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TITLE: The Cooperative Principle of Concern for Community: what is community

THEME: 1.G. COOPERATIVE IDENTITY: OTHERS, DEFINING COMMUNITY

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KEY ARGUMENT: The term community in the 7<sup>th</sup> Cooperative Principle can benefit from recent theoretical debates that try to rethink it as being-together or being-with while avoiding past pitfalls.

KEY WORDS: cooperatives, cooperative principles, community, theory

## **EXTENDED ABSTRACT The Cooperative Principle of Concern for Community: what is community**

### Introduction

The 7<sup>th</sup> Cooperative Principle of Concern for Community affirms that “Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members”. This work reflects upon and discusses the concept of community in connection to the cooperative identity, starting with a brief review of the articulation between both, followed by the benefits stemming from cooperatives’ contributions to community. Third, the concept of community is reviewed, including current debates, placing the articulation between cooperatives and community under a new light.

### Cooperatives and Community

The Cooperative Identity incorporated a new principle in 1995. The 7th Principle ‘Concern for Community’ states that “*Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.*”<sup>1</sup> As MacPherson and Paz explained, the fact that this principle was written in a clear and visible manner, and approved by all ICA members, did not mean it was new to the cooperative movement, but that it was an acknowledgement of an articulation that had been “*widely honoured throughout the movement’s history*” (MacPherson and Paz 2015, page 33).<sup>2</sup> This articulation takes place

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>.

<sup>2</sup> MacPherson, I., & Paz, Y. (Eds.) (2015). Series on Co-operatives & Peace: Vol. 2. Concern For Community: The Relevance of Cooperatives to Peace: Joy Emmanuel – Turning Times Research and Consulting.

through a double movement: first among cooperative members and, second, between cooperatives and their members on the one hand and the wider community on the other, observable through the concept of 'intentional community' (MacPherson and Paz 2015, page 34), 'community building' (Ibid, page 35), and cooperative traditions rooted in community and kin traditions (Ibid, page 36). Cooperatives are still analysed as communities in themselves, following Tönnies' concepts of *Gemeinschaft* - community and *Gesellschaft* - society<sup>3</sup>, where *Gemeinschaft* means the social norms within the cooperative enterprise, and *Gesellschaft*, the business side of the cooperative enterprise (Nilsson and Hendrikse 2010).<sup>4</sup> Yet, in 1995, there was a reason to draw a clear statement on the cooperative identity, and to include *community* in it. It was the goal of "*enhancement of the 'co-operative difference'* And it is in that context that the question of relationships with communities becomes of further importance", to prevent being dismissed in front of an, apparently, all-triumphant capitalist model (MacPherson and Paz, 2015, page 38). Thus, *Community* is to remind cooperative members that there is more than pure market transactions, that human beings are cooperators by nature, and that cooperation has a potential to uphold human values and rights, bringing about a shared welfare, wellbeing, and sustainable development.

#### Contributions of Cooperatives to Community

A host of studies and publications show the value of cooperatives to the community. Among the many cooperatives' contributions to community, it is worth mentioning in this extended abstract: their potential for education, training, and informing members about their rights or ways of innovating. Their role in providing jobs, services, and means of life, in all sectors and walks of life; their potential to enhance the dignity and well-being of all those participating and their families, thus the wider community; their rootedness in local areas for the long-term, which generally means local taxes that contribute to local development for all. If they want to survive, they also need to adapt, to remain open to new generations and new needs, and thus to the wider community. Their responses to basic needs can be a fundamental help to a community, such as in housing, food security, education, health, livelihoods, credit, among others. Besides, cooperatives require the formation of groups, of collective action that can carry a capacity for efficient mobilization of resources and knowledge. Such social action requires leadership, coordination, sustained agreement, and emergent solidarities, based on mutuality and understanding. This furthers social capital and social cohesion within the community, even before a cooperative is established. Their governance enhances the learning and experience of democratic forms, of personal and collective responsibilities, and can further equality, equity, and agency. Contributions of cooperatives are thus both tangible and intangible.

Cooperatives' contributions stem from sharing, transfer and reproduction of human knowledge and ties, because cooperative members come from, are part of and live within the

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<sup>3</sup> Tönnies, F. (1887, 2017) *Community and Society, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> Nilsson, J. And G. Hendrikse (2009) *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft in Cooperatives*, ERIM Report Series Research in Management, December.

community. Ties may seem weak and intangible, but it is these characteristics that allow for resilience, openness, and embeddedness. Granovetter's concept of weak ties improve flows and access to information and resources. Weak ties show the degree of openness to others, and the type of embeddedness in the community and social context. "The question is whether such ties [are] bridges" (Granovetter 1973, page 1375).<sup>5</sup> These connective ties make possible creative solutions to needs and aspirations. Human beings build ties with their diverse forms of capital, including bridging and bonding social capital that, as a resource, allowing human beings to potentially transfer or reproduce it into other forms, contributing to their survival as well as their well-being (Bourdieu 1986).<sup>6</sup> As reciprocity and trust are generalized, cooperatives can contribute to civic traditions of democracy in a community: "*Social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them*" (Putnam, 2000, 19). In Putnam's *Making Democracy Work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*, cooperatives contribute to democracy and civic culture (Nanetti, Leonardi, & Putnam, 1994 pages 139, 142, 148).<sup>7</sup>

So, what is community?

In 1955, there were at least 94 definitions of community (Hillery<sup>8</sup>). Today, there is still a double understanding of community as active process and outcome, as process and substantiveness. The polysemic concept of community can be understood both as an **it**, a real existing entity, and as a quality of life being built, constructed, a *vécu* or life-experience. The term comes from *communitas* and originated from *munus*: a *com-munus* or the obligation of exchange or debt to each other, in Indo-European culture. This led to the idea of reciprocal obligations and mutuality (Mauss 2002).<sup>9</sup> The idea of local self-sufficient community ensuring survival came from Aristotle, for whom polis or city was the self-sufficient community, "*originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life*" (Aristotle, Pol. 1252b29-30). But to survive, *philia* and justice were the necessary bond of every community. *Philia* can be translated as "*affectionate regard*", usually "*between equals*"<sup>10</sup>, or *general amiability* (Aristotle, 1126b, Nicomachean Ethics). In late 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>5</sup> Granovetter, M. (1973) The Strength of Weak Ties, *American Journal of Sociology* 78, 6, pages 1360-80.

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood), 241-258

<sup>7</sup> Nanetti, R. Y., Leonardi, R., & Putnam, R. D. (1994). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern*. Princeton University Press

<sup>8</sup> George A. Hillery. "Definition of Community: Areas of Agreement", *Rural Sociology*, 20, no. 2, 1955, 111

<sup>9</sup> Mauss, M. (2002 [1950]) *The Gift, The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. Routledge Classics 2002 edition. London and New York.

<sup>10</sup> *Philia*, in Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott (1940). *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford. Clarendon Press

and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, key thinkers about community included Tönnies (with his contrast between community and society) and Durkheim<sup>11</sup>.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, current debates on community lead us to Nancy and Agamben. In *The inoperative community* (Nancy, 1991),<sup>12</sup> Nancy argues that community can never be a complete work or a totality. Community is the in-between, the shared experience that rests between and among participants. Community emerges from such space and is always in construction. Freedom, like community, should neither be seen as a property, nor as totally subjective. Agamben responds that community is a thing. Following Spinoza, what is common to bodies is their attribute of extension. Solidarity is not based on essence and bodies scattered in existence (Agamben, 1990).<sup>13</sup> It should not, however, be real-essentialised, such “defending the reality and knowability of essence”<sup>14</sup>. Reese (1980) defines essentialism as the belief in that things have an essence as something necessary and stable in such concept or thing (Reese: 81, 80).<sup>15</sup> Why is this point important when thinking about community? Kronfeldner<sup>16</sup> analyses how thinking in terms of essentialism can catalyze dehumanizing behaviour, as it involves homogenized group stereotypes conditioned by beliefs in hidden essence.

A community, thus, is a contingent dynamic, being what it is, as it is. It is a life-space entailing both a dimension of human social interaction and a dimension of symbolic interaction, on which structuring can take place. Different from identity, it connects to belonging, building and offering a space of life (thinking also of Prigogine’s time space that can become a dynamic vector).<sup>17</sup> How does community appear?

Associations cannot be separated from community at the conceptual level. This is because associations are part of the community and community gives life to associations. In the same way, associations cannot be studied separate from the concepts of social action, social movements, and social organisation and structure. This reminds us that community associations’ key characteristics are that of staying in the community, responding to community evolution and organisation. Therefore, associations differ by type of engagement

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<sup>11</sup> Durkheim, É. (1967) *De la division du travail social: Livre 1, 2 et 3*. Original 1893 (8th ed.).

Durkheim, a positivist, sets out that labour division function is not to produce civilization, but to susciter groups, and thus being the principal source of cohesion. To verify his hypotheses, he compared social solidarity sources through the juridical systems. Also a real-essentialist, he believed women were asocial and that this could not change. For Tönnies, see Footnote 2.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy, J.-L. (1991). *The Inoperative Community: Edited by Peter Connor*. La communauté désœuvrée. *Theory and History of Literature*. Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>13</sup> Agamben, G. (1990) *The Coming Community*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, London.

<sup>14</sup> Oderberg, David S. (2007) *Real Essentialism*. Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy. Routledge, London, page 314. ISBN 9780415872126

<sup>15</sup> Reese William J. (1980) *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion Eastern and Western Thought*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, page 80-81.

<sup>16</sup> Kronfeldner, Maria (2021). Psychological Essentialism and Dehumanization. In *Routledge Handbook of Dehumanization*. Routledge.

<sup>17</sup> Prigogine I. and I. Stengers (1979) *La Nouvelle alliance métamorphose de la science*, Paris, Gallimard.

and ownership within community organization and are not meant to be a fleeting arrangement. Cooperatives are a type of association that cannot be, conceptually, fully separated from community, although it may be done for analytical or practical purposes. How do humans come up with solidarity to help each other and reach mutuality, cooperate, and bring about community, if we consider that we can be divided by free riders (Olson 1971)<sup>18</sup> and that we may face constraints generating inequality? As Durkheim observes : « *Ce qui constitue la contrainte : c'est toute espèce d'inégalité dans les conditions extérieures de la lutte* » [what constitutes the constraint: every type of inequality in the struggle's outer conditions]<sup>19</sup>. 'Progress', for Durkheim, would reduce the constraint, paving the way towards organic solidarity, a social cohesion based on the interdependence arising from work specialization. Yet, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whatever understanding of community there may be, there is an inescapable awareness of inequality, of difference in power and capability, while consequences may be suffered by all.

### Community and Cooperatives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

There are interesting shifts in thinking about capacity building, broadening life possibilities, and caring for community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A first shift is about the emergence of interdependent power as a transformative agent: *"another kind of power based not on resources, things, or attributes, but rooted in the social and cooperative relations in which people are enmeshed by virtue of group life... Social life is cooperative life, and in principle, all people who make contributions to these systems of cooperation have potential power over others who depend on them. This kind of interdependent power is not concentrated at the top but is potentially widespread"* (Piven 2007, page 5)<sup>20</sup>.

A second shift is about values underlying social relationships, which began with Polanyi (Zelizer 1988)<sup>21</sup> and Polanyi 1957<sup>22</sup>). Market oriented values have always contested by other values, as illustrated by the double movement in Polanyi: *"The outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy [human economy], as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships... Reciprocity and redistribution are able to ensure the working of an economic system"* (Polanyi & Block, 1944 (1957 repr.), pages 48 and 51). Interrelated connectedness and mutuality are harnessed for building community that can also ensure its economic life. Empirical economies are instituted through the patterns of reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange, but *"only in a symmetrically organized environment*

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<sup>18</sup> Olson M. (1980) Logique de l'action collective. Revue française de sociologie, Paris. 21-3. page 451-454

<sup>19</sup> Durkheim, Ibid. Livre III : Les formes anormales, Ch. I La division du travail anémique, page 12.

<sup>20</sup> Piven, F. F. (2008). Can Power from Below Change the World? 2007 Presidential Address.

*American Sociological Review* (February:1-14), 73, 1-14

<sup>21</sup> Zelizer, Viviana A. (1988) Review: Beyond the Polemics on the Market: Establishing a Theoretical and Empirical Agenda. Sociological Forum, Vol. 3, No. 4. (Autumn). Pages 614-634.

<sup>22</sup> Polanyi, Karl (1957) The great transformation: the political and economic origins of our time. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944 reprinted in 1957.

*will reciprocate behaviour result in economic institutions of any importance”* (Polanyi, Arensberg and Pearson 1957, page 252)<sup>23</sup> Reciprocity is a form of integration and social cohesion, strengthened through both redistribution and exchange as subordinate methods. It can be discussed as two types: thin reciprocity, dyadic exchanges between two human beings, and thick reciprocity, a generalised reciprocity beyond one-to-one exchange, is not exact, goes to the overall community and comes back within the community. Generalized reciprocity exchanges are now seen close to Nobel Prize Prigogine’s dissipative structures. Prigogine and Stengers (1979) brought about a scientific shift towards ontological pluralism, moving towards alignment along vectors, bringing closer physics and social sciences together, with a new understanding of how humans interact, and how to study social action and organizational change.

A third shift is about borders and community. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the concept of community is being enlarged, for example, by giving legal personhood to nature such as Lake Erie in the US. This is not the only case nor the only country. On the other, recent scientific research demonstrates cooperation among animals and in epigenetics (Bateson, 2014).<sup>24</sup>

What are community borders, what is community, and whether we can conceive Earth or elements of it as part of our concern for community, will be matter of debate in the coming years. The full paper will further develop all sections, reviewing cooperatives’ contributions to community and providing tentative conclusions.

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<sup>23</sup> Polanyi, K., Arensberg, K. and Pearson, H. (1957) *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*. The Free Press, New York.

<sup>24</sup> Bateson, P. (2014). Evolution, epigenetics and cooperation. *Journal of Biosciences*, 39(2), 191–200. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12038-013-9342-7>