



Book Review

Imagine, Studying the Relationship between Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) and Imaginary in the Era of Capitalocene

By Alexandrine Lapoutte, Timothée Duverger, and Eric Dacheux (Eds.)
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The co-editors and contributors to *Imagine* are to be commended for the breadth and ambition of their projects. They traverse important, if often conceptually demanding, terrain in respect of socioeconomic imaginaries and their concretisation as “real utopias” in the social and solidarity economy (SSE). Contributions span Francophone and Anglophone theories and practices, representing a step forward in cultivating our capacities to imagine the end of capitalism, rather than the end of the world. The book emphasises the SSE’s emancipatory potential, its capacity for self-criticism, and its encouragement of collective reflection. Such real utopian initiatives are understood as prefigurations of envisioned futures enacted in the organisational present (Olin Wright, 2010), with socioeconomic fictions playing a prominent bridging role between the imagined and the real (Davies, 2018). One author of this review (Oliveira) has expertise in organisational imaginaries with an interest in SSE, while the other (McMahon) has expertise in SSE with an interest in organisational imaginaries. It is from these positionalities that we review this timely book on imaginaries, SSE, and the capitalocene.

The introductory chapter positions fictions not as the opposite of imaginaries but as one of their principal vehicles. Fictions are presented as symbolic tools through which imaginaries circulate, consolidate, and sometimes acquire material force. Drawing on Castoriadis’ (1975/1987) *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, the editors conceptualise imaginaries as shared representations with instituted (ideological) and instituting (utopian) poles. They extend this frame through Ricœur’s (1978) distinction between ideology and utopia and through Bloch’s (1918/2000) anticipatory consciousness, to show how utopia can serve as an empirical pathway for fictional ideas to materialise. Subsequent chapters attempt to “institute” utopias by grounding them as active SSE practices. These include the curation of myths, rituals, and metaphors in political symbolism (chapter 2); the coordination of solidarity initiatives and the instituting of a new

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imaginary of “deliberalism” (chapter 10); the re-embedding of economic and ecological practices in territorial transitions such as community wealth building and grassroots organisations (chapters 3–5); and cultural explorations of solidarity and critique through cyberpunk dystopias (chapter 6) and blues assemblages (chapter 7).

The book’s great merit is to present organisational imaginaries in politicised and collectivised forms, in contrast to the individualising organisational storytelling tendencies of recent decades (Fernandes, 2017). The breadth of imaginaries is striking. Highlights include Ligha Young’s chapter on the blues tradition and co-operative economics, and Elif Tuğba Şimşek’s chapter on cyberpunk cinema and the politics of recognition and redistribution. These contributions demonstrate the diverse cultural sites where SSE imaginaries circulate. More broadly, the volume illustrates two dynamics: some imaginaries crystallise into co-operative forms of law, procurement, or deliberation (e.g., community wealth building, deliberalism), while others reproduce symbolic repertoires (e.g., cyberpunk or blues). This raises a central question: why foreground the utopian aspect of SSE? Is it to underscore the open-endedness of solidarity practices as a de-mythologised economics — visible in practices such as circular economy and deliberative co-ordination — or to preserve the fictional dimension of imaginaries as long-lasting counter-narratives, whether in degrowth, ecotopian futures, or cultural assemblages?

While intellectually stimulating, the book also suffers from several limitations. It is ultimately more about the process of organisational imaginaries than about images of organisation in practice. The deepest investigations concern fictional rather than real utopias. By consistently returning to “fiction” as the privileged lens, the book risks flattening the richness of imaginaries and reproducing a recurrent limitation of imaginary studies: the tendency to foreground unfulfillment over institutional traction. This may frustrate SSE practitioners, who might find the discussions overly abstract or insufficiently grounded in practice. The book seems aimed more at academics already familiar with organisational imaginaries than at practitioners or newcomers. Core concepts and their distinctions (e.g., utopia, imaginary, myth, fiction) are often assumed rather than explained. One example occurs towards the end, where community-supported agriculture and systems of local exchange are mentioned without elaboration, leaving even informed readers wanting more.

Structurally, the book lacks balance between theory and practice. It is conceptually dense and theoretically speculative, particularly in attempts to synthesise Castoriadis and Ricœur. These discussions are intriguing but inconclusive, leaving readers unfulfilled. At the same time, conceptual repetition across chapters becomes tiresome, especially when empirical case studies are thinly developed. This is unfortunate given the richness of possible examples such as Mondragon, ScopTi, the Preston Model, or Cooperation Jackson, which are cited but not examined in depth. The onto-epistemological decision to combine Castoriadis’ instituting/instituted dialectic with Ricœur’s ideology/utopia dyad is laudable, but its execution is uneven. The book carefully presents imaginaries as both ordering and transformative forces, but often leaves unresolved the tension between their symbolic expression and institutional embodiment. Castoriadis’ (1975/1987) emphasis on heteronomy — imaginaries solidifying into laws, norms, and institutions that regulate shared subjectivities — is visible in discussions of SSE practices absorbed into governance frameworks. Ricœur’s view, by contrast, highlights sedimentation, where actuality reflects the reproduction of ideologies, narratives, and identities (Ricoeur, 1978). The interplay is suggestive but underdeveloped.

Some shortcomings are perhaps unavoidable given the speculative nature of the topic. Still, stricter editorial oversight and more thorough copy editing could have alleviated their impact. The book persuasively demonstrates that imaginaries are vital to SSE across diverse empirical registers. Yet its final “Future Outlooks” chapter remains cautious, emphasising the role of imaginaries as systemic diagnostics and as narratives for civil and political arenas, rather than fully projecting how they might reconstitute public and political life. Are we to imagine the end of capitalism, or just the end of neoliberalism? We suggest that the contributions from Jerome Nikolai Warren (on de-mythologising the economics discipline) and Ermanno Tortia (on complementarities between critical realism, complexity, and paradox theory) point the most

promising path forward towards onto-epistemologically consistent theories and practices that can reconcile organisational imaginaries, utopian fictions, and real utopias.

In conclusion, this edited book is an important and provocative read, grappling with intellectually dense subject matter while opening the way for further research and consolidation of theories and practices. Our reservations notwithstanding, we recommend it wholeheartedly to academics interested in organisational imaginaries and the social and solidarity economy. For practitioners or newcomers, however, it may not be the most accessible starting point (see Adams, 2017, and our other references for more approachable introductions).

The Reviewers

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