



Reinventing journalism and empowering democratic communities: Worker co-operative innovations in the national-daily newspaper field

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Despite journalism's important role in developing democratic communities, English-language co-operative studies have long neglected news markets. Prompted by the news industry's contemporary shakeout, the field has only recently begun to address co-operators' role in journalism's democratic reconstruction. This article, therefore, presents several examples of long-established, large-scale, and influential news co-operatives in national daily newspaper markets. These experiences illustrate that the model can provide feasible, enduring, and meaningful alternatives to investor-owned media firms. Identifying consumer co-operatives' presence, worker co-operatives' apparent predominance, and multistakeholder co-operatives' recent emergence, the analysis next focuses on the distinctive value of news workers' leadership. Arguing for greater phenomenological understanding of journalists' unique economic, professional, reputational, political, and relational incentives, we draw from members' accounts in the case study literature and journalistic reports about Athens' *Efimerida ton Syntakton* newspaper co-operative; this illustrates these field-specific interests' distinctive force. Unpacking these economic and social motivations both explains and encourages worker-owners' leading role in successful news ventures. The paper concludes by recommending greater attention to news co-operation's economic sociology, including best practices to support this emerging sector—such as newsroom self-management, multistakeholder commitments, and inter-co-operation.

Introduction: Catch-up Co-operation in the News Sector

It is by now a cliché to say that investor-driven journalism's business model is broken. Of course, journalism's corruption by media-ownership concentrated in the hands of a wealthy few is well-known (e.g. Bagdikian, 2004). However, emerging alternatives risk reproducing plutocratic influence in new guises (Diamantopoulos, 2023). For example, "pink slime sites" resemble local news outlets but advance corporate, state, or party propaganda. By mid-2024, 1,265 of these outlets overtook the US's 1,213 dailies (NewsGuard, 2024). Many such evolving threats now stalk journalism's democratic purpose.

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For example, asset-stripping, community disinvestment, and news deserts have become widespread over the last decade (Abernathy, 2020). As corporate journalism declines and capital flees the news sector, public trust is in freefall (Newman et al., 2022) and news avoidance is ascendant (Mitchell et al., 2020). Misinformation, conspiracy theories, and far-right demagoguery increasingly fill this vacuum (Pickard, 2019). The public sphere's degradation hence threatens effective community action on urgent societal challenges — and even democracy's substantive viability. This is particularly true where strong public broadcasters are absent from the journalistic field (Benson et al., 2018). Exceptionally vulnerable are the emerging generation, who overwhelmingly rely on social media for news (Mitchell et al., 2020). Indeed, informational threats now rival carbon emissions' menace because informed public opinion and effective collective action each hinge on abundant and reliable journalism. Simply put, a profound existential crisis defines this conjuncture in journalism history. Consequently, fewer needs are more urgent than developing coherent understandings of what works, and what does not work, in media reform.

For co-operative studies, this moment thus poses a key question: can co-operators effectively intervene against news market failures? Unfortunately, the answer is unclear because the field has long under-researched, under-theorised, and strategically under-valued the news sector. Sector-specific understandings thus lag communities' news needs.

Moreover, other touted “solutions” have distracted from co-operative options. These include angel investors, philanthropists, hedge funds, family trusts, and employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs) in the US. Some have proposed worker-investor co-determination and community ownership, on the Green Bay Packer football club model. Technological solutions have included harnessing social media platforms, blockchain schemes, and platform-based subscription services such as Substack. These prospects have all distracted from co-operative possibilities.

This study, therefore, builds on recent interest in news co-operatives (e.g. Boyle, 2012; Fefes, 2021; Gollmitzer, 2024; Papadopoulou, 2024; Price, 2020; Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016; Voinea, 2021). It asks three urgent questions in evolving historical circumstances: have news co-operators successfully intervened in news markets; what has driven worker co-operators to succeed, despite the news industry's daunting circumstances; and have multistakeholder and inter-co-operative innovations helped overcome obstacles to such efforts?

To answer these questions, the article presents successful examples as evidence for co-operation's wider potential in journalism's democratic reconstruction. Furthermore, it argues that an interpretive understanding of news workers' distinctive economic and sociological interests explains co-operation's traction on the news industry's slippery and shifting market-terrain. Arguing that news sector self-management therefore yields complex empowerment effects — and that additional stakeholders, and inter-co-operation can amplify these effects — the paper thus addresses empirical, theoretical, and strategic gaps. In a sentence, the paper argues that several longstanding and large-scale news co-operatives demonstrate the model's viability; that the propensity toward worker-led news co-operatives (worker co-operatives and multistakeholder co-operatives) suggests workers' diverse stakes are a key success-factor; and that additional stakeholders (e.g. readers) and forms of inter-co-operation (e.g. movement support) can further encourage success.

Narrowing the empirical gap

Empirically, co-operative studies' delayed discovery of news markets obscures significant beachheads — particularly in hot-spots of journalism innovation. For instance, there are about 26 news co-operatives in Greece (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016) and 27 in Argentina (Grohmann, 2019). Co-operatives span many media sectors — from radio to cable television to internet and streaming services (Diamantopoulos, 2023). Worker co-operators publish the second-most-read monthly in France, *Alternatives Économiques* (est. 1980); the second-ranked weekly in Uruguay, *Brecha* (est. 1985); and the popular Buenos Aires weekly *Tiempo Argentina*

(est. 2016). In addition to daily online news, the latter circulates about 30,000 copies, with 2,500 subscribers, 2,000 reader-members, and 100 staff (Assis, 2018).

Notwithstanding the emerging news sector's broad scope, this article's specific empirical contribution focuses on national daily newspaper co-operatives. It finds that several long-standing and large-scale news co-operatives have pioneered media innovations in recent decades. For instance, worker co-operators publish national daily newspapers in Rome, Athens, Mexico City, and Montevideo. Consumer co-operators publish dailies in London and Berlin. Multistakeholder co-operatives publish French-language newspapers from the Canadian capital region of Ottawa-Gatineau and in Québec City, that Canadian province's capital. Enduring through economic downturns, rapid technological change, COVID-19 shocks, and the online migration of advertisers and audiences thus demonstrates news co-operatives' resilience at a significant scale.

Indeed, while news market disruption threatens continued success, co-operatives are generally more resilient than investor-owned firms and better protect jobs through crisis (Borzaga et al., 2022; Pérotin, 2013). These experiences, therefore, encourage harnessing news worker leadership, innovation-transfer, and inter-co-operation. For example, Spanish monthly *Alternativas económicas* (est. 2013) loosely replicated France's *Alternatives Économiques*, with their worker co-operative federation's backing (Voinea, 2021). Similarly, the trade union and co-operative movement-backed conversion of a six-title newspaper chain in Québec to worker-community co-ownership in 2019 illustrates that worker-leadership, additional stakeholders, and inter-co-operation can scale-up sector-reach (Fouquet et al., 2021).

In short, these experiences furnish the study's principal empirical finding: that co-operatives have established enduring and influential alternatives in several national daily news markets. While these outliers do not prove similar projects will prevail elsewhere, their success provides an empirical check against democratic defeatism in the news sector. Moreover, they suggest co-operative news models are viable; that worker stakes are an important ingredient of success; and that additional support from stakeholders and other co-operatives can further drive that success.

Narrowing the theoretical gap

Theoretically, news co-operatives' neglect renders their success mysterious. However, this essay argues that the journalistic field's distinct character offers important clues. Particularly, it shows reporters have a unique bundle of economic and social interests and that the expanded conceptual repertoire of economic sociology can thus furnish more adequate explanations (and predictive capacity) for news co-operatives' success (Bourdieu, 2005). Moreover, these dispositions are socially constructed rather than historically fixed. Presently threatened by the disruption of news production's corporate logic, those complex, shifting, and contentious interests may be co-operatively refashioned. In fact, these interests may provide news co-operatives' decisive motor force.

In short, co-operative economic action in the journalistic field is not simply socially embedded (Granovetter, 2018); it is also culturally embedded (Zelizer, 2002). With the economic shift to democratic ownership, social relations and newsroom cultures also shift. All this has implications for journalistic practice. News co-operatives, therefore, have theoretically complex lives, extending well beyond the fact of their incorporation. Where a reductive economism fails to capture these sociological and cultural complexities, economic and media sociology help to illuminate them.

As evidence from Greece's *Efimerida ton Syntakton* suggests, success seemed unlikely in strictly economic terms. Conversely, journalists' professional, reputational, political, and relational stakes help explain it. Of course, co-operation's institutional logic will not always buoy journalism's quality, given wide-ranging contingencies. In fact, co-operatives wage a two-front battle. Economically, they face the same market competition as capitalist firms. Sociologically,

they confront the same isomorphic and degenerative pressures which afflict other democratic organisations (Diamantopoulos, 2023; Papadopoulou, 2024). At best, a news sector of imperfect co-operatives constitutes one element of a structurally pluralist media system — alongside strong public broadcasters, for instance. Nevertheless, news co-operation affords important new possibilities.

The article's main theoretical contribution focuses on this promise: it sketches how journalists' distinctive economic and social interests may favour worker self-management, flourish under it, and thereby contribute to news co-operatives' success. For example, it draws from interviews on the journalistic record (Graham-Harrison, 2015) as well as scholarship on Athens' *Ef-Syn* (Fefes, 2021; Papadopoulou, 2024; Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016) to give voice to these workers' distinctive strivings.

Narrowing the strategic gap

Strategically, journalism's crisis constitutes a paradoxical dilemma for co-operators. On the one hand, news sectors in upheaval offer high risks and low returns. Certainly, the sector's underdevelopment demonstrates that buds of co-operative possibility seldom blossom. Rallying movement support may thus pose Sisyphean challenges. Overall, journalism's future is uncertain, and the risks are real. Launching co-operative news ventures may thus appear as naïve and potentially costly distractions. On the other hand, not exploiting corporate news media's market retreat may exact significant opportunity costs. Historically, strong co-operative sectors often emerge from economic crisis (Borzaga et al., 2022). Similarly, diminished competition, corporate journalism's legitimacy crisis, and popular concerns over online misinformation may help establish loyalty to news co-operatives. For example, co-operation may better satisfy news audiences' demand for journalistic independence (Price, 2020; Voinea, 2021) and reporters' quality-of-work-life preferences (Lees, 2024; Papadopoulou, 2024; Sandoval, 2016). News market failures thus create risks but also opportunities.

Moreover, journalism's decline threatens both the public interest and the movement's own democratic foundations. Conversely, news co-operatives implicitly advance the movement's doctrinal concern for community (International Co-operative Alliance, 2015) by continually spotlighting wide-ranging democratic concerns. Against news scarcity, abundant, quality, and engaging journalism empowers communities to better identify challenges and solutions. Indeed, journalism's neglect contrasts sharply with news co-operatives' outsized contributions to the movement's Principle 7, "concern for community". For community service is deeply inscribed in journalism's purpose and principles — as imperfect as its corporate practice may often be (Wring, 2012). As Kovach and Rosentiel (2014) argue, journalists owe the public their first loyalty. Similarly, journalism's purpose is to provide citizens with the understanding necessary for effective democratic engagement. More evocatively, Carey (2007) describes the public as journalists' "God term" (p. 12), and democracy as their "compulsory passion" (p. 13). Certainly, few fields are defined by such a continuous, comprehensive, and robust prosecution of community concerns. Like the democratic communities in which they are embedded, co-operators can therefore ill-afford complacency about the future of news.

The article is organised as follows. The next section offers a typological overview of news co-operatives, including worker news co-operatives, consumer news co-operatives, and the "community turn" toward worker-community co-ownership models (i.e. multistakeholder news co-operatives) and inter-co-operation (e.g. consortia). The paper then considers worker co-operators' diverse motivations to brave formidable market conditions. Interpreting the literature from one workplace experience illustrates self-management's specific appeal for reporters. Concluding remarks sum up implications for future research and development strategy.

Varieties of Co-operative Innovation in National Daily News Markets

There are both economic and political reasons to focus on co-operatives which publish national daily newspapers. Economically, the scale, frequency, and entrenched competition for readers and advertisers make these challenging news markets. Survival here thereby signals news co-operatives' wider potential.

Politically, whether read in print or online, national dailies uniquely foster the civic literacy on which well-functioning democracies depend. In short, by providing daily information, interpretive schema, and reinforcement to democratic engagement, they educate adults for citizenship. This helps us imagine our national communities and democratic possibilities. Moreover, while public broadcasting may constrain news commercialisation (Benson et al., 2018), governments are wary of intervening in print markets. Co-operators' distinctive editorial interventions have thus meaningfully democratised the media landscape and enriched national debates.

Technologically, shifting from the sunset industry of print-dailies to multi-media publication creates further complications. For example, these firms all pivoted to online publication in recent decades. *Il Manifesto* was Italy's first newspaper to publish an online edition. *Taz* moved to online-only publication in October 2025. In Canada, the *Coopérative nationale de l'information indépendante* (CN2i) papers, including *Le Soleil* and *Le Droit*, accelerated their transition to digital-only weekday editions due to COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020. If this sample were expanded to include digital-born news co-operatives we could add many cases. Conversely, limiting the cohort to outlets launched with print editions establishes firm longevity and scalability (with print-publication and distribution costs serving as a proxy).

Table 1: Selected national daily newspaper co-operatives by type

Co-operative	Est.	Country	Medium/ Frequency	Audience	Type	Website
Worker co-operatives						
<i>Il Manifesto</i>	1969	Italy	Daily print (1971)/online	Political left	Worker	ilmanifesto.it
<i>La Jornada</i>	1984	Mexico	Daily print/ online	Political left	Worker	jornada.com.mx
<i>La Diaria</i>	2006	Uruguay	Daily print/ online	Political left	Worker	ladiaria.com.uy
<i>Efimerida ton Syntakton (Ef-Syn)</i>	2012	Greece	Daily print/ online	Political left	Worker	efsyn.gr
Consumer co-operatives						
<i>Morning Star</i>	1930	UK	Daily print/ online	Political left	Consumer (1945)	morningstaronline. co.uk
<i>Die Tageszeitung (Taz)</i>	1978	Germany	Daily print/ online	Left-green	Consumer (1992)	taz.de
Multistakeholder co-operatives						
<i>Le Soleil</i>	2019	Québec, Canada	Daily online/ weekly print	Regional (Québec City and area)	Multistakeholder co-operative (part of CN2i consortium*)	lesoleil.com
<i>Le Droit</i>	2019	Québec, Canada	Daily online/ weekly print	Regional (Ottawa/ Gatineau)	Multistakeholder co-operative (part of CN2i consortium*)	ledroit.com

* CN2i consortium is made up of six multistakeholder co-operatives and one second-tier co-operative.

Source: Author

As Table 1 illustrates, co-operators have already progressed along this path in several countries for many decades, and at a significant scale. These national dailies are published by worker-, consumer-, and multistakeholder-co-operatives. The next sections take up each type in turn.

Exemplars of worker co-operative innovation

In the US, worker co-operatives' potential in the news sector has been overshadowed by another form of worker-ownership — employee trusts. However, all the daily newspapers which adopted this model appear to have either been sold or closed (Fedler & Pennington, 2003; Schneider, 2020). Employee trust-ownership thus appears to lack co-operative firms' well-documented resilience advantage (e.g. Borzaga et al., 2022; Pérotin, 2013). This highlights the importance of closer attention to worker co-operation. Below, we briefly consider four examples.

Founded by Italy's New Left in 1969, *Il Manifesto* has been published as a daily newspaper since 1971 (Downing, 2001). The worker co-operative boasts 55 staff, with over 21,000 print and online subscribers (*Il Manifesto*, n.d.). Rather than pay dividends, members reinvest surpluses in the co-operative. Although Italy's smallest national daily, it publishes the foreign policy monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique's* Italian edition. Supplements appear on Thursdays (environment), Saturdays (movies and music), and Sundays (books). A pioneering news co-operative, it overcame many challenges and setbacks (Grispigni, 2021). Publishing for over half a century, at a significant scale, it offers a meaningful alternative to corporate journalism.

Mexico's *La Jornada* (The Working Day) was launched in 1984. This worker co-operative has grown to reach about 10% of the country in print and 11% online (Newman et al., 2022). Braving one of the world's most dangerous terrains for journalists, it publishes 8 regional editions with over 500,000 print readers, 13 million website visits, 3.7 million followers on X, 3.1 million on Facebook, 207,000 on Instagram, and 66,300 on YouTube (*La Jornada*, n.d.). This makes it one of Mexico's leading national daily news sources. With broad-based, multi-media reach and proven durability, it offers a distinct, left-leaning alternative to mainstream media.

Since launching in 2006, *La Diaria* (The Daily) has become Uruguay's second-place daily newspaper (Nafria, 2018). By 2018, this worker co-operative employed 137 and had 12,500 subscribers. As another left-of-centre newspaper, *La Diaria*, has proven a durable and popular challenge to business-as-usual journalism.

Finally, *Efimerida ton Syntakton* (Newspaper of the Editors) was formed by a Greek worker co-operative in 2012 (Fefes, 2021; Papadopoulou, 2024). One of the planet's most stress-tested news markets, Greece endured a protracted depression following the 2008-09 economic crisis. Growing from a founding group of about 70 news labourers, this "phoenix co-operative" rose from a failed newspaper's ashes to become one of Greece's top five dailies. By 2024, their ranks had swelled to about 150. In 2022, *Ef-Syn* reached about 15% of Greeks online weekly (Newman et al., 2022). Moreover, it overcame profound cultural obstacles — with Greece's press scoring the world's lowest trust ratings in one study (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). While only 27% of Greeks expressed trust in news overall in 2022, *Ef-Syn's* score of 44% was well above that average — both reflecting its challenges and achievements (Newman et al., 2022). A canary in the coal mine, *Ef-Syn* thus emerged as an important part of Greece's democratic daily conversation.

These worker co-operatives illustrate three common features. First, news co-operatives can be viable over the long term, with these examples ranging from a dozen to over fifty years old. Second, they can be viable at a large scale. Third, they can meaningfully expand journalistic expression. In fact, by variously adopting left-leaning editorial lines, these outlets express their independence from the corporate establishment.

Not all co-operatives in national daily news markets are worker co-operatives. The consumer co-operative model offers one alternative. Partnering with audiences and/or supportive organisations within a multistakeholder model offers another solution. These models have

each leveraged news media ties to their “fan-base” and civil society groups (e.g. trade unions, co-operatives, social movements, and political parties). While consumer co-operatives sacrifice worker self-management and multistakeholder co-operatives replace it with joint governance, both options spread risk across a wider membership and revenue base. Each alternative is examined below.

Exemplars of consumer co-operative innovation

Can audience communities also help to solve news market failures? Consumer co-operatives appear less prevalent than worker co-operatives, at least in the daily newspaper sector. However, both the UK and Germany offer success stories. Britain’s left-leaning *Morning Star* is published by a consumer co-operative. It employs 30, includes 41,000 reader-shareholders, and enjoys the backing of trade union donors (Gollmitzer, 2024). 2025 marks its 80th year of publication as a co-operative. It appears to be the world’s longest-running co-operative daily newspaper, and perhaps the only English-language socialist daily. This case illustrates the driving role dedicated readers and unions can play in co-operative news ventures.

Similarly, Berlin’s daily newspaper *Die Tageszeitung (Taz)*, for short) launched in 1978. It became a consumer co-operative in 1992 (Rohleder, 2018). In 2012, it employed 140 reporters and had a daily circulation of 60,000, with half those readers voting Green (Kingsley, 2012). By 2018, it had built up about 17,000 members, 10,000 sustaining donors, and 50,000 subscribers (Rohleder, 2018). So, it has proven viable as a co-operative for over three decades. It has a large newsroom, membership base, and circulation. It is also a strong left-green voice.

Both these co-operatives identified underserved constituencies, built on subscribers’ political attachments, and mobilised moral sentiments for market advantage. Stepping beyond traditional subscribers’ roles, these consumers (and social movements) successfully intervened in news markets. Moreover, consumers increasingly embrace an “information commons” ethos, voluntarily supporting open access for all (Price, 2020; Rohleder, 2018). In this way, they express their solidarity twice: both supporting their favoured news outlet and ensuring others’ continued free access.

Exemplars of multistakeholder co-operative innovation

Single-stakeholder news co-operatives (both worker- and consumer-led) have proven viable across the above contexts. By contrast, multistakeholder models introduce added complexity and hazards. However, tapping audiences’ and supportive organisations’ resources may achieve together what news labour cannot accomplish alone. For example, *Taz* combines the enterprise’s consumer governance with newsroom self-management (Kingsley, 2012). Moreover, like *Il Manifesto*, members eschew dividends in favour of reinvesting all surplus. Through these operational and financial concessions, *Taz* prefigured subsequent multistakeholder innovations.

Building on newsroom expertise, experience, and leadership, multistakeholder strategies appear to be the co-operative news sector’s emerging best practice (Diamantopoulos, 2023; Gollmitzer, 2024). For example, the *New Internationalist* worker co-operative added reader-members to drive expansion (Voinea, 2021). Many recent news co-operatives are multistakeholder-born, capturing synergies from workers, consumers, and/or supportive groups’ resources. While news co-operatives face significant challenges, whether launched as consumer or worker co-operatives, combining membership groups can thus improve their prospects.

Space allows one example. Québec’s CN2i is a consortium of multistakeholder news co-operatives. Leveraging technical assistance from the trade union and co-operative movements, it emerged from a failed, six-title corporate newspaper chain in 2019 (Fouquet et al., 2021). Financially, workers’ commitment included surrendering their pensions, freezing their wages for two years, and pledging five per cent of their wages to purchase shares. Adopting multistakeholder structures raised another CA\$2.7 million (UK£1.5 million) from their audience

communities in March 2020. These combined stakes leveraged financing of CA\$21 million (£11.7 million). Risk was shared by two labour-sponsored funds, a Desjardins investment fund, three social economy funds, and the Province's Investissement Québec fund. This illustrates multistakeholder arrangements' emergent capacities, exceeding the sum of their parts. Large-scale lenders' confidence reflected both workers' and their communities' commitments, significantly multiplying their joint resources.

Editorially, this consortium also illustrates inter-co-operation's power. Since Québec is a distinct society within the Canadian Confederation, it publishes two "national" dailies. Its Québec City title *Le Soleil*, provides coverage from the provincial capital's National Assembly. Similarly, the proximity of its Ottawa/Gatineau title *Le Droit* to Parliament Hill provides French-language coverage of Canadian federal politics. News sharing from these strategically located papers benefits the entire newsgroup.

Québec's advanced co-operative development system limits generalisation, and this experiment is relatively recent. Nevertheless, CN2i survived significant back-to-back challenges: rebuilding quickly across six communities from a failed business, followed by COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, which dramatically accelerated the co-operators' digital conversion plans. The consortium thus represents a theoretically and strategically significant outlier of advanced innovation for co-operation's emerging news sector.

The next section explores successful news co-operatives' tendency to be worker self-managed (worker co-operatives) or co-managed (multistakeholder co-operatives). It argues that news workers' converging economic and social stakes in their co-operatives' success help explain this skew.

Values-added: Field-specific Incentives for Worker Self-management and Co-management in Journalism

Worker co-operatives are commonly considered to fit labour-intensive sectors well (Pérotin, 2013). However, national daily newspapers involve significant barriers to market entry (e.g. high costs of printing, distributing, and staffing). The findings above thus challenge small-scale views of worker co-operative possibility and extrapolations that they are unlikely vehicles for major daily newspapers. Economically, worker co-operatives' productivity, longevity, and job-protecting advantages are often attributed to labourers' double stake in their firms, as both wage-earners and owners. Where investors may lay off staff or reallocate capital for higher returns, workers' need for employment is their enterprise's defining purpose.

However, co-operative national dailies' experiences afford both economic and sociological explanations. In short, involvement in news work — like the transition from wage-labourer to worker co-operator — complicates reporters' motivations. Unpacking those social interests helps explain co-operators' enduring achievements despite turbulent news markets. These incentives are categorised below as economic, professional, reputational, political, and relational (see Table 2).

While we generally lack adequate English-language research in this fast-emerging but immature subfield, this interpretation benefits from the journalistic record (Graham-Harrison, 2015) and recent scholarship on Athens' *Ef-Syn* (Fefes, 2021; Papadopoulou, 2024; Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016). Although this narrow focus limits generalisation, it provides helpful heuristic value; interview findings illustrate how these varied social interests may be expressed in news workers' lived experience. Analytically untangling these interests clarifies self-management's multi-faceted empowerment effects in the news sector.

Table 2: Mixed motives for co-operative news work

Interests	Corporate sector experience	Co-operative sector aspirations
Economic	Unemployment & job-precarity	Long-term, secure employment
Professional	Declining work conditions, deskilling, & job dissatisfaction	Professional self-realisation through on-the-job empowerment
Reputational	Declining status & credibility of occupation	Opportunity to realise recognition through excellence
Political	Free expression delimited by news labour market vulnerability & owner- & advertiser-interests	Self-management expands the scope for democratic interventions, both in the reporting & editorial range
Relational	Turnstile work (i.e. downsizing & freelancing) erodes group cohesion & valued relationships	Self-managed workplaces' commitment to job security and quality-of-work-life fosters group belonging over the long term

Source: Author

Economic incentives for news co-operation

Economically, news workers may sacrifice in return for their co-operative's promise of long-range job security. They may volunteer labour, contribute sweat equity, or work at a discount during the firm's take-off stage or to avoid layoffs during downturns (e.g. Fefes, 2021; Fouquet et al., 2021). Trust in this commitment to long-term employment explains why worker co-operators make collective sacrifices they would not ordinarily make for other employers.

Certainly, this generic incentive to co-operate for job security now exerts a unique force in the news sector, where closures, layoffs, and job precarity are endemic. For example, in the United States, 51% of jobs in news were lost from 2008 to 2020 (Reinardy et al., 2021). Recent worker-led rescues in Québec (Fouquet et al., 2021), Greece (Fefes, 2021; Papadopoulou, 2024) and across Argentina (Assis, 2018; Grohmann, 2019), illustrate the resilience advantage generally ascribed to co-operatives (Borzaga et al., 2022; Pérotin, 2013). Founders pooled loans, start-up capital, or their labour to launch *Ef-Syn* in 2012 (Graham-Harrison, 2015). In the first year, they occasionally waived wages. Moreover, sunk investments of time, labour, and capital contributions may lock in worker commitments over time. Economics thus provides an important, and perhaps the most important, incentive for news workers to co-operate. However, economics seldom tells the whole story. Rather, it appears that several social incentives for worker co-operation are also significant — reflecting news labour's specific sociological characteristics. For example, economic insecurity may also occasion a fear of falling from valued social positions (Mills, 1951/2002). While rooted in the historical conjuncture's economic circumstances, other interests therefore play powerful roles. Their fusion in an appealing newsroom culture may further increase co-operation's allure.

Professional incentives for news co-operation

Most journalists are strongly committed to public service and principled practice. Yet, market conditions drive news work's widespread degradation and declining public trust (e.g. Wring, 2012). Like replacing craft-labour with the alienating labour of accelerating assembly-lines, journalists' talents may be under-employed in favour of a commercially expedient, cut-and-paste "churnalism". Compromised principles or work quality may thus cause emotional and moral injuries (Reinardy et al., 2021). Certainly, the cognitive dissonance stoked by journalism's lofty professional aims and its everyday practice may fuel journalists' frustrations and moral turnover.

Radicalised by industry dislocations, journalists may favour collective actions such as union formation. Similarly, greater control over working conditions empowers worker co-operators to overcome alienation and realise more creative freedom. Reinforcing journalism's value as a vocation lends membership additional reinforcement. For example, Spanish journalism co-operatives' members largely joined for professional and creative fulfilment; they aspired to

a more independent and critical practice, better focused on the public interest (Lees, 2024). Similarly, *Ef-Syn* reporters contended the mass media were complicit in Greece's crisis; through co-operation, they expressed themselves more freely (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016). Indeed, one *Ef-Syn* member described the co-operative experience as "freedom beyond our dreams" (Graham-Harrison, 2015). Another emphasised professional growth: "It's like a living thing, an organism, our child, it grows, it evolves and we evolve with it" (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016, p. 189). They thus valued both the professional freedom and self-actualisation which self-management offered (Papadopoulou, 2024).

Evidently, the appeal of freedom from corporate management's discursive regime cannot be underestimated. A veteran reporter never experienced such "absolute freedom;" another described this as a "huge advantage" (Papadopoulou, 2024, p.11). One refused job offers elsewhere at higher pay: "For a journalist, the most valuable thing is freedom of expression, even if this means getting a very low salary" (Papadopoulou, 2024, p. 12). The intrinsic satisfactions of unalienated, quality work can thus affirm reporters' professional values and identity; this may powerfully reinforce co-operative commitments.

Reputational incentives for news co-operation

In few occupations is public scrutiny greater than in the daily news fishbowl, where bylines continuously advertise reporters' credibility. Paradoxically, professional self-realisation's intrinsic rewards and a good reputation's extrinsic rewards are flip-sides of professional identity. Heads, extended recognition of quality work earns professional self-esteem. Tails, it earns professional social status. Conversely, compromised work quality may both arouse psychological distress from-within and inflict reputational injuries from-the-outside-in.

As the looking-glass-self theory argues, our self-identity reflects how we think others view us (Cooley, 1902/1983). Journalism's declining status, therefore, implies psychological consequences. Far-right politicians and their followers stigmatise reporters as corrupt, lazy, liars, and enemies of the people (e.g. Happer et al., 2019). Fewer people trust journalism, particularly in Greece (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2022). For instance, an *Ef-Syn* reporter recalls protesters chanting against "thugs, ruffians, journalists" (Graham-Harrison, 2015). Poisoning the well of public opinion against reporters, harassment often follows (Miller, 2024). Stigma thereby intrudes into everyday lived experience and professional identity, sometimes violently. Belonging to a denigrated caste may thus arouse status panic over diminishing white-collar prestige (Mills, 1951/2002).

However, reputational harms may provoke powerfully redemptive motivations. News co-operation offers one path, affirming professional identity through self-managed work, commitment to public service norms, and collegial solidarity. Against market logic and the online mob, co-operation thus offers a safe harbour to repair spoiled identities and reassert threatened reputations. Against the experience of professional anomie, in which journalism's norms, values, and status are in flux, contested, and unclear, co-operation may empower reporters to check mission drift and restore moral and conceptual clarity. For example, Spanish news co-operators accept the lay critique of establishment journalism — as losing its independence, ethical mooring, and credibility — in their motivation to co-operate (Lees, 2024). At *Ef-Syn*, the editor-in-chief argued their increasing audience share reflected "the loss of credibility of the big papers" (Graham-Harrison, 2015). Conversely, a colleague notes, "It was magic to create our own paper, to see it established ... and earning a huge amount of respect" (Graham-Harrison, 2015).

Ef-Syn's trust advantage over the Greek media norm may partly reflect this differentiation as an outsider- or challenger-brand (Newman et al., 2022). Indeed, 93% of *Ef-Syn* readers knew the paper was co-operatively published; 87% viewed this as an advantage (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016, p. 191). Rebranding professional identities under the aegis of a different kind of journalism, news labourers' reputational interests may thus also animate successful news co-operatives.

Political incentives for news co-operation

Relatedly, many reporters resent toeing the corporate media's editorial line. Of course, establishment media are big businesses, interlocked by board membership and advertising contracts with other big businesses (Bagdikian, 2004). Unsurprisingly, the capitalist press favours pro-business views, parties, and policies (Hackett & Carroll, 2006). This systemic bias creates a double bind. In training, journalists are coached to maintain independence from faction, give voice to the voiceless, and prioritise the public interest (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). In the field, their news outlet may align with factions, favour the affluent, and privilege private profit-making. For example, in Greece, only about 7% of those surveyed felt the news media were free from undue business or political interference (Newman et al., 2022). Employers' and advertisers' interests may thus delimit journalistic freedom. Consequently, ideologically compliant reporters might be rewarded with choice assignments, beats, and promotions. Conversely, the ideologically unreliable may be consigned to "safe" beats, passed over for promotions, or viewed as expendable during layoffs. Journalists may therefore grow increasingly frustrated by corporate dictates about what stories are covered, which sources are favoured, or whose editorial positions dominate.

By contrast, journalists may cherish the freedom from corporate managerial control which self-management offers. Indeed, practising workplace democracy may resonate strongly with their profession's defining democratic purpose and "compulsory passion". Moreover, the greater journalism's legitimacy deficits, the more powerful the reporters' political motivation to escape control will likely become. So, whereas capitalist journalism creates a professional constituency of ideological outsiders, co-operatives may shelter their robustly critical and independent news practice. This profound sense of democratic empowerment was expressed by an *Ef-Syn* founder: "We began with the very big idea that we would help Greece overcome the [economic and political] crisis" (Graham-Harrison, 2015). Paradigmatically, they collectively decided to treat the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn's elected representatives as part of a criminal organisation rather than a legitimate political party (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016).

Democratic values may thus provide powerful intrinsic motivation, particularly for journalists who value independence, identify with subaltern populations, or have progressive views. Consider an *Ef-Syn* reporter's response to lost advertising revenues, due to the paper's anti-corruption exposés: "we are never going to change our journalism for money" (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016, p. 190). Moreover, while politically committed to offering a coherently progressive alternative, and commonly associated with Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), *Ef-Syn* eschews partisanship in favour of newsroom diversity. "We have reporters close to Syriza, others are former Communists, and others are closer to the centre-left," said its Editor-in-Chief (Fefes, 2021, p. 77). Whatever their viewpoints, these journalists clearly value political independence — another positive feedback loop for their co-operative commitments.

Relational incentives for news co-operation

Typically, newsrooms are richly collaborative workplaces — with a high degree of informality, horizontal exchange, and flourishing relationships. They are "friendly, first-namish places" (Breed, 1955, pp. 330-331). This fraternity may be highly valued. While cutbacks and the shift to off-site labour erode this solidaristic culture, news workers often find peer support comforting through turbulent times (Hughes et al., 2024). Facing newsroom closures, this relational interest may also firm colleagues' resolve to embrace co-operative ownership. Reflecting that emergent culture of reciprocity, an *Ef-Syn* journalist recounts: "We had no investors. We did it alone, believing in our power and collective abilities" (Graham-Harrison, 2015).

Co-operation may thereby protect journalists' membership in valued peer-groups. While the precipitating need for work is economic, co-operative news labour thus also satisfies affiliative sentiments. In contrast with the precarity of corporate employment or the isolating experience of freelancing, co-operation can sustain valued workplace relationships. Much as sunk investments tend to strengthen economic commitments over time, the bonding experiences of

building their co-operative together may further lock in relational commitments. Indicative is an *Ef-Syn* member's view: "[co-operative membership] has changed me in such a direction that now I believe more in the power of collective work, something that is quite rare in a field that is so competitive and person-oriented" (Papadopoulou, 2024, p. 12). An editor poetically captures social capital's role in both facilitating, and nurturing, those commitments: "we argue a lot, we love each other a lot" (Graham-Harrison, 2015). Invisible on balance sheets, their sense of belonging clearly also matters a lot.

Contrasted with the bloodless, anthropological monster offered by a reductive economism (Bourdieu, 2005), this vivid (albeit partial) sketch-portrait of *Ef-Syn* members' work-life demonstrates a key point: that accounting for the social interests, as well as economic interests, at stake in the journalistic field helps explain evolving co-operative commitments. Replacing an abstract, one-dimensional, and economically overdetermined account of news workers' behaviour, economic sociology clarifies their co-operative commitments as a concrete unity of more diverse motivations. For example, an *Ef-Syn* editor expressed the fused energy resulting from the marriage of professional and political interests: "In media, and politically it is everything I have dreamed of — to have no bosses" (Graham-Harrison, 2015). "This is real freedom. Without a doubt, it's the only paper I would work for," said a cub reporter. In sharp contrast to the utility-maximising phantoms of economic theory, these testimonies remind us of the richly creative, ideological, affective, and convivial dimensions of news labour, the complexities of journalistic identity, and the relevance of both economic and social interests to co-operative studies of the news sector.

Conclusion: News Workers, News Consumers, and Development Coalitions

There are several conclusions we might draw from co-operative experiences in the national daily newspaper sector. First, several long-standing, large-scale, and influential national daily newspapers illustrate that co-operators' market prospects at this moment of corporate media's retreat cannot simply be dismissed. While volatile news markets pose formidable challenges, they also present historical openings to expand this sector, democratise the media, and respond to urgent community needs. Second, experience shows that mobilising consumer and community support through multistakeholder models and inter-co-operation can reinforce workers' resources. News consumers, the co-operative movement, co-operative support organisations, trade unions, and even political parties may prove valuable development partners. While such development coalitions take work, they can realise feats beyond any one stakeholder's reach. Third, news workers' desire for job security and greater freedom of journalistic expression often places them in the sector-building vanguard. They may be driven by a powerful mix of economic, professional, reputational, political, and relational incentives. Effective sector-building strategies will harness, rather than marginalise, this motor force for journalistic and democratic renewal.

Of course, worker ownership offers no panacea. Other models are feasible, have their strengths, and many have proven resilient over decades. *The Morning Star* and *Die Tageszeitung* are successful consumer co-operatives. *Le Soleil* and *Le Droit* are promising experiments in multistakeholder and consortium strategy. However, the *Ef-Syn* case suggests news labourers are driven by a distinctive constellation of deeply anchored economic and social interests. These mixed motives appear to be important success factors. Conversely, overlooking the uniquely propulsive power provided by news workers' diverse, and often intense, commitments risks trading these advantages away. Future research and development strategy can therefore benefit from using the toolkit of economic sociology to compare co-operative experiences and advantages across the journalistic field.

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