



Journal of Co-operative Studies

2025 Special issue: Worker co-operatives and concern for community – Call for papers

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The climate emergency, cost of living crisis and Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted the social and environmental impact of continuous orthodox economic growth. As a result, more attention has been paid to the ways in which communities attempt to build more sustainable and fair economies. Inspired by Principle 7, concern for community, this special issue investigates the role played by worker co-operatives in their local communities by exploring their core mission of putting both the direct membership *and* local communities before profit.

The editors welcome submissions ranging from full academic articles/research papers (7,000 words), as well as short articles (4,000 words), and short think pieces (approx. 1,000 words) from practitioners — please see the *Journal's* [guidelines for submission](#) for information on Journal style and formatting.

Accepted papers will be published in a special issue of the *Journal* in 2025.

Key dates

31 May 2024 Deadline for extended abstracts (1,000-1,200 words) for academic articles and short papers; outline suggestions for think pieces (500-800 words, or in full).

Email to: malu.villela@essex.ac.uk, leonore.perrinmasebiaux@gmail.com, and francois.deblangy@etu.univ-rouen.fr with 'Submission for special issue' in the subject line, and detail in your email the type of submission being made (research article, short paper/practitioner paper, think piece).

31 July 2024 Initial decisions and invitations for submission of full papers

Worker co-operatives and concern for community — Call for papers

Over their two-hundred-year history, co-operatives have helped local communities overcome harsh times of crises. From a global perspective, it appears that co-operative upturns frequently correspond to socio-economic downturns. Although they bring their own solutions to social ills, worker co-operatives are no exception to this historical rule and mainly thrived when and where the economy surrounding them was going through a depression. With the Covid-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis and the climate emergency putting the spotlight on the social and environmental impact of continuous orthodox economic growth, more attention has been paid to the ways in which communities attempt to build more sustainable and fair economies. A mushrooming of alternative economic practices have been tested ranging from community wealth building, an approach which connects anchor institutions with local economy organisations in order to keep the wealth locally (Dubb, 2016), to the recent growth in community benefit societies and community interest companies (Maddocks, 2019).

Some of those economic strategies have re-interpreted and re-affirmed the role of worker co-operatives as part of wider concerns for democratising the economy. Yet, as this and other community-centred economic approaches look to help grow the co-operative movement (Preston City Council, 2023), the question remains as to *how worker co-operatives can grow the community*. In other words, how the impact of worker co-operatives can transcend the realm of its direct members and include the wider community and place where they are based. Considering how the concept of community itself escapes singular definition (Aiken, 2017), we are interested here in the role played by worker co-operatives as grassroots, bottom-up, and alternative practices, and how they can build on their historic ties with local communities to help them overcome the multiple challenges of our current times.

Worker co-operatives are governed by values and principles which imbue their economic activity with democratic and ethical concerns. Those concerns inform their governance and decision-making practices and ensure that equality, equity, and solidarity – all of which echo the co-operative principles – are prioritised in the organisation. Within those, Principle 7 ensures that ‘Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members’ (International Cooperative Alliance, 2018), emphasising worker co-operatives’ core mission of putting not only the direct membership but also communities first before profit.

Yet, empirical research also suggests that adherence to co-operative principles and values overall is neither universal nor uniformly followed (Novkovic 2006), despite having a proven effect on the success of co-operatives (Novkovic, 2004). Moreover, the dual socio-economic characteristics of worker co-operatives presents particular challenges when balancing contrasting aims and values (Langmead, 2016; Novkovic, 2012; Somerville, 2007). This issue is exemplified by the prevalence of openness and independence, democratic membership and participation over principles deemed more aspirational such as the concern for the broader the community and wider co-operation

beyond the enterprise (Birchall 2011; Novkovic, 2006) – principles which were interestingly only included at a later stage of co-operatives' history (Battilani & Schroter, 2012). It may also be that, as Langmead (2016) notes, the lack of empirical research into day-to-day practices contributes to condemn worker co-operatives for their presumed self-interest. Indeed, in assessing the gap between principles and practices, Ghauri et al. (2012) highlight a more anchored understanding of the community principle in the co-operatives studied than is generally assumed.

Beyond the interest for co-operative principles *per se*, academic research also offers contested responses with regards to worker co-operatives' embeddedness in communities: while some consider worker co-operatives as one of the instruments in which communities build from the ground up more sustainable and equitable ways of working and living with dignity (Coraggio & Arroyo, 2009; North & Cato, 2018; Piñeiro Harnecker, 2007; Ranis, 2016), others warn against the degeneration of their democratic and egalitarian values over time, supplanted by profit-focused strategies (Cornforth, 1995; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). Indeed, worker co-operatives' commitment to building fairer, more sustainable and more equitable outcomes beyond their membership, their commitment to inclusivity and solidarity, their integration into wider economic strategies and the development of supportive ecosystems still lacks academic scrutiny.

As a result, this special issue welcomes contributions, theoretical, empirical or otherwise, on the interaction between worker co-operatives and the wider community – considered here in its broadest sense.

Potential topics for contributions to a special issue of the Journal of Co-operative Studies might include (but are not limited to):

- Worker co-operatives' interactions with the broader community, redistributive practices and/or challenges to the concept of self-interest in worker co-operatives.
- Worker co-operatives and community economies perspectives (Community Economies Network - Gibson-Graham, Feminist economics, post-colonial research).
- Worker co-operatives and post-growth/de-growth strategies.
- Worker co-operatives' engagement (or not) with sustainability practices, and the inscription of social and/or environmental goals within their economic activities.
- Worker co-operatives and community wealth building, supportive ecosystems such as co-operative support organisations, local economic development.
- Cross-sector work and/or collaboration to address local challenges around inequalities, climate change, well-being or other areas of relevance for inclusive and sustainable growth.
- Issues of inclusion and exclusion in worker co-operatives.
- Worker co-operatives, community, and social policy.
- Social care worker co-operatives, concepts of care, worker co-operatives and community interest.
- Newly established worker co-operatives: ethos, ambitions, and values.

- Worker co-operatives' principles and values: the gap between theory and practice.

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[Submission guidelines for authors](#)