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Module 4 reflection exercise

[Dan Wilton](#)
[All Sections](#)

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Option 1

Yochai Benkler posed a fascinating and important question: are the emerging alternatives referred to as platform co-operatives offering potential for advancing systems change or are they just another form of capitalism?

Choose one or more of the digital platform innovations profiled that you find most engaging and use it as a lens through which to explore Benkler's question.

Option 2

Choose one or more of the highlighted innovations/alternatives (objective 2) that interest you. Reflect on its possible application in a community or sector context you are directly impacted by, involved in, or would like to explore ways of making a contribution. Reflect on why it is potentially important in the context you are thinking about. Identify the impacts you think it could have over time, if implemented. Last, do you think it makes a contribution to systems change, and if so, how? If not, why it is still important to advance?

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<https://courses/2527/users/897624>

[melissa scaman \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897624\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897624)

Apr 15, 2019

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I found lacking in this module is recognition of how the 'new/digital economy' is further disconnecting us from fundamental things that are necessary for our own survival and health. - Clean air, clean water, and the Earth.

Just as the discussion in the last module become focused on social sustainability, rather than ecological issues despite the fact the food production is directly linked to ecological issues. For example, I brought up the unsustainable production of coffee and sugar for rich country consumption, and all responses was focused on fair compensation and impacts on the producers - I was talking about the environmental impacts. There is no sustainable way to grow millions of acres of one crop (coffee), and ship it thousands of miles for consumption. Period. What is the

carbon footprint of coffee? Why did everyone focus on the social issues of coffee and not the health of the Earth?

Given the crisis point we are now at with climate change, it should be part of all considerations and issues.

I find those in the coop and non-profit sector tend to put social justice at the center of their mindset/work, but if you fully understand the current state of our Earth and climate change crisis, we should be putting the earth at the center. I will be blunt, basic income, living wages, social community, and access to resources does not matter if we have no air to breath.

The ocean produces most of our oxygen, and it is dying. We are running out of drinkable water. It's a big deal.

My issues with the digital economy is it is disconnecting us even further from the Earth and interconnection, while continuing to kill the Earth at a faster rate. The underclass and mass unemployment the digital economy creates makes people short sighted, and more willing to destroy the earth or other species for self preservation/fulfillment.

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[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)



Apr 18, 2019

Hi Melissa

These are superb critical reflections. Thanks so much. In our book, The Resilience Imperative, Mike Lewis and I sought ways of tackling this huge divide between say the ecological stewardship analysis (commons) with the social justice analysis. As you rightly underscore, there is a singularity of vision on one side or the other. We found it helpful to try to align the resilience principles with the co-operative principles as a wider common good values base and argued for what we called SEE (social, ecological and economic) change as a joined social movements SEA change to resist the enclosures and support the blessed unrest brilliant work at the grassroots to co-build the Great Transition.

Why Synergia? We also with others set up Synergia to advance this common way of Seeing solidarity ways forward. Sadly as you indicate, many co-ops do not walk the talk as they neglect and don't invest in the last three co-op principles: Principle 5 (co-op education for all members and stakeholders), Principle 6 (mutual aid and co-operation among co-operatives - the solidarity economy principle) and Principle 7 (securing community benefit, do not harm, or people care and earth care).

David Bollier's blog here about the Co-op Commons and some ongoing work in Barcelona is insightful I think.

<http://www.bollier.org/blog/barcelonas-brave-struggle-advance-commons>

(<http://www.bollier.org/blog/barcelonas-brave-struggle-advance-commons>)

All the best

Pat

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[Caroline Hurley \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561)

Apr 30, 2019

This article stresses that it is important to think before acting, even for XRers, because if we're not careful we could be adding to the problem we're trying to solve -

<http://www.feasta.org/2019/04/24/extinction-rebellion-green-new-deal-labour-and-sustainability-and-cap-and-share/> (<http://www.feasta.org/2019/04/24/extinction-rebellion-green-new-deal-labour-and-sustainability-and-cap-and-share/>)

Of course we need to be doing both, thinking and acting, in the various domains: environment, community and so on while individually surviving from wherever we find ourselves. On coming into some money a decade or so ago, I resigned from a public service job which I felt often treated the public as an unreasonable nuisance to be kept at a distance. I subsequently lost quite a lot of my bequest to brokers and their accumulation by dispossession. A lamb to the slaughter when it came to money markets. I tried ethical investment for a while but it bombed too. I'm left at least without a mortgage, with some rental income, and time. As a landlord my rates are the lowest available and the tenants have my number if they're not satisfied with the manager I hired to deal with repairs and so

on. I hope later this year to have a real handle on the true state of my losses so that I can make decisions with what's left. I would really like to be able to contribute more both personally and in resources to cooperative endeavors, as a lifelong often-repressed hippie-poet.

I recently moved house and at the same time, a household moved in near me. They are loud, they trespass and run round my garden like it's theirs, throwing not only balls over the wall and back but also scrap metal missiles that could kill someone. The police, already acquainted with them for other reasons, say to ignore them. I soon learned they're Council tenants, meaning their requests for housing accessories are generously pandered to. While considering Guy Standing's precariat and the subdivisions of atavistic, nostalgic and progressive, it occurred to me they probably fall into the first category: those of few opportunities or conventional socio-moral values, getting what they can, with hits, from day to day however they can, the 2 fingers stuck up to tidy goody-goodies like me. And oddly enough, a basic income could wake them up to the idea they're not so special and are expected to follow the same communal rules others do. When I'm in the precariat, I'm more of an either nostalgic or progressive mindset. But everyone getting the same payment would surely speak volumes, and potentially free huge numbers of us up psychologically to concentrate on addressing priorities instead of persisting in bs jobs we hate doing that only keep the same system going or wasting our lives otherwise. Some politicians worry more than others about the new order it could foster. Basicincome.org's monthly newsletter Newsflash relays the latest news about basic income initiatives around the world and can be signed up to here <https://basicincome.org/newsflash/> (<https://basicincome.org/newsflash/>)

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[Conor O'Brien \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/906698\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/906698)

Apr 19, 2019

Hello all,

I do not believe we will get change at the government or academic level. Here in Ireland most cooperative academics are invested in the "system". They have to, because it is practically impossible to get to a position of influence in either area without doing so.

This program here opens possibilities for changing this, but Melissa is right. The environment is the key to change. The social damage is a consequence of how the environment is treated.

Our view of the problem is formed by our background. Mine is farming, and while I would have been environmentally aware, it is only now that I am realising the importance of the quality of the soil.

While farming I saw it almost as a collection of chemicals and minerals which housed a variety of insects and worms. My input was about what were the most effective minerals to add to this. This is how the thinking of a commodity producer is aligned with a commodity world. The concept of soil as a natural system, in fact the only natural system, was not present to me.

There is more awareness now, and the availability of knowledge and opinions through the

internet is playing a big part in that. So how do we get change?

We get change one person at a time through a planned campaign of people acting the change in their places through small scale projects.

I do not believe we will get it by mass demonstrations. The system knows how to deal with them; if they were going to be effective they would be banned. Solid planned work that continues when the demonstrators are all at home having their supper will be more effective.

There is a chicken and egg problem in dealing with small scale projects. The planning authorities need evidence of practicality, but evidence cannot be gathered because it is different to the system. "Not practical"

My small part is to work with a person who wants to do an under the radar version of the Welsh One planet system. Will it work? Who is to say what effects an action might have. Try it and see.

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[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)

Apr 20, 2019

Hello Conor

Great points indeed.

This is a good example from Italy called Libera Terra of co-operative agro-ecology that speaks well to what you say about Climate Justice in action that builds commonwealth.

<https://liberaterra.it/en/>

Your chicken and egg problem is the tricky one. Planning is a barrier. Also we need to be careful not to lump all Government and all Academics into the same basket. But as you say, they insist on 'evidence based findings' these day. Actually friendly academics can play a role in providing the latter.

On this score the work and story of Preston is interesting in how they revised the procurement rules to break large contracts into smaller ones that were not attractive by their nature to large corporates, This gave opportunity to local small businesses. Preston council then worked with researchers to track the results and to show how their experiment improved community wealth building.

Similarly in our CLT national demonstration project in England and Wales, we worked with communities to set up 30 CLT projects in 2005 (15 urban and 15 rural) and after 4 years we found by doing it in peer to peer ways that the rural projects had exceeded our expectations in that 20 had or were then building the CLT homes but none of the urban projects had got any land because of 'old boy' networks in cities. Eventually we broke through in the cities but it took some doing.

What was key for the expansion of the CLTs was that the national development project was supported by a specialist unit we set up at Salford University in Manchester. The Unit

was called Community Finance Solutions and this did the research to provide the evidence to national policy makers and the affordable housing gatekeepers. What also was key was finding fellow travellers in local government. This in the rural areas turned out to be Cornwall (which had a huge problem of low income communities and sky high housing price being inflated by second home owners and holiday home speculators). Cornwall County Council got the message and led the way on the rural CLT support. Other local government bodies in rural areas then followed this pioneering attitude to a greater or lesser extent.

Pat

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[Tristan Laing \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918)

Apr 19, 2019

Melissa,

Is it really not possible to produce coffee in an environmentally sustainable way? I generally try to purchase only organic, fair trade coffee. There must be some amount of coffee that can be raised and shipped sustainably? I want to get to the point where I'm buying only fair trade bananas. I want to improve my relationship with food systems, but it's tough because I'm financially precarious and where I live, the only options I'm aware of for consuming more ethically involve "paying more at the pump", as it were.

As for the health of the earth, this is a moral issue, a social issue. If the coffee trade is fundamentally unsustainable, then it must be regulated down to a sustainable level - this will require essentially some kind of moral control over trade, where the moral value is not destroying the planet.

I agree with you in general about the digital economy. I looked into Sherry Turkle's work because it was referenced in one of our readings, and I was really touched by her Ted talk. It reminds me a bit of Eric Fromm's work, actually - this importance of being alone to being able to engage genuinely in community, in conversation.

I respectfully disagree with framing "earth" vs "social justice" in opposition to each other. In order to have social justice, we need an earth. That means the earth is already present in all our discussions of social justice, perhaps as an ignored assumption, but in general I think there is a much higher level of recognition of environmental issues among people who discuss "social justice" vs those who don't. Let's lift up environmental issues, and not engage in a politics of zero-sum games?

Edited by [Tristan Laing \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918) on Apr 19 at 4:20pm

← [Reply](#)

[melissa scamman \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897624\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897624) 

Apr 15, 2019

One thing that is common among all the solutions to entrenched economic displacement and inequality is at the core it requires psychological changes and dealing with the fear of change, particularly fear of unknown change. Many of the alternatives will create new norms, and creates alot of unknown. Those with power and resources fear and resist change, and most of those suffering the negative consequences also resist change. Both stakeholders fear the unknown, fear potential loss, and lack knowledge about alternatives that could benefit them.

I would like to see more discussion of how to effectively facilitate change. There is lot's of work from the corporate world about 'change management' among employees. Are those methodologies and resources useful for social and economic change?

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 [Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)

Apr 19, 2019

Hi Melissa

Another brilliant question that no doubt others on the course are also looking for some ideas about. The work of Marshall Ganz at the grassroots in the civil rights movement in the US in the 1960s and as an organiser for the United Farm Workers in California both in the fields to build the union and in the Grape Boycott led to his analysis of what he learned about the ways and means for overcoming fear and in alliance building. Here is a 2 minute intro he gave to the Resistance School recently about the need to create a Common Story and advance this as a public narrative. This is just the intro and you find other parts linked to this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1Z2Rog--P8> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1Z2Rog--P8>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1Z2Rog--P8>

Pat

[← Reply](#)

 [Lella Blumer \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/896798\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/896798)

May 27, 2019

Melissa, are you familiar with Theory U? Here's a link: <https://www.presencing.org/aboutus/theory-u> <https://www.presencing.org/aboutus/theory-u>

I would call this approach change management for fundamental social change. You have hit the nail on the head by identifying fear as the number one motivator for individuals and corporations alike, and fear is being used by a sector of those with economic and therefore political power to limit the vision and intentions of people and communities. That may be why people seem more focused on their economic survival than ecological survival. It's very difficult to act against that kind of power to sway people, but as others have stated and demonstrated, every step is meaningful.

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[melissa scaman \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897624\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897624)

Apr 15, 2019

My choice example in this module was the initiatives noted as, "Cooperation Jackson" in Jackson, USA.

<https://cooperationjackson.org/> [\(https://cooperationjackson.org/\)](https://cooperationjackson.org/)

I would like to think we could apply the ideas of their urban land trust, and cooperative businesses they are putting into the buildings the land trust is buying in urban Canada to counter gentrification.

Why I selected this alternative? -The initiatives were implements with very limited resources. It is very grassroots. It is capacity building, and educational. It is holistic. It is honest and address core issues, that capitalist and the current political system is a problem. It seems like a realistic starting phase for socioeconomic change.

Benefits? - It teaches people how to participate in a new economic and governance/political models through learning by doing, and developing new mindsets/ways of thinking. It is holistic, addressing income, democratic governance, food security, resource availability, ecological issues, and education.

Negatives? - There was not much detail provided in the interview, so I am not aware of alot of the potential challenges. It seemed to have required a dire situation to be initiated. The community suffered extreme poverty, and had hit a wall that made the initiative possible. I am hoping we don't all need 50% unemployment and widespread poverty in our community to initiate change. Appear to be facing challenges with fundraising to further some of the projects.

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[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)

Apr 19, 2019

Hi Mel

Jackson Rising is a good example of a number of regional Solidarity Economy building

networks. I mentioned Barcelona and New York in my introduction and sent you the David Bollier blob about the former. The New York group did some brilliant action research to build an alliance across the city. You will find on the Solidarity NYC home page below some of the videos of the work by many groups in different communities across the city they mapped. Also have a look at the map of the Solidarity Economy they posted. Solidarity NYC is a collective of activists that have formed a co-op called Co-operative Economy Alliance - NYC) 'scenic' for short. See more info online highlighting that they have developed a course in practical co-op economics and putting ideas in economic democracy building action. An impressive achievement. Some of their members have formed a Study Circle to join this version of Synergia. Here in the UK I am a member of a co-op called Solidarity Economy Association (SEA) this is doing mapping work like the New York activists have done in two city regions. We are working with Ripess Europe on a tool to do this with Live and Open Data (LOD) to keep the maps up to date like a Wiki.

<http://solidaritynyc.org> (<http://solidaritynyc.org>)

Pat

← [Reply](#)



[Conor O'Brien \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/906698\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/906698)

Apr 19, 2019

The Naked Capitalism site is one of the best sites for social and environmental thinking. Yves Smith the chief editor is ex-McKinsey and sharp as a whip. She does not take prisoners in the discussion columns, so there is a very high quality of debate.

If you are serious about knowing what is happening in the world this is the equivalent of what the Financial Times is to the corporate world.

This is a piece from today's edition about Porto Rico. Try it and see.

<https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2019/04/mckinsey-doing-gods-work-in-puerto-rico.html>

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[Tristan Laing \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918)

Apr 19, 2019

"are the emerging alternatives referred to as platform co-operatives offering potential for advancing systems change or are they just another form of capitalism?"

If really depends what we mean by capitalism. When I say capitalism, I mean a system

characterized generally by a) theft of the commons and b) an approach to governance which has been historically referred to as "liberalism". These two features are not really distinguishable from each other (they mutually justify and reinforce each other). So my best attempt at a "definition" is going to look like this:

1. accumulation by dispossession (historical and ongoing) - general denigration of the reality and concept of the "commons", proposes private greed/ownership as solution to environmental and social (i.e. "Common") problems
2. dis-embedding of local trade relations from the moral fabric of society. Communities lose control over their local markets (See EP Thompson's work on the "[Moral Economy of the English Crowd](https://www.jstor.org/stable/650244) (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/650244>)"), and the traditional systems for establishing a "just price" are replaced by an assumption that the price that arises in the "free market" is the "true" price.
3. destruction of the guilds whenever possible. Negative attitudes towards non-religious ritual practices. (This was largely accomplished before the rise of capitalism, and done in the name of increasing power of the "state", but I do see it as a key enabler because it took down key structures of community/economic democracy. Also, the anti-capitalist tendency of guilds can be seen in their connections with the early modern co-operative movement i.e. [Fenwick](http://fenwickweaverscooperative.com/frenwick-weavers-society/history/) (<http://fenwickweaverscooperative.com/frenwick-weavers-society/history/>)).
4. liberalization of long-distance trade, and erasure of the distinction between local and long-distance trade (this is a massive historical anomaly of the "modern" world). Fairground (site of long distance exchange) is made permanent in the "stock market". (My main source here is the work of [Arpad Szakolczai](https://www.politicalanthropology.org/8-chief-editors/99-arpad-szakolczai.html) (<https://www.politicalanthropology.org/8-chief-editors/99-arpad-szakolczai.html>) on "Fairground Capitalism")
5. liberal attitudes towards personal morality justified in the name of social good (Mandeville - [Fable of the bees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fable_of_the_Bees) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fable_of_the_Bees)), we all believe that personal vice produces social virtue (absurd).

Now, looking at capitalism this way, as a system, then simply changing the characteristics of how capital is controlled is not going to totally transform the system. However, platform co-ops, if they were to become the dominant form of capital ownership, would have a substantial impact on "capitalism" as I've defined it. I don't see the need to limit this to a single Platform Co-op, so I'm going to think about how the "economy" would be transformed in relation to the 5 points above if producer owned Platform co-ops like FairBNB, GreenTaxi, SMart, etc, became dominant across all the sectors in which labour is carried out by independent contractors/artisans.

- 1) Platform Co-ops generate a very different and more generous attitude and set of practices towards the commons, and even "commoning".
- 2) Platform co-ops allow producers to work together to decide on fair prices for their labour, bringing moral issues into pricing. Also, Platform co-ops will regulate the quality of work, because everyone who is a member has an interest in their co-op being a byword for quality - tendency will be to weed out free-riders. And that basically covers
- 3) - platform co-ops, when they are co-ops of producers, are essentially guilds. Not sure how these guilds will resuscitate an appetite for ritual practice, I think their governance is done mostly electronically. This is potentially a weak point.
- 4) If platform co-ops were able to become economically dominant, they may be able to institute

their own regulations on labour flows between markets. For example, if there was a European wide network of platform rideshare co-ops, they could have some kind of mutual agreement allowing for a certain amount of members from some regions moving to other regions.

5) I think participating in any co-op in which all members work and in which they are impacted by each others' work, this essentially teaches people, socially, the importance of a certain set of moral values (i.e. diligence, quality, etc), in such a way that they see the direct inter-link between the moral value and the social application/purpose/impact of that value.

I think if Platform co-ops were to become a dominant force in the "economy", capitalism would be substantially impacted. However, **Platform Co-ops are not a solution to large scale production and distribution**. No approach to creating a co-operative commonwealth which doesn't have a plan for Amazon, Walmart, and the current production systems that supply them, can be considered serious.

Edited by [Tristan Laing \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918) on Apr 19 at 4:13pm

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[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)

Apr 20, 2019

Hi Tristan

This is a brilliant Reflection Exercise. You focus convincingly and quite rightly not exclusively (as you comment at the end) on the platform co-op way forward but make no comments on the complementary role of trade unions the materials talk to. Just wondering if you had any further points to add about them? On the social history aspect, the guild movement morphed as early capitalism emerged in different countries and forked in two key ways; The Masters in the guilds became the burghers (the capitalists over time) while the Day workers (where the the 'journeymen' name came from as they travelled and worked for a day rate) and Apprentices established trade unions (underground for centuries in many countries until they secured legality at different times in different countries).

Pat

↳ [Reply](#)



[Tristan Laing \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918)

Apr 20, 2019

Hi Pat,

I didn't talk about union coops because the question, as I read it, was specifically about platform Co-operativism.

Unions do have access to capital through member dues. And there are unions doing good things in terms of funding social/solidarity economy ventures.

In the past, the knights of labor pursued a union based worker co-op creation strategy that had big aspirations. However, after the Haymarket affair, it was very easy for capitalist firms to attack the union based worker co-ops by refusing to supply them with raw materials and refusing to purchase from them. The consumer co-operators have always understood this problem - the fabled December night in 1844, where rochdale pioneers waited their comrades with the barrow to return from Manchester, that whole escapade was only necessitated because of being boycotted by the local wholesalers. No surprise that it was Rochdale pioneers at the forefront of discussions which brought the CWS into existence in the early 1860s. By extending working class ownership over the entire chain of production and distribution, a system is created which is maximally defensible against economic sabotage by the capitalist class (although, as they learned during the great war, not political sabotage).

I worry that there are cultural problems with unions that would make the prospect of owning large scale firms unappealing. And from a realpolitik perspective, whether profitable or loss making, union owned firms can be dangers to entrenched authority either way.

[← Reply](#)



[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)



Apr 22, 2019

Hey Tristan

You are right about the Exercise question. Beyond the Reflection exercise that you handled powerfully, I was simply keen to get your analysis on the trade union and co-op partnership. A tough one as you say and our work in the UK on Union Co-ops is just getting underway by advancing the Social Dialogue between these two key social movements. A coming together is key if we want to build countervailing social power for systems change and collaboration on an Alternative Economic Strategy. Engaging and re-connecting again co-op and trade union movements, is a key first step.

The Knights of Labor in the US and Canada and their strategic focus on economic democracy is a good example. Thanks and for your reflections here. Then with similarities to now, real incomes were declining year on year during Long Depression of 20 years from 1873 to the early 1890s. Other reform and reconstruction movements built together cross alignments and these were on the rise. For example, many grassroots activists in both movement and small farmers, and land workers supported money reform via Greenbacks - fiat money not linked to gold as today we see again the case being made for People's QE and a Green New Deal. The Greenback Labor movement supported public bank ideas. I am facilitator for Module 7 on finance later on the course and we will seek to get a grip with this then and what we can learn from past successes and failures for the present as you scrutinise well.

But also more recently in the 1980s trade unions and the co-op movement in a

number of countries joined forces to seek to advance economic democracy. Here in the UK both movements worked to stop the privatisation of municipal bus services and Co-op models were jointly proposed and indeed in a number of cities secured the contracts. Unfortunately the Employee Ownership model was a management buy out one and during the 1990s in virtually all cases the employees voted to transfer ownership to private operators.

Our Union Co-ops steering group has attracted the support of 8 trade unions in the UK over the past six months. We are co-planning a series of events and working with the Union Coop movement in the US.

Pat

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[Tristan Laing \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918)



Apr 20, 2019

Regarding the relationship between the collapse of guilds and the rise of capitalism,

I think it's important to distinguish between two periods of decline for guilds. I understand they were attacked, finally de-legitimized, and lost the last of their rights in the late 18th/into the 19th and 20th century (although certainly they continue to exist amongst some of the highest skilled workers, lawyers, accountants, engineers, etc). These attacks came from the emerging discourse that we can call "liberalism", although the physiocrats I think had the same critiques of guilds. I think to talk about the social history here we should say something like, due to their loss of protected status in guilds, masters generally went on to become bourgeois, and apprentices workers. But what's important is the system that bonded them together was destroyed by the state. This is really the state saying it has the right to regulate production directly, artisans have no right to self-regulation because it is not in the public interest. In contemporary language, perhaps they may have been denounced as "special interest groups".

However, manufacturing guild began declining much earlier (1500s?), under pressure to reduce prices (perhaps related to the little ice age and economic contraction). My understanding of the general dynamic of the decline of lower skilled guilds from the middle ages to present is bankers, politicians, and the high-skilled guilds (including literally guilds of bankers), worked together to undermine the ability of lower skilled industries to self regulate and set production targets and prices.

Yes, I think you're right, whenever an industry loses its ability to self regulate, it breaks down into a system characterized by class antagonism.

← [Reply](#)



[Tristan Laing \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918)



Apr 20, 2019

With regard to that last point, the USSR's decision to dissolve the co-op boards after the revolution, and the fakeness of NEP with respect to genuine co-op autonomy, and then final destruction of the consumer coop movement on under Stalin - if we ignore for a minute the USSR's supposed ideology, we can read that as the state re-affirming it's right to suppress any organizations that may have the power to self-regulate a portion of the economy. This would line up with Foucault's point about the USSR never developing an automous governmentality but merely regressing from liberalism to the police state.

The term "Co-operative Commonwealth" has a long history with soviet-critical socialists. In the early 20s the US based student league for industrial democracy dropped language that associated them with the Soviet Union, but kept the term 'cooperative Commonwealth' in their statement of unity. In the 40s when they dropped that term from their program, it was because it had become ideologically associated with Soviet style Communism.

One of the key elements in the view of consumer coop based coop Commonwealth was the ability to regulate production to prevent over production and downward price pressure. Also, to regulate competition - not allowing too many Cooperative societies to exist in the same area. I see these "anti competitive" elements of consumer Co-operative Commonwealth as symbolic ties back to the strategies for social stability instituted by guild systems. Recognizing the importance of social regulation through civil association of competition is, i think, key to building a genuinely alternative governmentality (in Foucault's sense).

← [Reply](#)



[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)



Apr 22, 2019

Great points Tristan. The Tudors 500 years ago began to support the emergence of manufacturing but under strong state regulation. Henry VIII of course legalises usury and lending at interest. Elizabeth I regulates and nationalises in effect the guilds in the manual trades - the artisans. But as you say, the professional classes of merchants, accountants, lawyers, architects etc are exempted and allowed to continue to self-regulate and we see thereafter the development of partnerships and partnership law not requiring an Act of parliament. Also with freehold property emerging with only a Master able to own a shop - but not a string of shops - only one due to the threat that clearly a chain would pose to other Masters in the town and the collectively regulation of trade.

The platform corporations resemble 'with their dark arts' the long distance trading mercantile guilds then and earlier as the means to bypass the town 'just price' regulations of the guilds. To do so then, cottage industries and villages were procured from at slavery prices. This was called 'out-putting' to 'home workers'. Indeed a key

learning point from SEWA was that it was precisely organised as a trade union for not just street vendors in Ahmedabad and Gujarat in the early 1970s but also to organise 'home workers' that the textile and garment corporations were 'out-putting' to and still are. Nothing new as they say, but the key point is that the resistance and organising must not neglect the best broad based organising strategies from the Past when mutual aid organisations (trade unions, co-ops, mutuals and civil society organisations worked cleverly together hand in glove).

Pat

[← Reply](#)



[Tristan Laing \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/679918)



Apr 25, 2019

Appreciate your continuation in this string very much, Pat. Agree with all your points - one more thing though

" Also with freehold property emerging with only a Master able to own a shop - but not a string of shops - only one due to the threat that clearly a chain would pose to other Masters in the town and the collectively regulation of trade. "

I hadn't given enough thought to the regulatory framework that produced the retail situation which allowed the Co-op movement to flourish in the 19th century. Sometimes when I tell the story of the emergence of the C.W.S. I really focus on this idea that "the co-ops invented vertically integrated retail, and were quite dominant up until the point, in the 1950s, when for-profit retailers figured out how to run chains supplied by their own privately owned wholesale network" - but the problem with this story is the co-ops are actually acting as the "disruptors" in the 19th century - driving prices downwards by effectively undermining these earlier forms of regulation (really by creating an alternative framework of ownership).

If this is correct, then my fears at the co-op movement was a kind of proto-neoliberalism may bear out. I've always been uncomfortable at how easily co-op and neo-liberal discourses can mutually reinforce each other. If co-operation is a tool used by a social movement, that has a strong social religion (i.e. Victorian progressivism), then the "disruption" might be justifiable in terms of moving the site of regulation from the state to the community - but, if at the same time, the co-op becomes an international arrangement, that social religion is going to have to be pretty damn strong to prevent the desire for cheap goods to justify awful practices on the other end. And, the C.W.S. behaviour from the 50s to the 70s bears this out - they were really quite slow to adopt Fair Trade practices (Japan is the more heartening example here, but also maybe Japan never had its social fabric destroyed by liberalism in the same way as Western countries). That said, The CWS/Co-operative Group's currently willingness to support Fair Trade today is, maybe, quite an encouraging suggestion that we have developed a social religion powerful enough to regulate international trade? Of course that's happened at the expense of the Group no longer being a working class institution

- and this shift, well, it happens over the same period of time, right?

← [Reply](#)



[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)



Apr 26, 2019

Hi Tristan

Interesting questions. But there is something you are missing. So a few comments that I hope will shed more light here....

Regulation by government follows social rights secured by people and communities against oppression. A German judge and old friend highlighted this to me in the 1990s as the historic evolution of the 'sociology of law.' 'Baron's law' as they sometimes say in the UK came first - a first step for the aristocracy but not very inclusive. Magna Carta was forced on a despotic King John in 1215. But those same barons had to be fought against by artisans who formed mutual aid guilds to secure via a license (the charter of the guild) which granted the emergence of their self-regulated markets in exchange for taxes - also to pay for protection by the overlord. These struggles took place over centuries across Europe and got incorporated into by-laws in towns and cities as these emerged. Guilds have different names in Russia, the Middle East, India, West Africa, etc but the social economic histories are similar.

So socially secured rights evolve and gain government approval. Here is your point about state regulation which has the benefit of universalising rights. You in other reflections have noted the work of Beatrice Webb. Actually her work and that of Sidney Webb (the Fabians) advocated what become the welfare state by arguing for universal provision of health care, unemployment benefits, public support for affordable housing, pensions, by drawing on German reforms but also the innovation of the co-operative and trade union movements. The UK National Health Service was modelled in 1943 on what was achieved to provide partial sickness and health services by 20,000 plus friendly societies - most of these were sponsored by trade unions.

You can trace the UN Human Rights Declaration back this way. Moreover human rights it must not be forgotten are different bundles: political rights, civil rights, social rights, economic rights and cultural rights.

History tells us that it was civil society organisations including artisanal guilds, friendly societies (who invented mutual insurance for funerals, sickness, homes, etc), co-ops, trade unions, the suffragettes, Home rule movements (Ireland, India, South Africa, etc), environmental movements, etc, etc - this is the democratic sociology of law in action opposing oppression, rent-seeking

and usurious Baron's Law practices.

For this reason John Stuart Mill was a huge supporter of co-ops, women's rights, land reform via taxing the unearned increment (this is where Henry George got his ideas), public parks, and the commons. But he was definitely not a neoliberal. He championed in particular worker co-ops (as practical schools for daily democracy),co-operative commonwealth thinking and what we would call today social democracy but enriched by involving citizens actively through civil society activism.

Pat

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2 2



[Murray Hidlebaugh](#)

<https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/895967>

Apr 21, 2019



The Preston model is very interesting. My experience is working on Community Economic Development projects with communities in rural Saskatchewan, including development of cooperatives. I have encountered many of the challenges the Preston Model has identified. There are several strategies outlined in the video that I think are applicable here.

The discussion on place-based policy and localization of business development, with strategies to do so, is informative. The interviews with the members of both the municipal government and the Labour Party indicated a high level of understanding and support for the project. It is useful to learn that there is at least one political party in the G7 who aren't all in on globalization. In Canada, at the federal level, there is legislation, there are public health policies, and there are trade treaty agreements such as the NAFTA and the CPTPP, that make it almost impossible to institute, place-based, local procurement or construction programs. And in terms of food production, processing, and distribution this is only tolerated if it is on a very small scale.

I found it interesting that Jeremy Corbyn stated there was a need for government to support both cooperatives and there was also a need for public ownership of water, energy, rails, and postal service. In Saskatchewan water, energy, insurance, and electricity are under public ownership that we call Crown Corporations. I think that it is important to make the distinction between Crown Corporations and cooperatives. Crowns are owned by the entire population but are under government management. Cooperatives are owned and managed by the individual members of the specific cooperative. Corbyn's position is that government will protect the public commons and also will support the efforts of cooperatives to develop and work as private businesses with government protection for preferential status at the local business level. I agree.

What I found lacking in the resource material was any reference to education that focused on strategies to develop, govern, and manage cooperatives at a primary level. Harold Chapman is fairly well known in Canada for his work in coop education. This was a broad based, community focused program that has declined. The Centre for Cooperative Studies at the University of Saskatchewan does provide valuable research and coop studies but not at the community level that develops place-based capacity to lead coop development and management. There was some discussion in the resource material about updating the 7 Cooperative Principles. I think that would be interesting. The lack of discussion on community based coop management education is a concern.

I also found the reference material had excellent information on the importance of good working conditions, on ways that coops could work with communities to address access to basic biophysical needs, along with access to basic socio-economic needs including public health services, local control of finances, and public education. These were noted as very important to an individual's health and well-being. However, there have been no references to the importance of opportunities for citizens to be able to access worthy use of leisure opportunities. Nor has there been discussion on the value of urban open space and conservation areas to the health of the community. Healthy communities need to be areas where all have opportunities to live, work and play with dignity. Urban parks and recreation provide an essential service in this area that both cooperatives and government could have an important role.

In summary I think information in this section, and especially the Preston Model, shows that both government and cooperatives have important roles in renewing community vitality. It shows that Cooperatives can be a worker friendly replacement for private corporations. It also shows that cooperatives are not a replacement for progressive government and indeed need progressive government if they are to be able to develop and thrive.

← [Reply](#)



[Kelleigh Wright \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897550\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897550)



Apr 22, 2019

Hi Murray. Thank you for this very reflective post. I'd like to pick your brain for a developing co-op at the local scale. If that's okay with you, what would be the best way to contact you?

← [Reply](#)



[Murray Hidlebaugh \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/895967\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/895967)



Apr 23, 2019

Interesting timing Kelleigh. I had just posted in the module survey that I am not much for group discussion on digital platform. I had mentioned email directly or Skype. I would be pleased to share thoughts and ideas. I have done a lot of research in this and also have learned a lot from others who have shared their ideas.

My email is [iet@sasktel.net \(mailto:iet@sasktel.net\)](mailto:iet@sasktel.net). I have resource material that I have used in Saskatchewan, in Cambodia, Uganda, Myanmar, Ghana, Malawi, Grenada, Bolivia, and Peru as well. I worked with small farmers and regional governments. I found the language different but the issues were identical to my experiences here. I am interested in hearing your thoughts as well where you are. Not just working but living.

← [Reply](#)



Pat Conaty (<https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202>)

Apr 23, 2019

Hi Murray

Thanks so much for this wide ranging analysis. How to align community economic development best practices with Co-operative Economic Democracy ways forward is strategically vital. The underinvestment in the core principle of Co-op education and a movement renewal focus on teaching practical co-operative economics is indeed tragic. This is an international problem. As a starter for 10, I would really like to hear your views on how in Canada this could be addressed and how perhaps the Synergia (a new educational co-op) materials could help out here.

As a response to the ongoing efforts, especially in England, to privatise all levels of education, trade unions (teaching and educational support unions) and a number of local government bodies have supported the development of a Co-operative Schools trust model. There are now over 800 of these established in England. We wrote up this in our 2017 report for the TUC on Organising Precarious Workers. You can find this online with the same authors as the Working Together report.

But to take a bird's eye view on what is emerging and out there, a few remarks for you and Synergia colleagues on this list.....

Danny Dorling at Oxford University is a leading researcher on poverty and inequality. This article and extended links has info on a diversity of co-operative schools innovation and including info on the above trust model in our TUC report that was led by the Co-operative College in Manchester. Cilla Ross, vice principal, at the Co-op College wrote up the case study in the TUC report.

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/nov/15/cooperative-schools-grammar-education>

Cilla and The College are now firmly behind (with a growing number of Co-op higher education organisations) to set up and develop a federated Co-operative University operating in future across the UK to address three things: the increasing use of short term and zero hour contracts in higher education, to enable co-operative study programmes in higher education to survive and fundamentally to change the governance model of education through a future federated Co-operative University intent on moving to a multi-stakeholder co-operative system where teachers, students, other staff will have voice and votes and co-develop the pedagogy.

Thanks indeed so much for your wide ranging and really helpful reflections. I will come back to

your comments on the danger of an overly narrow focus on the land question.

More on this anon.

Pat

[← Reply](#)



[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)

Apr 24, 2019

Hi Tristan and Murray

A collective problem for solutions that seek to democratise ownership and control (definitely addressing the glaring void of co-operative education is a crucial) is the on the ground fragmentation and siloed efforts. Practitioners tend therefore to work with their backs to each other and plough and sow fields going away from each other.

This is understandable because at the niche level specific basic needs solution are intrinsically complex (setting up a housing co-op, setting up a community energy co-op, setting up a local food hub, setting up a child care co-op or managed workspace). CLTs as a result tend to specialise (with few exceptions) in developing affordable housing - though their missions commonly aspire more widely. Hence your key observation Murray about a lack of focus on amenity and public space and the wider Commons (and protecting this from enclosure and privatisation). You suggest the vital question Murray, could 'Land for People' become a horizontal common cause for broad based organising? But, and crucially for success, would politicians and more 'community wealth building local authorities' become fellow travellers and join in this struggle against present day urban realities internationally, where usury remains unchecked and insane as we have seen for over a decade 'Houses earning Yearly more than People'.

Tragically we forget as the stories from the past are not told about bigger scale urban land reform that succeeded. We are now at a point in history where social inequality is comparable to the beginning of the 20th century. Then as you highlight Tristan, 'co-op commonwealth' symbols were emblazoned on trade union and banners, discussed widely at the grassroots and inspired by then recent history and awareness of the Chartist Land Company, Henry George and the land struggles in Ireland for Home Rule.

Out of this ferment, the Garden City movement emerged and was led by co-operative activists and practical land reformers from the late 1890s. Indeed before the major rise of public housing innovation from the 1920s, the Garden City activists developed co-op housing in and around London and this action spread to similar movements in Brussels (where you can still see the housing legacy and green spaces), Berlin, Dresden and other cities with projects also in Canada, the USA and Brazil.

Letchworth Garden City, the pioneer, was established on a green field site on a train line out of London with a plan for 33,000 people and by definition (of a 'garden city') where all the land would be held in perpetuity in common trust for community benefit - including a significant

greenbelt of agricultural land. Also by design all the commercial rents would be captured for community benefit and the utilities would be municipally owned.

The master plan implementation took place over 50 years from 1903 and by 1946 the city was economically resilient. Also and most importantly the early stage vision and schema was designed before the motor car with greenbelts through the city and for walkers. Commercial rents are still captured by the trust as this large CLT owns the commercial business district and still retains ownership of the agricultural lands.

Under the theme of 'co-operative place making' we have held three conferences on Co-operative garden cities since 2012 at Letchworth and this short summary article provides an overview of how the planning system can be democratised this way to capture the 'unearned increment' and stop the ruthless rack renting that advances unchallenged systemically.

<http://wiki.p2pfoundation.net/images/Lecthworth.pdf>

You can find on line a longer report called 'Commons Sense', co-edited by myself and Martin Large and published by Co-operatives UK. This is the document with contributions from the first Letchworth conference that invited CLTs, co-op housing, co-op energy, local food and other co-operative economy builders to consider the Land question as the common denominator.

More recently two months ago the Co-operative College held a conference in Manchester with speakers invited to talk about 'co-operative place making' including from Preston, Bologna, Rochdale and the Union Co-op Initiatives in US cities.

The land reform and planning reform questions are common denominator opportunity areas for joint working and horizontal collaboration on Climate Justice ways forward. Green New Deal thinking needs to consider land reform as a cardinal question. This also takes us back to Polanyi and his encouragement to focus on the ABCs of economic democracy and 'commonwealth' building by taking People, Land and Money out of the market.

Pat

[← Reply](#)



[Benjamin Turner \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897723\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897723)

Apr 24, 2019

I believe these platform co-operatives are potential for advancing a systems change. They create an entirely new sharing economy that offers workers on demand. People have the opportunity to create an income based on someone else infrastructure. This sounds positive, but it also creates more of an independent contractor workforce, it puts the threat of old age, health issues, etc on the on to the workers. Opponents of these coops believe many of them dodge taxes, route around labor laws, and operate illegally in some cities - they find every opportunity to circumnavigate

regulations in order to maximize profits. Proponents see them as bringing about a more equitable and fair digitally mediated economy. Platform coops "contribute to the commons for the purpose of fostering an equitable social and economic landscape."

It seems that many people get turned off the idea of a cooperative because it can be viewed as a slow process to create, it can often be bogged down with meetings, especially since each member is an owner and may want to voice their thoughts. The most important tool for progressing the cooperative is education. People are not familiar with cooperatives, how they function, the benefits of them and one can get involved. I would not be surprised if most people in my community are only familiar with the word coop because of the gas station in a town called COOP and may not actually understand why it's named that.

By sharing examples like Green Taxi Coop that has now become the largest taxi company in Denver, it could provide people with a better appreciation. In BC the taxi unions are strong. We are still without any ridesharing and from my understanding its because of the taxi unions political pressure. Uber is what everyone is calling for, but perhaps a taxi coop alternative may be a much better middle ground. It would give the customer more benefits, cost the drivers less, and keep the money within our province (unlike the funds that Uber would withdrawal from our economy)

← [Reply](#)



[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)

Apr 26, 2019

Hi Benjamin

Great reflections indeed. The new digital technology is undermining a broad range of human rights (social and economic ones) and the Uber case exemplifies the usurious rack renting going on through wide ranging false self-employment as the UK labour courts have upheld in recent GMB union class action cases. Hermes and other digital corporations have lost test cases also. I circulated this media story about Hermes recently.

Social and economic rights that those in salaried and conventional wage employment take for granted were not given from on high by Moses. Trade unions secured these by organising and forcing political supporters and in turn governments to make social and economic rights more widespread and universal. The new tech is shredding these and hence why real wages in the past decade in the UK (and in other countries) have been declining at the greatest rate since the mid 1800s.. See for more detail the Steve Hill report in supplementary reading for this Module. His analysis is an eye-opener. With trade union membership plummeting in Developed economies since the 1970s this Labour's Untold Story needs repeating for the facts to come out.

Labour unions secured holiday pay, shorter hours, health and safety ad work, after decades of struggle against abusive practices. But swords can be converted into ploughshares and indeed the digital technology could be applied the other way round to create better working conditions,

higher quality services, higher skilling of workers and a virtuous circle by using the greater productivity aspect for common good outcomes. So it is not just the co-op advantage here but the co-op advantage in the Age of Google we need to think harder and more strategically about. This also does mean getting bigger Co-ops to become social investors in New Wave Co-op opportunities.

To highlight the economic democracy Transition opportunities here, I would encourage you and others on this Module to check out the the TED Talk about Buurtzorg (a transformative social enterprise in the Netherlands that has spread rapidly and transformed community nursing services using neighbourhood scale small work teams empowered to work autonomously). This is not a care co-op but it could well be a recipe for success for social care co-ops that John Restakis will talk more to in Module 5 after the Catch up break. There is current interest by care co-ops here in the UK in this way forward. You can see the success in the Netherlands actually shows ways to harness the tech to increases local and community economic development outcomes.

Pat

← [Reply](#)



[CJ Holden \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/906739\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/906739)

Apr 25, 2019

A primary obstacle in the U.S. is the projected "fear" around Socialism concepts. Yes, we need a new model. Yes, capitalism as currently practices is a pyramid scheme benefiting only those on top -- and soon to collapse.

In the 1980s there was the Transition Movement -- a post-oil economy practice that emerged in Britain and quickly spread. Many of us were attuned to that effort which was based on localization of work, finance, farming, education and then trade with similar communities within a 20 mile radius.

Interestingly, the Founder of the Credit Card economy, Dee Hock, also proposed a similar model. Almost a "company store" ideal, the concept was based on optimization of size (15, 50, 150, and 500) as a way to re-organize society into "towns" that produced one thing, or a series of related things. (Silicon Valley is an example). It starts with a small effort of a small group of people, who design, create, manufacture, and distribute. This expands with growth of the market (trade to other towns who see a need for this product). Everyone in the community is engaged in the production of the product, and city-states emerge from this model of trade and production. Its not at all dissimilar to the progress of society post Dark Ages in Europe.

Where I live, there is far too much emphasis on Tourist Dollars to fund our community. This is a mistake. Tourism is discretionary spending in an era where extra money is limited to the wealthy --- and they require things that locals do not need. In fact this plan ignores the needs of locals (fire department) in favor of what the rich temporary visitors want: an airport with a new Taos Air plane to bring Texans to our town. The conflict of needs and values is explosive --- and wrong. People who don't live here do not care if we have an adequate police force or volunteer fire department.

They don't care if our public employees are adequately paid or have benefits. And the rich don't care if the restaurants they patronize pay a fair living wage (\$20 per hour according to a 2018 MIT study). They only care that the streets along the main thorough fair look clean, and if the stores for food sell what they want. They do not support CSA farms, and they do not support our hospital or schools. They come, they take and hopefully they leave.

Meanwhile, there is a small but growing movement in New Mexico to return state funds to a public bank here, to keep our revenues here and invest in us. For too long, the state, like others, is investing in New York brokers who manage our money for their purposes, at a significant profit. Some of us understand bringing the money home will help growth for our own people, and will fund more of the needed education.

Another example is state funding for education --- based on extraction of oil/gas/mineral resources. So education is funded only by allowing outside raiders to exploit our land and water. This rule was established in the 1930's and is fixed in the minds of leadership. It denies the possibility that people in the state may have something to contribute (solar, wind, and renewable energy systems). No one born in New Mexico is considered an expert. For too long the culture of ignorance and poverty has placed our future in the hands of the pirates.

Fortunately, the indigenous peoples here are showing the way by refusing this exploitation, especially of our sacred sites and water resources. The many well-educated retirees who come here are supporting sensible energy and extraction policies, working with millenials and indigneous tribes.

Watching the videos on Jackson, and Cleveland, and the Preston model gives me hope for a different, locally based economy, that visitors can enjoy and perhaps learn from. But the day is late and time is running out for the changes to be made. Thanks for posting the FarmHack video. So many resources to consider for our brave new world.

[← Reply](#)



Pat Conaty (<https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202>)

Apr 27, 2019



Thanks for these reflections CJ. Glad that the new municipalism and FarmHack have been thought provoking about Ways Forward for resisting and countering the brave new world. Much more coming up in the modules after the break about public-social partnerships to secure the common good. I think you are right that public banks could have a significant role to play. We give this attention in Module 7.

You mention Dee Hock and his proposal. His network governance thinking may have some applications. Did you want to say a bit more about this or about what things the Transition groups in New Mexico are doing? Can you see more potential partnerships with local governments? In Bologna there has been some pioneering work on what are called the Bologna Regulations that revive in creative new ways the by-law powers of towns and cities by establishing a new social contract to steward the commons. Here is some information from David Bollier about this social innovation that is complement to participatory budgeting ideas.

Pat

↩ [Reply](#)



[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)

Apr 27, 2019

Sorry CJ - here is the link to the David Bollier blog on the Bologna Regulation and the experiments in this City and more recently Rome with a social Laboratory to reconnect local governments with their citizens by co-producing Commons.

<http://commonstransition.org/bologna-celebrates-one-year-of-a-bold-experiment-in-urban-commoning/> (<http://commonstransition.org/bologna-celebrates-one-year-of-a-bold-experiment-in-urban-commoning/>)

It is a method for 'commoning'

Pat

↩ [Reply](#)



[ANNA BUBEL \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/551904\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/551904)

Apr 29, 2019

Hi. First off, thanks for the labour of love, organizing group. Appreciate you trying to advance the field. Sincerely! I was encouraged to post my thoughts about this last module in the public forum, rather than through the survey, so here goes.

I really enjoyed the Jackson Miss. interview and the presentation about the cab co-op. The latter was the only instance in which I was shown how poor people are materially better off having participated in the co-op. Both of these were great and had me hungering for more. (I would love to know much, much more about Jackson.)

My first overall observation about the module is that there appeared to be a significant

mismatch between the problem of precarious labour and the solutions proffered. I fail to see how people who don't have steady employment are significantly better off by peddling their services online, with little else having changed. Why are we organizing to so that people are paid on time rather than a) pushing for unionized labour, b) requiring that clients pay on 30 day terms? Too much effort for not enough return. Similarly, I don't see how open software for upgrading farm equipment is much of a solution or how having poor SEWA members selling home delivered manicures is going to accomplish much of anything given the scale and complexity of the problem of precarious labour. In a related vein, I would argue it is dangerous for any social entrepreneurs in Canada to get into fields that are clearly the jurisdiction of the government, namely healthcare and child care. Rather than organizing worker coops to deliver childcare, we need a \$15/day universal childcare policy. Finally, I find a number of the solutions were poorly articulated and/or overhyped. Having read and watched all of the material, I still don't understand the Preston model. Anchor institutions? Local purchasing? City Council building affordable housing? None of these things are new... I don't understand what the model "is" or what makes it innovative. At least I understand what union organizing is and what it can achieve - demonstrable results. (And/or I am a dolt. Sorry.) When I went to look up the food aggregation platform that was up and running in Canada, I found a blank website. "Lots of sizzle, not much meat"

I wish there been a more deliberate connection/discussion of a universal wage in the light of precarious work. The connection with the previous session seemed obvious to me.

Overall, I would suggest that rather than taking a survey approach, we would be better off picking a smaller number of examples and really digging in. Even exploring superficially compelling examples such as coops competing with Airbnb in order to better understand the false promise traps/unintended consequences of some approaches (losing valuable rental housing stock, for example).

Perhaps this module would be better re-conceptualized as an exploration of the impact of technology on employment and economic prosperity, leading into a discussion of universal basic income/ and a moral economy of basic needs, etc. The superficiality of the approach had a paradoxical effect on me. In a weird way the course makes me feel even more lonely than normal. I already read 3 books on the Guaranteed Basic Income last year... The topic is right, but I want discussion at a higher level... I have enjoyed following up on some suggested reading and got "The Revolution will not be Funded" as well as several others out of the library. Thanks for that.

I hope this feedback is useful. Looking forward to the next four.

← [Reply](#)



[Mike Gismondi \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/227458\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/227458)

May 3, 2019



Hi Anna. Thanks for posting.

We are all reading your post and thinking things over.

Some good suggestions about design, and equally good one's about content and teaching.

For my own part, I encouraged a Module design that appeals to different levels of experience among participants, anticipating that a MOOC attracts a wide range (level of preparation, experience, academic formation) of participant, wider than a classroom.

That said some of foci you suggest might be sharper and more on target (and some we engage in the next modules). We discussed perhaps a deeper dive in one area of each module as a weekly strategy. I like that idea. Another might be a basic and an advanced course. You have us thinking out loud.

In part I see some of the connections and what you yearn for happening across the three discussions each week, more like a mash up of issues, than a single focused in depth discussion. A combination of required and supplemental materials we curated, feedback prompted by questions, and peer to peer contributions and discussions.

We may be able to work harder at bringing those patterns to the surface in Part 2.

Your idea (when we spoke) of perhaps inviting a same time call in with a lead from a project during the module week is exciting to contemplate for the next offering, a bit out of our fiscal range right now, but something we can approach others to help fund. There are some time zone issues too, but it is doable.

I agree such an opportunity to question a practitioner in some detail and in some depth would be a rich vein to explore.

Thanks for taking the time here. Much appreciated.

Mikeg

[← Reply](#)



[Kelleigh Wright \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897550\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/897550)

May 6, 2019



Thanks for your post Anna. I've been struggling with this unit and thought it was just me. I've gone back over the reading/video list hoping a few lightbulbs would turn on..and I feel that I'm just not 'getting' what the unit is trying to convey. Mike(s) & Pat - please know this isn't a criticism of the amount of work and thought that went into building this section of the MOOC - complex interrelated topics like this have got to be an incredible challenge to

teach on this type of platform - and I am grateful to be able to participate. I really like the idea of a same time call/webinar, I hope it comes to fruition in future offerings.

↳ [Reply](#)



[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)



May 6, 2019

Hi Anna

Thanks so much for these reflections and feedback.

You raise so well the bigger picture transformative strategies needed. Jackson Rising is a superb example of this system changing advocacy. But on the other hand, in most places niche solutions are there and in the case of Smart for example, is influencing and using tech and workspace provision to meet needs and to provide legal advice to freelancers and in this regard not to secure just cash flow but also worker and social rights (access to the welfare state). But you are absolutely right, this is not good enough and Smart in Belgium has been in dialogue with Belgian Trade unions and many in Smart are interested very much in Union Co-op ways forward.

Mike G has explained above the Synergia team dilemmas in structuring this course. Last time the evaluations of the Mooc indicated we needed to find shorter and pithier readings/viewings as opposed to longer more in depth articles that we posted on the last Mooc. Thus we went for this structure this time and also readings or viewings to act as Signposts. We have added Supplementary readings to seek to fill this gap and we can post more of these.

Also if you have a read of the Working Together full report which is beyond the Summary reading you will find more material on how in different places Unions and Co-ops are working together. Preston for example is now seeking to develop a Union Co-op strategy and this is a very recent development. To pursue this they have brought in trade unionists (with educational and organising backgrounds) to work in the Preston Co-op Development Network.

But you are right, there is such a long way to go to find ways for different social movements (trade unions, co-ops, a new municipalism, direct action networks like Extinction Rebellion, etc etc) to come together. Also you ask about affordable housing and what is Preston doing, a real problem this in the UK (and other countries) is that the law as it stands prevents Preston from engaging directly as a housing developer. Public policy and the rules structure in private and market solutions. Many Labour local government bodies and also some centre left administrations would love to be able to borrow and build but central government and Treasury rules do not give them this freedom (the 'public bad, private good' hegemony). A way potentially to

overcome this is the development of public banks and municipal banks but also regional co-op banks. We will look at this in Module 7 coming up in Part 2.

In respect to your request for more information on other matters you raise, you other colleagues on the Mooc should find this summary review of how Trade Unions and Worker Co-ops in Europe are building collaborative strategies of interest. You will see that in Emilia Romagna in Italy that Union Co-ops at 85% are the norm not the exception. London and other local authorities in England and Wales were going down this road in the mid 1980s before Mrs. Thatcher took out an entire layer of government, the metropolitan county councils like the Greater London Council (GLC). The late Robin Murray who worked with us in the Synergia team led the work at the GLC before the GLC was abolished in 1986.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_234169.pdf (https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_234169.pdf)

There was collaborative work during the 1980s in many European countries between trade unions and co-op to advance economic democracy and to develop 'socially useful products.' The Lucas Alternative Corporate Plan (now being talked about again in UK in respect to Green New Deal strategy) is a good example of this and also the Meidner Plan in Sweden and its work on Wage Earner Funds for regional social investment. These paradigm changing strategies are now being looked back to for signposts for a revival of horizontal forms of economic democracy and increasingly with People and Planet common good goals.

I am glad you are looking forward to the next four modules. Module 5 will delve deeper into other aspects of more comprehensive strategies that aim to align better and generatively different social movements.

All the best

Pat

[← Reply](#)



[Rolando Ramirez \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/893132\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/893132)

May 5, 2019

Option #1.

Green Taxi in Denver it is a very interesting example of opening new grounds and improve, to a

degree, people's quality of life, decent work, socio-economic protection, in this case for its members. But still they are within the system, and have to adhere to the rules of the system....like for example "competitor". They need to compete in a capitalist market with other taxi union or private enterprizes. It is a step in the right direction, but transformational platform is different than improved platforms to operate within the system. At least coop platforms are going in a different direction than UBER, for example, which to a degree they represent the modernization of poverty.

↳ [Reply](#)



[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)

May 6, 2019

Hi Rolando

Thanks for these reflections on the trap and vice grip of austerity. Can we find post-scarcity solutions?

On the potential for social movements to democratise and socialise platform technology and in horizontal partnerships with a new municipalism oriented towards the commons, this blog by Paul Mason joins up many of the dots in strategic ways that you and colleagues might find helpful.

<https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-new-spirit-of-postcapitalism>
(<https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-new-spirit-of-postcapitalism>)

Pat

↳ [Reply](#)



[Caroline Hurley \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561)

May 6, 2019

Regarding the trap of austerity, Hari Kunzru, author of novel White Tears illustrates, in a particularly perceptive and minute analysis, using his own experience of being on the dole, how socio-economically disabling poverty and dependence on state welfare is, from an interview for a FutureLearn MOOC:

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/how-to-read-a-novel/4/steps/453827> ALEX: There's also that almost Kafkaesque quality of the system not working for certain people. Or, I suppose, on the other hand actually, working all too well for certain people, as it's designed to work.

HARI: You know, I think - I spent a lot of time just trying to understand how it works from a worm's eye view. And without wanting to put it too much emphasis on this - I mean I spent a couple of years on the dole in England in my early 20s and was really trying to live off the money that I had from that situation. And some days, you can buy a travelcard, and some days you can't, which means you can only go to your appointment on a certain day. And you can really see how these tiny perturbations can just destroy you. You can be

knocked off course by the tiniest things.

Things that the person interacting with you wouldn't even necessarily recognise as a problem, but can be a total disaster for you. And if the state is behaving in a deliberately punitive fashion designed to keep people insecure, then that's the way that power works. It is not to do with people in pointy hoods or people in jackboots oppressing people - these very easily understandable forms. It's to do with the way systems actually function in order to create a class of workers who can be exploited. We're seeing this as a kind of logic that goes all the way through the system.

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/how-to-read-a-novel/4/steps/453827> I mean anybody who's been involved in any kind of creative or academic work understands about precarious labour and about the ways that, in certain sorts of, guaranteed middle class status which a generation or two ago would have been accepted as part of certain jobs, are now just not available. So there's whole groups of people who are slipping away from a secure identification with authority because they're being destabilised and being made precarious. So there's a - I always think there's a kind of commonality of experience between the middle class freelancer and the precarious working class, the casual labourer or the person on the zero hours contract.

Because although your context is, in some ways, very different, the fundamental experience is the same.

ALEX: There's also so much about the kind of language there - the bureaucratization of the way in which people speak. And the sort of administrators, or those being left in charge of the system, buying into almost too much, so it becomes sort of a robotic way of dealing with real people, which is something you see quite a lot. You have a danger of buying into the system far too much.

HARI: Yes - and the use of euphemism.

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/how-to-read-a-novel/4/steps/453827> ALEX: Yeah, and acronyms.

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/how-to-read-a-novel/4/steps/453827> HARI: A kind of hell, isn't it, for, because it makes interactions - dehumanises interactions and it cloaks acts of raw aggression in abstraction, yeah.....

Paul Mason's insights in his article for socialeurope.eu link ring all too true, but at least his example of Barcelona exerting a more democratic non-profiteering approach gives cause for hope.

Edited by [Caroline Hurley \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561) on May 6 at 2:52pm

[← Reply](#)



[Caroline Hurley \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561)

May 9, 2019



Uber and Lyft drivers are fed up of being wage-gouged and are going on strike -

<https://www.truthdig.com/articles/all-hail-the-ride-share-strike/> (<https://www.truthdig.com/articles/all-hail-the-ride-share-strike/>)

← Reply



[Stephanie Hartline](#)

[https://learn.canvas.net/courses](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/906461)

[/2527/users/906461](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/906461)

May 25, 2019

Option 1

Are the emerging alternatives referred to as platform co-operatives offering potential for advancing systems change or are they just another form of capitalism?

To me, it would be an 'alternate' form of capitalism that is offering potential for advancing system change. The co-operative form of control through negotiation, governance of production, governance of distribution, and responsible consumption of the product collaborated by the providers and consumers; while providing profitability and sustainability to the market economy.

A great example of this kind of co-operative capitalistic approach is [REI](https://www.rei.com/) (<https://www.rei.com/>). A company that replicates the convenience and efficiency of any other company, however the consumers are members and own part of the company by purchasing a member fee. REI not only has 18 million stakeholders/members who receive 10% dividends for their membership, but also it gives back a portion of each purchase to the environment. This co-operative practices total transparency and not only collaborates with members on sustainability solutions, but also with other who share the same values as well.

Yochai Benkler called my class, the Progressive Precariates, and he is correct. I can't speak for everyone, but I know that I'm searching for the politics of paradise. The climate crisis is in fact a crisis, and its undeniable. We have witnessed record breaking cold temps, record breaking heat waves, intense droughts, warmer oceans that are supercharging hurricanes, and rampaging wildfires. Its affecting the health, safety, and security of every person alive. We are seeing an increase in the amount of vector-borne diseases, frequent and sever allergic and respiratory illnesses. We are expecting to see countless lost lives and significant financial losses in the years to come. As a country of 325 million people, with the most advanced industrial economy, we have every necessary tool to fight climate change and the plans to know how to use those tools. I don't believe that we (the future) will move backwards, if transitioned to a new systems change.

Yesterday, I participated in a climate strike in Atlanta. Roughly thirty children stood on the stairs of the town hall fighting for climate action. #FridaysforFuture #GlobalClimateStrike During the strike, the children had the opportunity to meet with one of the commissioners before they left for Memorial Day weekend. The children demanded the shut down of fossil fuels and more renewable energy. During their

conversation, the commissioner stated that they would invest in more renewable energy, however it doesn't allow for profitability. One of the children stated that 'money is not important, our future is important'. Again, I stand behind my previous statement, I don't believe that we (the future) will move backwards, if we transition to a new system.

I stand behind a Universal Basic Income, because it would allow more opportunity to begin a co-op platform such as the Brazilian garbage pickers. There is no immediate accessibility to a recycling facility in the county that I work in, therefore not a lot of citizens recycle. I have already started giving my employees the opportunity to recycle at work, and to bring in their recycled plastic so I can take it to my residence, outside of their county, to properly recycle the items.

Engaging this idea on a co-operative digital platform and integrating the Good Work Code, would be beneficial to the community it serves and environment as a whole.

↳ [Reply](#)



[Lella Blumer \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/896798\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/896798)

May 27, 2019

Option 2

Cooperative alternatives in journalism are not particularly new, but I think there are aspects that reach beyond providing more sustainable employment for journalists and could have significant impacts on systems change. I researched this a little further and hopefully can convey some of the potential energy of this alternative here.

Benefits for journalists in this particular area of precarious work (large multimedia corporations buying out independent papers, move to digital news, reliance on advertising) include not only fair wages and the possibility of benefits and a share of the profits - they also, and perhaps more meaningfully for journalists, involve a voice in the direction of the media: what kinds of stories need to be covered; how much revenue (if any) should be brought in by advertising, and what kinds of advertising; how will diverse and marginalized voices be included in reporting, etc.

Depending on the kind of cooperative formed, membership could include journalists only, editors, members of the public and/or readership. It could be run through member contributions and/or subscriptions.

The impact on systems change could start with the recognition that journalism is a viable and respected occupation (that lack of value is something so many occupations are suffering due to digital transformation), leading to more people choosing it as a career, leading to more extensive, diverse, truly independent reporting on issues and events, and a more direct connection between what's happening and how it is being reported. Communication is key to revolution (oops, inside

voice).

There are issues to overcome; a major issue, in my mind, is lack of motivation on the part of readers (misleading news bites are more easily digestible than properly-constructed and research-based news, and it's quicker to get news from your friends on FB than read an article). But there's also a pervasive question of credibility and the perception of bias in news coverage that is more difficult to address. Government support or subsidy is not seen as a viable option because it creates a conflict of interest and question of control. Some major hurdles to clear, but the cooperative approach does seem to me to have potential to address them. Interested in your reactions.

[← Reply](#)



[Pat Conaty \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/379202)



May 28, 2019

Hi Stephanie and Lelia

I think your respective reflections and outlines of Ways forward are superb. This recent report from my colleague, Simon Borkin, at Co-operatives UK may be helpful. It provides the basis of a creative financing framework for platform co-ops and though he does not make the case, you can see where trade unions could be patient investors.

https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Nesta_Platform_Report_AW_v4_3.pdf
(https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Nesta_Platform_Report_AW_v4_3.pdf)

Also you will find a typology of different platform co-ops. Resonate is working along the lines of your analysis Lelia. Creative industries are key areas where unions and co-ops are already working hand in glove in some countries.

Stephanie on Universal Basic Income there is a shift by some trade unions in supporting this.

For a long time this was not the case. Guy Standing has recently produced a new book on Basic Income: And how can we make it happen. He has been working on Basic Income actively for over 30 years and the case he makes in the book is compelling.

Pat

[← Reply](#)



[Lella Blumer \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/896798\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/896798)



May 28, 2019

Thanks for the info Pat; much appreciated. I will investigate.

[← Reply](#)



Lazaros Angelou (<https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/886724>)

Jun 7, 2019



Capitalist Economy

In capitalist economy for anything to be built or produced, someone has to provide the money, or 'capital', to allow it to be done.

It's main characteristic is that most means of production and property are privately owned by individuals and companies.

Wages are payed to workers and businesses are directed hierarchically towards the benefit of the owner (profit incentive, capital accumulation).

Cooperative Principles

1. Open and Voluntary Membership

Membership in a cooperative is open to all persons who can reasonably use its services and stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, regardless of race, religion, gender, or economic circumstances.

2. Democratic Member Control

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Elected representatives (directors/trustees) are elected from among the membership and are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote); cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.

3. Members' Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital remains the common property of the cooperative. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the cooperative; setting up reserves; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. Autonomy and Independence

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control as well as their unique identity.

5. Education, Training, and Information

Education and training for members, elected representatives (directors/trustees), CEOs, and employees help them effectively contribute to the development of their cooperatives. Communications about the nature and benefits of cooperatives, particularly with the general public and opinion leaders, helps boost cooperative understanding.

6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives

By working together through local, national, regional, and international structures, cooperatives improve services, bolster local economies, and deal more effectively with social and community needs.

7. Concern for Community

Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies supported by the membership.

From the above main characteristics of capitalist and cooperative businesses the differences in ownership, control and social impact are obvious. There are also fundamental differences concerning environmental aspects, due to the concern of cooperatives for the sustainability of their communities.

Imposing these differences on platform cooperatives, one could say that ownership of the platform is the main thing at stake. If the platform is collectively owned and democratically controlled by the membership (principles 2 and 3), then the platform cooperative is an alternative to the capitalist platform business, given that it follows all the other 5 principles.

I'd say that the Buurtzorg (Neighbourhood Care) model in the Netherlands is an example of platform economics in practice consisting of self-managing teams without command and control structure (distributed manager-less organization), confederating and becoming powerful through the creative use of a common platform.

Buurtzorg is also a paradigm of how use of digital technology save massively on command and control overheads, so that growth is self-financed.

I'd add that this distributed model of service provision at the local level has a much less ecological footprint than the capitalist one.

← [Reply](#)



[Caroline Hurley \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561)

Jun 8, 2019

Here is [an uncomfortable story](https://www.independent.ie/business/farming/agri-business/row-over-kerry-coop-shares-escalating-as-shares-in-kerry-group-break-100-barrier-38113515.html) (https://www.independent.ie/business/farming/agri-business/row-over-kerry-coop-shares-escalating-as-shares-in-kerry-group-break-100-barrier-38113515.html) about what can happen to some 'co-ops', in this case, one of the best known and most successful in the world.

← [Reply](#)



[Brendan Reimer \(https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/903250\)](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/903250)

Jun 9, 2019

I'll take my reflection a little more broadly, and perhaps in a different direction a bit, hopefully it is

still relevant and contributes to the discourse.

Do co-operatives such as platform co-ops offer systems change or are they another form of capitalism?

To the extent that capitalism concentrates money and power in the hands of the few, co-operation creates system change as it distributes power and money in the hands of the many. To the extent capitalism idealizes individualism, co-operation creates a new system in idealizing collectivism. Perhaps co-operation is collective capitalism? I realize that the members of any co-op can be much more progressive than that and create a mission and purpose that is very transformative, but the co-op model itself doesn't guarantee that other than the elements mentioned above.

As a life-long co-op champion (and perhaps idealist), it really hurt me deeply when I heard a co-op leader speak of the need for co-ops to think of all stakeholders even when the membership was only made up of one group. He posited that too many consumer co-ops still sought to exploit (perhaps too strong word, but he was making a point) the workers and the producers, too many worker co-ops sought to exploit the consumer and the producer, and producer co-ops sought to exploit workers and consumers. Perhaps "maximizing benefit while minimizing cost" is a better way to say what he was saying - but the point being that in this sense perhaps they are not unlike a traditional capitalist company when it comes to others than themselves as members. To this extent, they aren't really creating a transformative system, but rather creating a model that provides a collective vehicle with which to succeed in the capitalistic model.

I'll reiterate that I've seen so many (particularly multi-stakeholder co-ops where all are representative as members) that go far beyond their own particular model to care for all stakeholders including community and environment.

On another note, a thought that has been nagging at me a bit and that is the inclusion of people with multiple barriers to employment. In Italy, this is a role for social co-ops. In Canada and elsewhere, there are employment-focused social enterprises. In Spain, you have public policy requiring companies to hire people with disabilities. But to be honest, I've experience challenges in engaging co-ops (and unions for that matter) in the conversation about creating jobs for people with barriers to employment. If we're really going to create a sustainable co-operative commonwealth, we're going to need all actors (particularly those highlighted as models in this course) to actively work toward the inclusion and empowerment of the most disadvantaged.

[← Reply](#)



Caroline Hurley (<https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/894561>)

Jun 10, 2019

Is it worthwhile to agree goals, values, joining policies and terms of engagement at set-up stages, or amend later by constitutional referendum, with the aid of [back-casting](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40309-018-0142-z) (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40309-018-0142-z>), [participatory design](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/participatory-design) (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/participatory-design>) and the like?

[← Reply](#)

Sandra Wheeler (<https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/903359>)

Jun 17, 2019

Given that farms are businesses selling what they produce to various markets, they need the means of production, including machinery and tools in the classic capitalist formulation. Yet in the wake of decades of bigger-is-better thinking, the smallest John Deere sub-compact tractor can cost \$12,500 (before adding the loader, backhoe, and blade or optional heated cab) while forbidding owner repairs, without necessarily doing what small sustainable farmers need to get done. So small farmers, according to Farm Hack, have tended to restore old equipment, keep fixing it as long as possible, or build their own from scratch. Once Farm Hack identified this need, they chose to collaborate online, sharing solutions and calling for new designs of specific needed equipment all to be built from standard parts. So in the capitalist framework, Farm Hack participants can be considered at least as both producers and consumers, workers and suppliers.

Farm Hack creates and participates in the common good, are “cooperative” as an adjective, yet are not a cooperative as a noun. They do exhibit almost all seven co-operative principles we were given in an infographic: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control (at least in the sense that any member can add and edit content); autonomy and independence; education, training, and information; and concern for community. The primary difference is that there is no member economic participation. They do not seek markets collectively or make collective decisions on how to run the farms involved. They are a design and problem-solving collaborative, adding value to members’ own enterprises as a mutual aid society. They are definitely part of a network economy. “We share our hacks online and at meet ups because we become better farmers when we work together.... Together, with an open-source ethic, we can retool our farms for a sustainable future.... All Farm Hack documentation and written materials are open source, both hardware and software” (greenhorns.org).

So Farm Hack is part of the network economy, “the emerging economic order within the information society.... [in which] products and services are created and value is added through social networks operating on large or global scales” (en.m.wikipedia.org). So according to Michel Bauwens’ economic model in which “what is heavy is local and what is light is global,” they got that right. The designs are out there; construction is on demand for real needs and takes place on the farm itself or in the shop of a rural fabricator in a way that may build relationships and manufacturing capacity in local economies, contributing something to the resilience of workers and communities.

Farm Hack is a project of Greenhorns. “Greenhorns works to create a welcoming and hospitable culture for new entrants in sustainable agriculture.... for the benefit of the human and non-human worlds. Our various programs and projects address the practical and social concerns of those in their first years farming[;] we emphasize restorative land-practices, skill-building, networking, and dialogue” (greenhorns.org). So much for cutthroat competition. As Kali Akuno said, “Given climate change and the breakdown of global capitalism, the only way to go is to transform how we do production, consumption, etc.... creating systems so we can endure means-destroying capitalism, a vampire system.” Farm Hack is on that track.

[← Reply](#)[Bernadette Cohen-James](#)[https://learn.canvas.net/courses](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/893046)[/2527/users/893046](https://learn.canvas.net/courses/2527/users/893046)

Jun 22, 2019

People developed in and by the community of our backgrounds and cultures which will predict the kind of technologies and applications that can work per region and social group. Education is key as is the attitude to be willing to learn - too often we wait for disaster before we innovate, a crazy human characteristic, when we can foresee needed solutions but habit, fear, social conditioning etc hold us paralyzed. Disasters are excellent in reminding us how we rely on each other - one only has to see how communities come together to help heal and repair from disaster.

Creating community in the community one lives and works is where I wish to see application of co-ops on multiple platforms - from how we care for our youth, working peoples and aged population through to how we use and create natural resources. Electronics makes possible this connection as well as access to information to bring new ideas to play.

In creating connected communities, we can heal ourselves.

1 - Community will be community again where people meet, greet and support one another.

2 - Our children will be raised and integrated into community through the care and attention of our elders who have the time, wisdom and experience to give to our youth, such an important gift when more often than not both parents are working, the educational system is stress and far too many children growing up where their peer groups provide the validation that is needed from adults.

3 - Nature becomes part of our lives again. We live in cemented, mechanical worlds where too many of us have lost touch with nature and that we are part of Earths' natural systems, that we cannot survive without the air, water, food Earth provides. Creating local systems where we can farm our food/ support local producers/ engineer energy systems that are not destructive brings the responsibility back to home base and can help reconnect us again.

My dream is to help restore our soils, trees, sky to health. That can only happen if I and many others like me are willing to live a different way. That can only happen if there are alternatives that can take us out of this rat race manic system that has enslaved our minds and bodies. That can only happen if we truly know who we are and the power we hold to create anew, to tell a different story.

[← Reply](#)