

# Editorial

What does the future hold for co-operatives? What role can they play in addressing society's grand challenges? How might co-operatives address challenges in their own organisations? The Autumn issue of the *Journal of Co-operative Studies* is an open issue, but the peer-reviewed papers and shorter articles all address the future of co-operatives by investigating areas such as the sustainable development goals (SDGs), business models, Strategic Renewal, and the role of education in promoting social transformation.

The issue begins with an article by Gamze Yakar-Pritchard, Rory Ridley-Duff, Kıymet Çalıyurt, and Yasin Akkuş that explores co-operatives' potential to contribute to sustainable development. They start by recognising the strength of the co-operative movement worldwide, where the top 300 co-operatives have a combined turnover of over 2.171 billion USD (Carini et al., 2022) and over 270 million people are employed in co-operatives around the world (Eum, 2017). With the dual mandate of social and economic objectives, they argue that co-operatives have the potential to contribute to the SDGs, but methodologies for analysing such impact are limited. To address this gap, Yakar-Pritchard et al. focus on the links between co-operative principles and the SDGs, using these to develop a research instrument. The study is based on three research questions: how can the contribution of co-operatives to sustainable development be measured; how might co-operative principles and SDGs be linked to each other; and what level of support exists within the co-operative movement for the SDG framework favoured by their apex bodies? Drawing on mixed methods research on agricultural co-operatives in Turkey that explored the relationship between co-operative principles and the SDGs, the study develops a survey instrument that can be used to measure the co-operative contribution to SDGs. The survey, which is included as an appendix to the paper, has a long list of factors, organised under four broad headings: poverty and inequality, quality of work and life, sustaining the environment, and managing the sustainable economy. Taken together, these can be used to assess how co-operative principles can contribute to sustainable development.

The second paper by Nick Money, Olive McCarthy, Paul A. Jones, and Noreen Byrne examines the future of the credit union movement in Ireland, specifically by focusing on the role of business models in transforming the movement. Since their introduction in the 1950s as a response to poverty and financial exclusion in Ireland, credit unions have become popular, well-regarded institutions within local communities. However, as this paper notes, the financial services market in Ireland has changed considerably since the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. Although the credit union model was more resilient than for-profit financial institutions, the economic sustainability of the Irish credit unions has come under pressure, particularly in an era of low interest rates and increased regulation. Several reports have suggested changes to the credit union business model as a response to these pressures, but, as Money et al. note, the concept is poorly defined in these reports and rarely addresses credit union principles and values. Using a broad definition of a business model as something that identifies value, the authors pose three questions: what is a business model and has it been defined for Irish credit unions; why has it been proposed that Irish credit unions need to change their business models; and, finally, is the business model concept useful and relevant for credit unions who want to address their financial performance? The paper offers an extended review of the academic and grey literature on business models, examining how they relate to the Irish credit union context, and particularly to the credit unions' strategic and planning needs. The authors conclude that the business model concept will only be of use to Irish credit unions if it adds something new to their existing strategy, planning, and management processes, and is something that practitioners both understand and want to adopt.

From credit unions in Ireland, we move to consumer co-operatives around the world. The first of the short articles, by John F. Wilson, Samuli Skurnik, Espen Ekberg, and Anthony Webster, explores Strategic Renewal in consumer co-operatives since the 1980s. This paper starts from

the premise that consumer co-operatives are in crisis in many different parts of the world. The problems are many and varied, but include the rise of consumerism and investor-owned chain stores, loss of market share, demutualisation, and neo-liberal economic policies. Responses to these challenges have been termed ‘Strategic Renewal’, a term which generally refers to fast, radical changes to a company’s business (Tuncdogan et al., 2019), where all aspects of the business are reconsidered, usually in response to a crisis. Wilson et al. apply this principle to consumer co-operatives, arguing that the co-operative model raises interesting questions about Strategic Renewal, which is more usually applied to large, investor-owned, hierarchical organisations. Thus, there are issues about how to consult with members about large-scale change, how to ensure a Strategic Renewal plan fits with co-operative principles and values, and how the change might impact on the wider co-operative movement. To address these issues, the authors report on case studies gathered from the UK, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Italy, France, Canada, Australia, South Korea, and Japan (Wilson et al., in press). They suggest that iterative, piecemeal change is a more effective, and sustainable, way of ensuring Strategic Renewal of co-operatives. This leads them to conclude that Strategic Renewal in practice, rather than in theory, is also more improvisational and less planned than the literature would suggest.

The final short paper, by John Harrison, offers a report on the formation, in 2021, of the Preston Cooperative Education Centre (PCEC). The PCEC founders’ focus is on the role that co-operative education can have on social transformation and community wealth building. They have been inspired locally by the Preston Model and, internationally, by the Mondragón co-operatives in the Basque Country. Drawing on Brown and Jones (2021) and the Mondragón report (LKS Next, 2020), Harrison expands upon the important role that co-operatives play in community wealth building. To develop co-operatives, local communities need education and training in co-operative principles and PCEC aims to provide this training to the local community in Preston. They are particularly interested in promoting co-operative education within the local trade union movement and Harrison reflects on both the opportunities and the challenges that this involves.

While the articles have looked to the future, the issue concludes with two book reviews that consider recent texts on interpreting co-operative history. The first is an extended review, by Richard Bickle, of Leslie Huckfield’s *How Blair Killed the Co-ops: Reclaiming Social Enterprise from its Neoliberal Turn*. Bickle notes that while the title might suggest a polemic, Huckfield in fact offers “a meticulous study” of the policy shift away from democratic, independent co-operatives and towards the marketisation of public service delivery via philanthropy and individualistic social enterprises. The book is based on Huckfield’s PhD thesis, and offers a comprehensive account of policy developments over the past 40 years, drawing on personal experience, documentary evidence and interviews with key policy makers. The depth and breadth of material will, Bickle suggests, make the book “a key text for students, researchers and policymakers for many years to come”, while adding that it is occasionally a challenging read for a non-academic audience.

Finally, Rita Rhodes reviews *Cooperative Rule: Community Development in Britain’s Late Empire*, by Aaron Windel, which she welcomes as a “significant contribution to co-operative literature” that also benefits from having “a mighty bibliography”. Windel explores how co-operatives came to be entangled in colonial rule in the British Empire, in a way that was at odds with the co-operative movement’s democratic origins and co-operators’ somewhat utopian ways of thinking about co-operative principles. While Rhodes has some reservations about the text, noting areas where she would have liked more detail, a strength of Windel’s approach is that he examines the consequences of using co-operatives as a tool of empire. This chimes with recent academic work on postcolonial organisation studies and decolonising the curriculum, demonstrating the importance of breadth of scholarship and analysing topics using a plurality of perspectives.

**Anita Mangan**  
Editor

## References

- Brown, M., & Jones, R. E. (2021). *Paint your town red: How Preston took back control and your town can too*. Repeater.
- Carini, C., Eum, H., Han, A., Delvecchio, P., Gotz, I., & Vitali, M. (2022). World cooperative monitor: Exploring the cooperative economy. Report 2022. EURISCE/ICA. <https://monitor.coop/en/media/library/research-and-reviews/world-cooperative-monitor-2022>
- Eum, H. (2017). Cooperatives and employment: Second global report. CICOPA. <https://www.cicopa.coop/publications/second-global-report-on-cooperatives-and-employment/>
- LKS Next. (2020). *Designing a cooperative entrepreneurship initiative for Preston: Challenges and strategic action lines. A report presented to the University of Central Lancashire, Preston City Council and the Project Committee*. <https://prestonmodel.net/reports/>
- Tuncdogan, A., Lindgreen, A., Volberda, H., and van den Bosch, F. (Eds.). (2019). *Strategic renewal: Core concepts, antecedents, and micro foundations*. Routledge.
- Wilson, J. F., Webster, A., Ekberg, E., & Skurnik, S. (Eds.). (in press). *The consumer co-operative sector: International perspectives on strategic renewal*. Routledge.