts and humanities, and to focus on what we have in common, as students and teachers, in terms of our scholarly methodologies and methods. Marx argued in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 that “natural science has transformed human life all the more practically through industry and has prepared the conditions for human emancipation, however much its immediate effect was to complete the process of dehumanisation” (Marx, 1975, 304). Even during the time in which he is writing he argues that the stage is set for natural science to “become the basis of a human science...The idea of one basis for life and another for science is from the very outset a lie...Natural science will in time subsume the science of man, just as the science of man will subsume natural science: there will be *one science*.” (304). This is much more than a call for interdisciplinarity, but is a powerful critique of the subject discipline obsessed capitalist university, providing the basis for a new revolutionary science and the foundation for a higher and higher education.

## Conclusion

This research has been undertaken during a period of continual restructuring of public services and the higher education sector. During this period, we have been involved, with others, in forming a response that is not simply an act of principled opposition to the concept of students as consumers and the market-based principle of value-for-money. Our concerns have been guided by the more foundational themes of social co-operatives, which reconfigure labour and property; a new form of social wealth, based on the principle of abundance; and reconstituting the curriculum in a way that reflects the critical-practical nature of these concepts which we refer to as one science. The key issue that all of our work points to is the way that value is produced in capitalist society. This is a problem to be either solved by capitalism or abolished by a real alternative.

Productivity is not only our concern, but is the key driver for government policy and the real basis for recent reforms. This is evidenced with remarkable clarity at the beginning of the recent HE Green Paper (BIS, 2015):

“Increasing productivity is one of the country’s main economic challenges, and universities have a vital role to play. As outlined in the Government’s Productivity

Plan, *Fixing the Foundations: creating a more prosperous nation*, increasing productivity will be the main driver of economic growth in years to come, and improving skills are an essential component of this.”

While the focus of debate has been on the practical implications of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the Research Excellence Framework (REF), our concern is to address the problem of productivity and, therefore, the production of value. What we have done in this paper is to develop a different framework for debate and action, building on the foundations of the co-operative movement and participatory action research. We have identified three routes by which universities might be reconstituted as co-operatives. We have framed the debate around a set of catalytic principles (knowledge, democracy, bureaucracy, livelihood and solidarity) that provide momentum for three transitional themes. These themes are the outcome of our deductive and inductive methodology and are by no means fully resolved, but a way to focus the conversation and point in the direction of future work. This will involve testing the catalytic principles through a closer engagement with co-operative enterprises and using them inside higher education institutions as an alternative to the metrics of performance; and by looking at how innovations in the ‘new co-operativism’ can be applied to the higher education context.

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