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The More-than-Economic Dimensions of Cooperation in Food Production

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Abstract

Moving forwards from an extensive literature on farmers' cooperatives, this Special Issue aims to explore the interaction and interdependence of multiple material and immaterial benefits associated with cooperation. Addressing a range of contexts, the eight papers gathered here explore the inseparability of a set of 'more-than-economic' benefits of cooperation and consider the wider implications of doing so. Responding to their insights, this editorial reflects upon the ontological ambiguity of concepts of economy and the political potentiality of cooperative activities. In addition, we highlight three key themes raised by the papers, which emphasize the complexity of processes and values included in cooperation: Relatedness and Embeddedness; Institutions and Formalisation; Histories and Futures. Reflecting on the transformative capacities of cooperation described in this collection, we argue that valuing cooperation as a process rather than a means to fixed-ends can carry its own emancipatory potential, given the ways in which this can work to counter the compartmentalising tendencies of capitalism. However, we conclude by cautioning that the addressing of more pervasive structural impediments needs to be integrated into cooperative endeavours if such potential is to be fully realised.

Keywords: Cooperatives; Agriculture; Food Networks; Diverse Economies

1. Introduction

Food and its inter-connectivity with social organisation, politics and culture is a mainstay of rural studies and has, over the years, been the subject of many papers in this journal. The impetus and sensibilities associated with cooperation have, however, undergone substantive changes in response to the continuing reconfiguration of our food systems and the institutions, communities, and environmental systems underpinning these (Bijman et al. 2012; Cook et al. 1997; Merrett and Waltzer 2004; Mooney et al. 1996; Prager et al. 2012; Stock et al 2014; van der Ploeg 2008; Wolf and Bonnano eds. 2013) - prompting the need for

this Special Issue. In particular, we contend that the politics surrounding cooperation present a fraught entanglement of aspirations, positioning and sometimes unexpected transformations, which are in need of careful assessment.

Twenty or thirty years ago the literature was largely concerned with the structure, organisation and performance of formal agricultural cooperatives in a Western context; predominantly aligned with the disciplines of agricultural economics, management and business (e.g. Rhodes, 1983; Vitaliano, 1983; Porter and Scully, 1987). Fewer academic studies concerned themselves with the philosophy or ideology of cooperativism as a movement (but see Lipset, 1971; Worsley, 1971) or the sociology of cooperation itself (but see Gasson, 1977; Sargent, 1982). Today, our parameters of enquiry have been widened – not only in response to the changing formations of cooperation apparent, but also due to the integration of different disciplinary and theoretical approaches. This means that we now need to be more precise in our questioning of what constitutes cooperation, who is cooperating and with what intention(s).

The Oxford dictionary outlines cooperation as *‘the action or process of working together to the same end’*. However, the examples covered in this Special Issue do not always indicate that cooperation takes place toward a common goal. Moreover, we note that the idea of ‘working together’ can suggest simultaneity and similarity of action, whereas our papers include examples of cooperative behaviour that can involve different forms of action, along with actions that are separated in time yet remain connected by an expectation of reciprocation. Contrasting these interpretations with Dunn’s (1988: 85) formal definition of an agricultural cooperative reveals other challenges: “[A] user-owned and controlled business from which benefits are derived and distributed on the basis of use”. Dunn infers a commercial orientation and degree of formality, whilst our papers tend towards the blurring of these narrow parameters. More recent definitions of agricultural cooperation incorporate a wider set of practices and principles and more flexibility of interpretation (e.g. ICA, 1995; see Ajates Gonzalez, this issue). This is in response to the often uneasy relationships between disparate motives for and benefits from cooperation (Mooney, 2004; Stock et al., 2014; Gray, 2016), particularly in regards to the balance of individual versus collective benefit (Emery 2015; see Wynne-Jones this issue).

The increasing breadth in our understanding of cooperatives has been enabled by research into their normative, cultural and interpersonal dimensions (Gurven, 2006; Emery and Franks, 2012; Kasper and Mulder, 2015; Forney and Häberli, 2016). Here-in, particular focus has been placed on the values underpinning cooperation and the extent to which these are embroiled with, or constitutive of, farmer identity (Stock and Forney, 2014). The role of ‘social capital’ and network analyses has equally been central to understanding the relations and forms of relatedness within cooperative groupings and how this sustains or undermines them over the longer term (Tapia, 2012; Djanibekov et al., 2013; Crespo et al., 2014; Koutsou et al., 2014; Liang et al., 2015; Abizaid et al., 2015; Tregear and Cooper, 2016); although

questions can be raised with regards to the adequacy of such conceptualisations of connection and care (see Wynne-Jones this issue).

In addition, there is a body of work exploring cooperation as movement. Some of this is overtly class-based and emancipatory, engaging with ideas around food sovereignty, justice and political mobilisations (Desmarais, 2002; Stock et al., 2014; Bacon, 2015; Boone and Taylor, 2015; Diniz and Gilbert, 2015; Pahnke, 2015). Other work studies less overtly political movements, associated more with conceptualisations of local food, sustainability, alternative agriculture and bottom-up approaches to rural development (Baker, 2004; Fandino et al., 2006; Ortiz-Miranda et al., 2010; Beckie et al., 2012; Balazs et al., 2016). Across these different strands, there is an important debate around the extent to which such formulations lay challenge to mainstream capitalist agricultural production, and the extent to which they politicise or de-politicise food production vis-à-vis the capitalist mode (Kimura and Nishiyama, 2008), which underpins many of the papers in this issue.

Moving forwards from these developments and the persisting tensions highlighted, this Special Issue aims to explore the interaction and interdependence of multiple material and immaterial benefits associated with cooperation. Our aim is not simply to criticise narrow economic interpretations (following Mooney 2004), but to explore the very inseparability of a set of ‘more-than-economic’ benefits of cooperation and to consider the wider implications of doing so, leading us to reflect upon the ontological ambiguity of concepts of economy and the political potentiality of cooperative activities. Here we emphasize the ‘more-than-economic’ rather than ‘non-economic’ dimensions to cooperation, to avoid depoliticizing and de-economising social organisational activities or presenting non-economic benefits as ‘autonomous forces shaping development’ (Hadjimichalis 2006: 692-693).

Whilst we left our authors to untangle and engage with the ‘more-than-economic’ in their own way, their papers prompt us to highlight two specific approaches here. The first mirrors pre-eminent conceptualisations of sustainable development as the integration of social, environmental and economic domains. The second requires that we reconceive what we mean by ‘the economy’ and ‘the economic’ altogether. Whilst some of our authors are more or less aligned with a particular approach, we see that many of them start with the former interpretation and then arrive at a position much closer to the latter through the course of their analyses.

To elaborate, the first approach tends to maintain an idea of the economy as a separate sphere of calculable production and value. Although not eschewing the interdependence between the economic and extra-economic, such an approach can retain the same de-socialising and de-politicising effects as a purely empirical focus on, and reification of, the non-economic (de L’Estoile, 2014; cf Hadjimichalis, 2006). Indeed, it is along such lines that Tilzey (this issue) conceptualises the ‘reified trichotomy’ of economy-society-environment as the product of

capitalist relations of production and criticises Polanyian inspired visions of cooperative alterity for maintaining rather than challenging this compartmentalisation.

The second approach attempts to offer a less problematic way of understanding and organising human social relations. This follows the thinking of Timothy Mitchell (2014) who has argued that ‘the economy’ as a discrete object, or fact which is calculable and commensurable, emerged relatively recently in the 1940s. Prior to that, he argues, economics was considered a *process*; a process of economising or governing for the prudent use and allocation of resources. This switch has clear implications for decision-making in terms of its narrowly defined and apparently objective determination of value and benefit. Similar thinking, and empirical research, illustrating the inability of narrow, rational econometal interpretations of economy to explain human social behaviour and value, has led to calls to extend our thinking on the matter. In Economic Anthropology, for instance, Gudeman (2001, 2008) separates the economy into a community/household realm and a market realm in which actions are motivated by very different temporalities and intentions (see Vladimirova, this issue). Others have argued that we need to “unthink the economy” altogether as a distinct institutional sphere, and instead see it broadly as ‘the processes involved in making a living’ (where ‘making a living’ is itself broadly defined not as earning an income but as living a decent and worthwhile life) (de L’Estoile, 2014; Narotzky and Besnier, 2014).

To further ground and enrich these broad divisions, we highlight a further three key themes raised by our papers which we expand upon in sections 3-5.

- Relatedness and Embeddedness
- Institutions and Formalisation
- Histories and Futures

2. Overview of Papers

Before turning to this discussion, we provide an overview of the papers to introduce the reader. Geographically, they focus on cooperative endeavours in the UK (Wynne-Jones, Ajates Gonzalez), Switzerland (Forney & Häberli), Italy (Fonte and Cucco), Spain (Ajates Gonzalez), Greece (Spyridakis & Dima), Russia (Vladimirova), Canada (Wittman et al.) and Bolivia (Tilzey); providing very different contexts in terms of the physical environments and modes of food production discussed; along with distinctions in policy and institutional apparatus which have prompted or enabled the groupings in question. Whilst all of the papers employ a predominantly qualitative analysis, drawing on interviews, questionnaires and ethnographic research, some authors take a case-study approach working with specific groups (Ajates Gonzalez; Spyridakis & Dima; Vladimirova; Wynne-Jones) whilst others provide analysis across a sector or emerging movement (Fonte and Cucco; Forney & Häberli; Tilzey; Wittman et al.). Cooperation at a range of spatial scales is discussed, with differing degrees of formalisation and diverse actors represented.

Starting with a focus on the working and transformation of long-standing cooperatives, Forney and Häberli explore transitions taking place within the Swiss dairy sector in the

context of increasing deregulation. Ranging from ‘traditional’ primary cooperatives of farmer members to former cooperatives that have been privatized into Public Limited Companies (with remaining farmer ownership), Forney and Häberli explore the role and remaining importance of the more-than-economic cooperative values of democracy, solidarity, and autonomy. By showing that these values persist (through reconfiguration), as well as creating tensions in all forms of cooperative adaptation studied, the authors argue against simplified dichotomies between ‘traditional’ and ‘corporatised’ cooperatives, and notions of hybridization between these two poles. Drawing on Gibson-Graham’s (2006) concept of diverse economies, they argue that cooperative values and principles are ‘re-actualised’ by the developments in the industry, rather than being straightjacketed and undermined by a purely economic rationality.

Maintaining the theme of transformation in the context of the Russian Arctic, Vladimirova explores the perseverance of reindeer herding cooperatives following the post-Soviet reorganisation of State and collective farms. In contrast to expectations that cooperatives would give way to privately organised reindeer husbandry, Vladimirova explains the survival of cooperative herding (in two particular cases) precisely because of its more-than-economic functioning and the influence of pre-Soviet value systems. Drawing on Gudeman’s (2008) dialectical analysis of the household and market economy Vladimirova shows how the inseparability of social and material benefits is maintained by the embeddedness of the herding cooperatives within the wider indigenous communities. This ensures that the material benefits and rights assured by the cooperative extend beyond its immediate membership and that wider social controls serve to regulate cooperative and private practices. The cooperatives are thus seen as providing both economic and social security to the indigenous communities of which they are part and, moreover, are at the symbolic and cultural core of reproducing social relations within them.

A second group of papers explore the initiation of new cooperative relations among existing farmers and growers. Wynne-Jones explores a small-scale farmer cooperative in Wales (UK), called *Pontbren*, which was designed to advance more resilient production systems leading to a greater interweaving of environmental, social and economic facets in member’s farming systems. She shows that, despite notable failures to secure significant market benefits, the cooperative has endured on account of the wider affective and inter-personal benefits arising. Whilst noting a remaining tension between individual and collective interests, Wynne-Jones contends that the experience has provided an important opportunity for farmers to (re)learn and normalise cooperative ways of relating. Conceptually, she argues for an expansion of Bourdieu-inspired readings of social learning and capital exchange to better understand the emergent modes of relatedness arising from cooperative practise.

In the Sitia province of Eastern Crete (Greece) Spyridakis and Dima explore new cooperative adaptations made by farmers in order to survive in the face of the Greek economic crisis and the longer-term hindrances on local production that result from the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The authors illustrate how farmers rebuild social networks and

cooperative ways of relating (among family and friends) concurrently with the ‘re-invention’ of traditional products that had become unviable under the CAP support system. They show how the endeavours, with the institutional support of the Greek Government’s new Social Co-operatives framework, at first deliver wider more-than-economic benefits as a necessary precursor to the subsequent realisation of financial viability.

Ajates Gonzalez’s paper centres on the emergence of Multi-Stakeholder Cooperatives (MSC), considering two examples. One in Spain, *Actyvia*, represents an initiative developed among (but going beyond) existing farmers practising extensive means of agricultural production. Here she illustrates how the MSC propagates a much more environmental and social agenda within the wider agro-ecological and food sovereignty movements. The second example, *Manchester Veg People* in the UK, is comprised primarily of new entrants to farming and food production. By incorporating stakeholders with conventionally competing economic interests (growers and buyers), Ajates Gonzalez argues that MSCs necessitate a more-than-economic cooperative focus and objective, over and above a purely market-based rationality. She thus concludes that, in contrast to ‘conventional’ agricultural cooperatives that maintain a primarily market interest, the MSC model offers a more transformative alternative to the mainstream capitalist food production system.

This more ‘alternative’ approach to food production among new entrants is also the subject of the papers by Fonte and Cucco and Wittman et al. Fonte and Cucco centre their analysis on the position of, and prospects for, Social Cooperatives within Italy. Providing a historical look at the development of cooperation in the Italian context, Fonte and Cucco illustrate how the formal institutionalisation of Social Cooperatives in the 1990s served to decouple social interests away from economic interests, thus diluting the transformative capacity of food producing cooperatives (with ‘mainstream’ agricultural cooperatives pursuing financial interests and social cooperatives targeting social welfare, rather than any combined social, economic and political agenda). The authors argue that a new alignment between social cooperatives and the alternative/civic food movement is needed to re-enliven their transformational potential.

Wittman et al. explore the potential of community-based land reform programmes in British Columbia, Canada to instigate a new phase of agrarian transition toward land and food sovereignty, responding to the challenges of land concentration. Primarily providing land access to new entrants to farming, Wittman et al. demonstrate how the new approaches allow for the development of ideas of citizenship, political and agrarian rights away from a model underpinned by individual land ownership. They also argue that the new approaches to community farming offer genuine scope for the reconnection of people, food and ecology. Whilst outlining the potential of these land-based movements to challenge dominant agrarian values and discourses, the authors also illustrate considerable barriers to their emancipatory potential which arise on account of their embeddedness within wider corporate structures of land ownership, rights and capitalist food production. In particular, they demonstrate that many of the new entrants still aspire to private land ownership, raising question over the

levels of ideological transformation. Equally, they contend that without more substantive agrarian reform the forms of land access considered remain under threat.

Finally, Tilzey approaches the focus of our Special Issue much more conceptually. Interested in the ability of cooperative endeavours to achieve ‘actual’ autonomy (Stock et al., 2014) from capitalist relations of production he argues for a Marxian inspired reading of, and approach to, cooperative alterity as opposed to the Polanyian interpretation which, he argues, underlies much of the academic and practice-based interpretation of approaches to achieving food sovereignty. Tilzey argues that it is capitalism itself that artificially separates the economy from the domains of society and environment. Moreover, he argues that Polanyi’s institutional approach to analysis cannot overcome this ‘reified trichotomy’ precisely because it fails to recognise that the market is underlain by *social* relations of production founded on class exploitation. Polanyi thus believes that ‘society’ acts holistically in its supra-class interest to protect itself from the excesses of market production through the popular concepts of ‘double movement’ and re-embedding. However, merely refashioning the economy to make it work better for some unspecified social whole, argues Tilzey, simultaneously maintains the division between economy and society and overlooks (and can thus serve to maintain) the exploitative social relations at the heart of the capitalist economy. Tilzey thus argues that, because of its more Marxian interpretation, only the ‘radical’ faction of the food sovereignty movement has the potential to achieve social relational transformational change in food production systems.

We now turn to develop the three themes highlighted above.

3. Relatedness and Embeddedness

In contrast to formal definitions of agricultural cooperatives, many of our papers illustrate how the benefits and organisation of cooperative activities extend beyond a neatly delineated ‘membership’ to the wider communities in which they are situated, and indeed how this is often fundamental to their success and survival. Whilst such insights clearly resonate with existing literature on networks, social capital (e.g. Svendsen and Svendsen 2000) and embeddedness (e.g. Kloppenborg et al. 1996), which indicate important reciprocal relationships between producer activities and the wider reproduction and rearticulation of rural space, our papers highlight new apparatus through which such connections are being made and formalised. They also link these relations with current contexts of economic crisis and deepening neo-liberalisation, which have heightened regional and social disparities, exacerbated levels of precarity and prompted various forms of reaction or resistance. Equally, the papers show new insights on the conceptualisation of connectedness and the measure of benefits arising there-in.

Fonte and Cucco as well as Syridakis and Dima focus their work on social cooperatives and the social economy, whereby cooperative activities are legally obliged to pursue the common good of the community, the social integration of citizens and the satisfaction of general social

interests, rather than the narrow interest of its members. By engaging with the idea of multi-stakeholderism, meanwhile, the papers by Ajates Gonzalez and Fonte and Cucco widen the ‘traditional’ membership of cooperatives and illustrate a re-focussing of objectives away from member self-interests by targeting transformational change of the neoliberal food regime for the benefit of wider society. Similarly, Wittman et al. outline how the community farm approach in British Columbia targets the integration of ‘local food producers into a supportive social environment and facilitates the long-term development of a sustainable regional food system’ which explicitly moves away from previous divisions (rural-urban; producer-consumer). As such, these papers enhance a growing field of literature that argues against an isolation of producers and the production functions of agriculture from wider food networks and regional economies (e.g. Goodman and DuPuis, 2002; Marsden, 2010), whilst showing how cooperative relations and institutions are fundamental to achieving this.

At a more localised scale, papers by Spyridakis and Dima, Vladimirova, and Wynne-Jones show how producers’ families and friends may be indirectly involved in the organisation and functioning of the cooperatives. Spyridakis and Dima observe that producers’ access to a wider kin and friendship network ensured their survival in the harsh climate of the Greek debt crisis. In some instances this included labour exchange for work-intensive activities such as harvesting or collecting. In other instances, it was the quality of the social network itself that allowed entrepreneurial initiatives to succeed. In particular, the establishment and building of reputational endorsement among networks of family and friends was essential for the marketing of the new (old) products.

Vladimirova draws on the dialectical mutuality of the household and market economy (following Gudeman, 2008) to emphasise the very inseparability of the two domains in the context of the reindeer herding cooperatives under study. She shows, for instance, how economic exchanges occur within kinship, family and friendship relations, which makes it ‘difficult to delineate a sphere of individual economic interest, or for that reason of the economy, from relations of affection, sociality and friendship’. Vladimirova shows how access to the resources of the reindeer cooperative can be extended through kin and friendship networks. Reindeer herders’ family members, for instance, might be permitted access to resources such as transport and accommodation, and be permitted to engage in hunting or fishing within the tundra. Whilst present, those family members might then be expected to help with chores and herding activities.

Wynne-Jones observes similar enmeshing of sociality and economy in Wales, where she argues social benefits held the *Pontbren* cooperative together when explicit financial benefits were not realised by the group. Within an isolated rural context that has experienced a general weakening of community relations, Wynne-Jones shows how cooperative activities enabled a ‘wider realisation of community renewal and vibrancy’ which sustained the group when faced with disappointment over failures to secure favourable market outlets. In particular, she connects this with the affective experiences of pride, hope, comfort and fun that resulted from

the group's interactions; asserting a need to better appreciate the emotional dimensions of cooperation that are poorly accommodated in conceptions of social capital.

Whilst these experiences confirm the importance of cooperatives' embeddedness, the papers also demonstrate that wider skills, values and practises are equally required as a means to facilitate and reproduce cooperative behaviours and structures (see also Tregear and Cooper 2016). Hence, we see that whilst the forms of organisation studied by Forney and Häberli are more spatially diffuse than some of the other cases presented here, shared values amongst members are shown to enable a continuing commitment. We caution, therefore, that proximity and connectedness within a locality should not automatically be equated with successful cooperation. Instead, the discussions here explicitly deepen the understanding of why embeddedness is so important to many groups, through their focus on routine activities, interpersonal negotiations and more personal forms of reflection and reconfiguration. Critically, the papers also show that these behaviours and skills are not unique to producers and the transformations occurring have broader reach across rural communities.

4. Institutions and Formalisation

Many of the papers illustrate how a wider set of more-than-economic benefits from cooperation arise precisely because of the enmeshing of formalised and informal cooperative arrangements. At the same time, however, the papers point to a variety of tensions when looking at the relationship between the formal and informal, or between the opportunities and constraints implicated in the legal form.

In her comparison of two Multi-Stakeholder Cooperatives, Ajates Gonzalez shows how the UK cooperative was facilitated by the existence of an appropriate legal form, whilst the Spanish case was inhibited by a complex and fragmented approach to the formalisation of cooperatives. In British Columbia, Canada, Wittman et al. demonstrate that the failure to address land access needs within current government mechanisms prompted experimentation with new arrangements with non-governmental and community actors, yet there is a clear level of formalisation associated with many of these resulting arrangements. Wynne-Jones shows that the adoption of a legalised cooperative form was a practical necessity to administer finances for the *Pontbren* farmers, and provided benefits through the ability to access specific funding mechanisms. However, benefits were most often seen to arise from informal practices and relations. In the case of Russian reindeer herding cooperatives, Vladimirova argues that the survival of the cooperatives, and their success in achieving a wider set of benefits, arises because they are organised around a set of moral community norms, which carry greater sway than the strict legal rules of the cooperative. Forney and Haberli, meanwhile, show how the legal separation of economic from cooperative activities and interests in the restructuring of the Swiss dairy industry posed a challenge to the interpretation and application of the cooperative principles of democracy, solidarity, and

autonomy. At the same time, however, they maintain that the principles persist and are reconfigured to ensure that the organisations continue to adhere to a set of more-than-economic principles despite the narrowed material focus on their operations.

Consideration of the legal aspect also necessarily implicates the State in our analysis. Like the other authors, Spyridakis and Dima point to an uneasy relationship between the State and the emergent social cooperatives in Crete. Rather ironically, the new entrepreneurs foster close cooperative relations within their kin and friendship networks precisely because they feel abandoned by, and mistrusting of, the State. At the same time, however, they are forced to accept the benefits that come with the legal recognition from the State as Social Cooperative Enterprises. The contradiction of this dependency points to a more fundamental tension associated with the role of the State in reproducing and maintaining the neoliberal food regimes and capitalist relations of production that many ‘socially’ oriented cooperatives and food movements aim to challenge. Can the State at one and the same time support the social economy and the neoliberal food regime?

Fonte and Cucco’s exploration of social cooperatives in Italy, along with Tilzey’s theoretical contribution, allow us to consider this issue. Fonte and Cucco show how the social economy project was appropriated and ‘sanitized’ by ‘the legally sanctioned establishment of social cooperatives and their confinement to specific sections within national cooperative federations’. The new narrowly defined social cooperatives took on a primarily welfare role, operating as flanking mechanisms for social security among vulnerable members of society following the roll-back of the Italian State. Following Tilzey’s argument that capitalism itself artificially separates the economy from society and environment, we can see how such processes may be part of a State-supported neoliberalisation of the food regime. Cooperative food production is separated into a purely ‘social’ (welfarist) endeavour on the one hand (under the social cooperative model) and a purely ‘economic’ (profit-seeking) endeavour on the other (under the transitions witnessed within the ‘conventional’ agricultural cooperative sector [Bijman et al., 2014; Häberli and Forney, this issue]). So the legal form has the effect of depoliticising both the ‘conventional’ and ‘social cooperative’ models through the separation of the ‘economic’ from the ‘social’ into discrete spheres of operation *alongside* a narrowing of the very terms upon which ‘economy’ and ‘society’ are understood. Our papers show, then, that whilst the legal formalisation of emergent cooperative forms offers certain benefits, it also runs the risk of inhibiting the realisation of the type of diverse and integrated benefits that our papers suggest underlie cooperative success.

5. Histories and Futures

Many of the papers in the Special Issue illustrate how the survival, renewal or rejuvenation of historical ideas, values and ways of relating facilitates the realisation of more-than-economic benefits. Moreover, these historical values are presented as useful because they tend to check the individualising, fragmenting and subordinating structures and values underlying contemporary capitalist food production systems.

Forney and Häberli, in their challenge to the dichotomised (corporate versus alternative) or hybridised visions of contemporary agricultural cooperatives, show how historically important cooperative principles persist, are tested and re-actualised in diverse contemporary cooperative settings. They argue that the maintenance of such principles, even in privatised organisations, maintains a confederacy, and commitment to the more-than-economic, among the farmers and wider farming community involved. In her study of MSCs, Ajates Gonzalez illustrates how the MSC model, whilst apparently a relatively recent structural form (especially legally), traces its roots back to the British Cooperative Wholesale Society (founded in 1863), which first attempted to unite the interests of workers/producers alongside consumers. Moreover, as argued by one of the Actyva MSC members, the MSC is not just the rejuvenation of an old failed model of cooperation from the distant past, but re-enlivens the original aspiration of the cooperative movement to be inclusive and incorporate ‘all facets of human life’; thus opposing the fragmentation and depoliticisation of interests and values regnant under capitalist food systems.

Rather than an appeal to any former cooperative ideology, Wynne-Jones instead explores how sociality and ways of relating are rejuvenated within the community of Welsh farmers under study. She shows how the formation of the *Pontbren* group, and the collective exchange and stronger community relations that it engendered, was supported by the memory of historical ways of relating among previous generations (such as engagement around the Chapel and associated responsibilities to one’s community). Those memories provided a ‘reference point’ around which they could begin to challenge and suspend the more individualised set of norms ‘they had become accustomed to’. Similarly, Spyridakis and Dima explore the rejuvenation of older ways of relating, through family and friendship networks, in Eastern Crete.

Interestingly, they show how this rejuvenated sociality sits alongside the ‘re-invention’ and re-production of traditional products, such as carob honey, which are ‘deep-rooted in local traditions’. With echoes of Appadurai’s ‘The Social Life of Things’ (1988) this suggests that the products are the stuff of material culture and their production is intimately imbricated in particular ways of relating; a point that could equally be made for Forney and Häberli’s discussion of milk-based products in Switzerland. Critically, Spyridakis and Dima show how this re-invention and return to an older set of social relations is also associated with an oppositional discourse. That is an oppositional discourse directed at the State, the EU and large corporate actors in the food sector vis-à-vis a focus on traditional products which are associated ‘with the inclusionary aspect of social networks against the classic model of making a profit’.

Setting it apart, Vladimirova’s example of reindeer herding cooperatives in northern Russia explores the *survival* of social relations and moral values despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union. She does argue, however, that this survival may also go hand-in-hand with the adaptation of pre-Soviet indigenous values and cultural organisation.

6. Concluding Remarks: Reconsidering Value and Politics in Cooperation

Bringing these insights together, we highlight the evidence presented for genuine value in cooperation as a process in-and-of itself. That is something which goes beyond pre-ordained or narrowly delimited objectives and what Mooney (2004) referred to as ‘cooperation for cooperation’s sake’. Such a view also conforms to a broadened understanding, or ‘unthinking’, of the meaning of economy itself (de L’Estoile, 2014). Where cooperation underpins sociality, ways of relating, cultural affirmation and affective inter-subjectivity, the process also confers upon its participants a value in being human; a movement toward personhood through confederacy (see also Sennett 2012).

This can then be connected to political questions around the potential of such transformations. For example, as Wynne-Jones observes, even when groups were not explicitly motivated by ideological commitments, the very processes of cooperating can result in unanticipated changes in their sensibilities and dispositions. In the other cases discussed, even when authors do not push strongly for transformational political change in their analyses, a link can be made back to Mooney’s assertion (2004: 92) that valuing cooperation as a process rather than a means to fixed-ends can carry its own emancipatory potential in challenging *“the singular capitalist logic of exchange value by emphasizing a plurality of use values in the context of a diverse community”*.

This connects with Gibson-Graham’s (2006) vision of a ‘post-capitalist politics’, which centres on the plural and multiple challenges to the dominant capitalist economy that are co-existent with capitalist norms across all levels of society. This language of possibility and hope are clearly appealing to many of the authors in this collection and others beyond (e.g. Anderson et al., 2016). We could conceive, for instance, that those emergent benefits of cooperation could be the necessary first step toward the realisation of collective interests and an expanded sense of consciousness and care beyond the self. In particular, in advanced capitalist countries where food producers have a long history of competitive individual production, might the very fact that producers come to speak and engage with one another sow the seeds for change? Or do such developments, as Tilzey’s Marxian interpretation of cooperative alterity suggest, merely serve to soften the excesses of capitalist exploitation in specific locations, whilst simultaneously maintaining exploitative structures by offering the illusion that more radical change is just around the corner?

Tilzey argues convincingly that capitalism reinforces its position and control through the fragmentation and narrow delineation of society, economy and environment into discrete domains. By working against this compartmentalisation, many of our papers’ elaboration of the more-than-economic dimensions to food production do point toward its political potential (e.g. Ajates Gonzalez, Fonte and Cucco, Wittman et al.). The question is, however, whether the cooperatives in question go far enough or indeed focus their energies on critical components determining systematic transformation. In particular, the persistence of private

property as a foundational unit within many collective relations is shown by both Wittman et al. and Wynne-Jones as a key barrier to more substantive reconfigurations of behaviour and aspiration. Although, as Wittman et al. outline, agrarian reform could work to curtail the concentration of property and associated wealth away from those who would seek to use farmland for 'recreation, retirement, tourism, speculation and/or development', to ensure greater access and utilisation of land within a more connected and egalitarian system of food production.

More broadly, all of our papers illustrate how the ambitions for realising change (or for 'making a living' in the broad sense [Narotzky and Besnier, 2014]) rub up against the apparatus of the State and the law. Whilst the dissolution of the boundaries between society, economy and environment is recognised as valuable by the cooperators involved in the examples described, legal and governmental apparatus tends to push in the opposite direction: separating social, from economic from environmental interests, and narrowly defining what those interests ought to be. So whilst a more-than-economic approach to cooperation in food production can provide the grounds for transformation, such transformation is by no means guaranteed unless the structural contexts of cooperation are simultaneously reflected upon and addressed.

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