



# Cooperatives

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*Cooperatives are a main means of organization for economic activity, generally operating on principles of equal membership and members' democratic control of their means of livelihood. Co-ops have developed as modern institutions aiming to tackle problems created by contemporary capitalism and its associated dependency on wage work. Co-ops operate and interact in context, mobilising ways of human contact that anthropologists usually study (kinship, community, ethnicity, and local belief systems). Anthropologists have expressed interest in co-ops since the origins of their discipline. They tend to investigate the ways that members interact within co-op organizations, as well as the ways co-ops interact with and within broader social frameworks. Key issues arising in understanding cooperatives are how co-ops negotiate industrial democracy, how they respond to market influences, and how they interrelate with broader civil society and social movements. Anthropological critiques of cooperatives distinguish between cooperative ideology and praxis, and highlight cases where institutional cooperation does not work in favour of local communities. However, anthropologists have equally celebrated cooperatives as institutional forms that shield communities off from exploitation and promote social solidarity.*

## Introduction

While cooperatives (co-ops) often stand in the shadow of private companies and state institutions, they do in fact constitute a major organizational form around the globe. According to the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), a staggering '12% of humanity' are cooperative members, and thus have an immediate livelihood relation to different forms of economic cooperation.<sup>1</sup> The ICA defines cooperatives as 'an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise'.

Although there is mindboggling variation as to what principles co-ops around the world actually follow and to what extent they do so, there are some main ideas permeating the cooperative movement globally. More specifically, cooperatives tend to adhere to a set of organizational beliefs and practices, often identified as 'the Rochdale principles'. They were set out by the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, founded in 1844 in Rochdale, England, where the first recognised cooperative operated (in that case a consumer cooperative). These principles can be summarised as follows: in terms of members, a co-op has to have voluntary and open membership, as well as democratic member control and members' economic participation; in terms of operation, a co-op has to have autonomy and independence, while pursuing the education, training, and information of its members; lastly, in terms of its broader social ties, a co-op has to express concern for the community as well as cooperation with other cooperatives. The Rochdale principles

are normative, if open to some interpretation. What is important to note are that their key ideas pretty accurately summarise the main issues that cooperatives face, as well as summon the key terms that social analysis has associated with cooperatives: [democracy](#), autonomy, community, common needs, participation, and joint ownership.

Cooperativism can include a variety of free forms of association and common ownership of some means of production, distribution, or consumption. A good first way to classify cooperatives is thus to divide them into three sorts: cooperatives of production, worker cooperatives, and cooperatives of consumption and distribution. Co-ops are often producer-based, where autonomous holders – for example, [farmers](#) – share one asset, such as a winery. Such cooperative forms may focus on just one aspect of agrarian production (in this example, vinification) and they may not engage farmers in the whole year in a cooperative setting but only during the harvest and distribution period (Ulin 1996). Co-ops are sometimes worker-based, where workers co-own an asset such as land, or where they work on an asset owned by the state (Rakopoulos 2018). In industry, a workers' co-op would own the whole array of the means of production, most often a factory (Azzellini 2015). Finally, co-ops can operate as consumption and distribution institutions: there, the members commonly own an asset, for instance a supermarket, and collaborate with producers that provide them with products. These consumer co-ops are particularly common in large cities of Europe and elsewhere, as well as in local food movements (Durrenberger 2018). They very often promote products of producer co-ops. This creates an 'ecology of cooperation': cooperation among co-ops, and thus implicit promotion of the principles of cooperation in wider society.

Co-ops can operate in agrarian or industrial contexts, as well as in the countryside or in the city; they can be gender-based, for instance by creating women's co-ops (Stephen 2005), or focus on class or [ethnicity](#). The variety of cooperative forms is therefore wide but what they tend to have in common is that they work on the premise of, as a minimum, two pillars regarding control. The first pillar is democratic control: co-ops employ a one person-one vote system in their member assemblies. These meetings organise their inner workings, and are foundational for any kind of cooperativism. The second pillar is collective control: co-ops work on the grounds of [sharing](#) an asset collectively across members – be it a factory, a shop, a plot, or even a set of practical ideas.

### **A history of anthropological and sociological interest**

Anthropological interest in cooperatives has been evident since the early twentieth century, when Marcel Mauss wrote about them. Mauss, an anthropologist most known for his analyses of [gift-giving](#), was actively involved in cooperativism. His participation in cooperative socialism is well-documented and remains relevant to this day (Hart 2014: 35; Graeber 2014: 67). In order to fully comprehend the political project of Mauss, we need to read his most famous work, *The gift* in tandem with his political writings (Hart 2007: 5, Hart & James 2014). In those, we encounter a person of action, who takes an active interest in cooperation

(specifically, a cooperative bread-making factory), as he sees a horizon of social emancipation and [egalitarianism](#) in the phenomenon of co-op development in France.

Mauss insisted that cooperatives brought about 'practical socialism' (Fournier 2006: 125). This engaged relationship with a social organization that strives for workers' rights and a fair distribution of resources is at the heart of his view of economic anthropology. After all, the anthropology of the economy explores the idea that different but possible ways of organising economic activity can not only be imagined in theory but can be brought to fruit in historical reality. This drive brought Mauss to engage with cooperatives in France and address the English Cooperative Association across the Channel. Speaking before the First National and International Congress of Socialist Cooperatives (in July of 1900), the young anthropologist-cum-activist stated,

We will educate him [the citizen] for his revolutionary task by giving him a sort of foretaste of all the advantages that the future society will be able to offer him. ... We will create a veritable arsenal of socialist capital in the midst of bourgeois capital. (Mauss cited in Graeber 2001: 151)

Mauss's appreciation for the cooperative movement, which marks anthropology's first engagement with the phenomenon, is not too different from the erstwhile take of Karl Marx on the issue. Like conventional wage [labour](#), cooperativism commenced in Marx's area of '[ethnographic](#)' expertise – Northern Britain in the mid-nineteenth century (as noted, the first co-ops had come to life in Rochdale in the 1840s). Co-ops aimed to do away with distinctions between capital and labour, while Marx, then a young revolutionary yet to engage with Britain, was studying alienation from work (1844). Marx saw in cooperatives the dialectics of capitalism's present contradictions and the seed of future social developments, a sort of future that is present already in current circumstances.

Marx, anticipating this future-in-present, criticised but did not denounce the cooperative movement. He saw, in the movement's attempt to bridge capital and labour, firstly a preliminary victory of the latter over the former and, secondly, 'the husks of the old system and the seeds of the new' (Bottomore 1991: 111). However, for that victory to be complete, political power, and not localism, was required. Marx's interest in cooperativism was underpinned by a belief in a dialectical relationship among state, society, and market. However important the particular local cooperative struggles, they needed to articulate upon a wider reality of mostly antagonistic politics. Therefore, an attention to scale is important for understanding cooperation. For Marx, cooperatives were founded upon a historical contradiction:

The cooperative factories run by workers themselves are, within the old form, the first examples of the emergence of a new form, even though they naturally reproduce in all cases, all the defects of the existing system, and must reproduce them. But the opposition between capital and labour is abolished here, even if at first only in the form that the workers in association become their own capitalist, i.e. they use the means of production to valorise their own labour. These factories show

how, at a certain stage of development of the material forces of production, and of the social forms of production corresponding to them, a new form of production develops and is formed naturally out of the old. (Marx cited in Bottomore 1991: 571)

That historical reality that engaged Marx and Mauss astounded the socialist and member of the Fabian Society Beatrice Potter Webb, who toured Lancashire in the late-nineteenth century and realised that co-ops were part of local culture (2016 [1920]). By then, Webb had already written a classic book on what was the reality of the vivid cooperative movement in Britain (2013 [1896]). She was a proponent of cooperative federalism as a political and economic system. It was to be a system of 'cooperative wholesale societies', in which all the members of federated cooperatives are cooperatives themselves. It might sound complicated but, especially among consumer cooperatives, it is very much a reality in many places: in Britain, for example, the Co-operative group (founded in Rochdale in 1844) is a cooperative wholesale society composed of hundreds of retail co-ops in over 3.700 locations. They employ more than 60.000 people, and amount to over 4.5 million members overall.

While Mauss' life and work illustrate that economic emancipative experiments are not imagined or planned but experienced in the present, and Webb was interested in describing what we could call an actually existing cooperativism, Marx took a critical distance from this focus on the present. He favoured a more historical approach. Meanwhile, the sociologist Emile Durkheim, while investigating the division of labour in society (1891), established his own understanding of the idea of solidarity, a key principle in cooperativism. According to Durkheim, social solidarity is stretched across the distribution of labour in modern institutions and is part of the collective consciousness of members of society. This notion of solidarity is far more encompassing and general than common-sense versions of it. It can be seen to present a macro version of the social principle on which cooperatives operate. Durkheim has been described as 'a kind of guild socialist' (Morris 2005), that is, someone who does not favour class conflict but general cooperation according to trade skill. He is also known to have sympathised with cooperatives, seeing them as associations of social solidarity.

### **Key issues**

Cooperatives have posed a variety of interesting questions since social theory first began engaging with them. They seem to supercede the antithesis between bosses and workers, something associated either with dreams about an [egalitarian](#) future (as in Marx) or with an original affluent society of people that work together in small groups of [hunter-gatherers](#). Cooperatives have also been identified by many, including anthropologists, as a form of 'industrial democracy' (Holmström 1989), an idea that points to the desire of making an economy democratic, egalitarian, and participatory. They equally seem to work best within a wider 'ecology' of cooperative associations and federations (Ingram & Simmons 1995). There is a holistic aspect to the efficiency and influence of cooperation: the more co-op units exist, and the more cooperation

there is among them, the better this is held to be for social equality and democratic participation. A web of cooperation may allow, for example, to control as much of our own time and everyday experience as possible: working in cooperation with others in conditions we collectively choose, or shopping and consuming produce we collectively choose with other cooperators. This goal, of gaining greater democratic and egalitarian choice over the means of our social existence, suggests both an attention to local economic and social facts and an attention to how these scale up towards larger markets and networks of political power.

One way to understand how anthropology has dealt with cooperatives and their wide spread around the world is to consider three key issues: movement, scale, and egalitarianism. Anthropologists tend to discuss them with reference to the real, empirical realities studied through [ethnographic](#) work. Major findings arising from their studies include: that scaling up has been challenging for co-ops around the world; that there is indeed a tendency for co-ops to fuse within broader social movements; and that internal democracy in cooperatives is heatedly debated and contested.

Ethnographic attention to cooperatives has mainly focused on two regions, where many cooperatives operate today: Europe and [Latin America](#). Latin American studies began already in the mid-1970s (Nash 1976) and stretch from Mexico (Ferry 2004) to Argentina (Bryer 2012). In Europe, as noted earlier, cooperatives were seen in the context of a variety of local claims, often in tandem and in dialogue with debates on [ethnicity](#), political ideology, and worker mobilization. Contributions came principally from Spain (Kasimir 1996, Greenwood & Gonzalez 1992), as well as Italy (Holmström 1989, Sanchez-Hall 2019), France (Ulin 1996), and Greece (Rakopoulos 2014).

### **Democracy and egalitarianism**

Co-op politics tend to be born of practitioners acting together in a collective fashion. They are less based on blueprints of overarching ideologies but instead they inform such ideologies through practice (Whyte 1999). The widely-discussed cooperativist experiment in Mondragón, the largest cooperative in the world, attracted much scholarly attention. Mondragón is based in the Basque country, and is active in a number of industries, including manufacturing, retail, and services, while employing c.80.000 people today. Since its inception in the 1950s, the cooperative avoided being encompassed by totalising ideological systems: it was ‘a reaction against -isms’, like ‘socialism’ which was perceived as an ideology rather than a practice, but also Taylorist specialization and division of labour. Workers referred to the verse of poet Antonio Machado, ‘the path is made walking’ (*‘se hace el camino al andar’*), to explain their processual pragmatism (Whyte & Whyte 1991: 257). In that way, ‘cooperativism was true socialism—not just one way to achieve it’ (Whyte & Whyte 1991: 253). The difference to much political socialism lay in its model of practice: cooperation was defined as being about doing and experiencing a social reality, rather than applying or running after an idea.

Indeed, one of anthropology's main contributions to cooperative debates has been to distinguish between cooperative ideology and praxis. Ethnography is an empirical and realist approach to knowledge, one that does not primarily apply theory to reality, but that aims to be inspired by reality. This has proven ideal to witness the practical and hands-on economic [democracy](#) that cooperativism suggests. In many ways, ethnographies have provided 'test cases', fact-checking whether co-ops actually live up to ideals of social equality and worker democracy. While some research embraces current cooperativism as 'horizontalist' (Sitrin 2012), that is, being radically [egalitarian](#) as opposed to working on labour hierarchies, many other contributions are critical. Some have presented a 'disenchanted' vision of cooperative practice - including two important books that came out in the same year: Sharryn Kasmir's classic study *The myth of Mondragón* (1996), but also Robert Ulin's book *Vintages and traditions: an ethnohistory of French wine cooperatives* (1996). Kasmir's study, focusing on a workers' cooperative, presents the Basque experiment in Spain as a 'myth'. The co-op's leadership trumped labour rights but considered union representation to lie at odds with cooperative membership. This stalled the potential for social egalitarianism. Ulin, focusing on producers' cooperatives in the Southwest of France, notes that there has been an anti-elitist tendency in winemakers' cooperation. However, their internal division of labour is nothing short of capitalist, marginalising smaller wine growers. These insights from France and the Basque country have significantly nuanced our understanding of co-ops as institutions, shining light on the ways in which their immediate livelihoods are not necessarily egalitarian and might indeed reproduce capitalist exploitation. Anthropologists have accounted for the different cleavages caused across different lines of order and normativity in members' lives (for instance, the schism between those who share common interests with management and those who do not [Kasmir 1996: 198]).

What is more, research has shown that co-ops can include practices that are outright socially and physically destructive. In Sicily, a co-op form has been created, as a group of Mafiosi decided to form their own wine-making cooperative and in so doing conjured autonomous producers around them (Rakopoulos 2017b). Reaping social consensus through co-op participation proved very beneficial for the local Cosa Nostra, until the co-op disbanded when its leaders were arrested. Catalanian examples also include a murky undercurrent to the local cooperative history, as the Franco regime saw in the cooperative the desirable work equivalent of the 'home' - a corporatist, close institution (Narotzky 1988). In Catalonia, fascism found in the ideology of the *casa* and the *cooperativa* two pillars of social cohesion that complemented a Francoist vision of society as an organic field, with no social upheaval or internal contradiction. In this picture, cooperatives worked well as institutions of further worker exploitation (1997). In these examples, co-ops do bring about labour democracy and egalitarianism because they never sought to do so: they were founded by hierarchical, violent institutions (the fascist state and the Mafia), to seeking to create sense of worker cohesion and a lack of class conflict.

Other critical analyses were initially not concerned with cooperatives, but focused on kinship (Ferry 2003),

ethnicity, and struggles around identity instead (Kasimir 2002). These issues might, in the first instance, seem to draw attention away from cooperative forms. Yet, kinship and [ethnicity](#) can in fact be inherent aspects of how cooperatives function and how they are experienced. Cooperatives may pool from the immediate kin group to recruit members, and people may see the [house](#) as a cooperative. Both examples show that close interconnections between family and co-op life exist (Rakopoulos 2017a). The study of cooperatives may thus point out that efforts for greater democracy and egalitarianism can be based on communitarian and family-based underpinnings.

Other encouraging studies exist: in a recent book on the fascinating history of forty years of [ethnographic](#) engagement in a 'Red' area of Romagna, Italy, cooperatives have been celebrated as a great achievement for social equality and progress (Sánchez Hall 2019). As the author notes, 'I came to feel like the first anthropologist in the history of the discipline whose informants thought she came from a backward culture to study their most advanced ways' (2019: 2). Similarly, Mark Holmström presents a story of utter fascination with Italy's industrial democracy (1989). He sympathised with cooperatives and went on to investigate them further in the Spanish context (Holmström 1993). Investigative journalist Robert Oakeshott even went so far as to marry his life commitment to cooperativism with making the 'scholarly case' for co-ops (1977).

### **Scale and markets**

Engaging with world markets reshapes not just cooperatives themselves but also the localities in which they are situated. Markets may affect the very cosmology that surround resources and people. Mexican cooperative [miners](#), for example, have been shown to attach a varied array of signification to the precious metals that they unearth, depending on where these metals are in the ground, in their homes, or in a global exchange circuit. Thinking about how co-op members in Mexico conceptualize the silver deposits they mine, as well as the ways that this mineral enters international markets, shows that idioms surrounding family and patrimony may help make sense of the deposits they work on (Ferry 2003). Their language that presents the silver they mine as inalienable, however, coexists with its commodification. When the silver enters commercial circulation, its exchangeability eventually triumphs over its inalienability, and [relations](#) of exchange trump relations of production (Ferry 2002: 342-3). These mutually exclusive idioms and tensions between lived community (with its environmental sensitivity) and abstracted market brings us to the core of current and, potentially, future anthropological concerns with cooperative worklives and industrial [democracy](#).

Thinking about co-ops as part of wider markets highlights questions of scale and how cooperatives as local, community institutions relate to broader systems in which they and their members operate. This tension between local thinking about cooperative environments and the global changes influencing labour, work, and co-op products animates other Mexico-focused studies (Stephen 2005). In the context of the North



American Free Trade Agreement that Mexico had signed, co-ops offered a shelter from global capitalism in its [neoliberal](#) form. Similarly, work drawing on Mexico (Chiapas), as well as Italy (Sardinia) shows how cooperatives can be both in dialogue with large-scale corporate forms and an expression of a more community-based economy (Vargas-Cetina 2011). They can provide their members with some engagement with the market, whilst attempting to improve people's living conditions by protecting them from the market's unbridled forces, standing in opposition to exploitative market pricing and protecting labor rights (Vargas-Cetina 2009: 128). Thereby they have historically provided buffer zones of sociality to abjure capitalism's aggressive individualisation (Vargas-Cetina 2005; cf Curl 2009), and indeed shaping notions of collective selfhood (Stephen 2005: 254; cf Nash *et al.* 1976). The idea is that practices of cooperation are conducive to sentiments of belonging to forms of a 'collective' rather than an individual self.

While co-ops thereby often stand in opposition to market logics, this is not always the case. European food cooperatives, for example, both need markets and scale back from them, focusing on self-sufficiency during times of austerity (Homs & Narotzky 2019). While coops are most often aiming to reinvest locally only (indeed, they are at times legally obliged to do so), they can also be active proponents of global capitalism, investing in companies that are located offshore (Kasmir 2016).

In actual fact, then, there is a variety of praxes and different logics informing cooperatives: from self-sufficiency and an anti-capitalist, even anti-market tendency, to one that redirects co-op priorities from egalitarianism to a corporate logic. Having a clear understanding of this multifaceted nature of cooperatives is particularly pressing, as capitalist commodification often hinges on community economics, at times turning cooperatives into so-called 'coopitalist' institutions (Errasti *et al.* 2016).

The relation between cooperatives and the expansion of capitalist production is thus tenuous and open to modifications. On the one hand, cooperatives have become a key strategy of grassroots movements to improve the livelihoods of local populations. On the other, they are part and parcel of public policies in favour of growth-based development, rising productivity, and higher employment rates. The adaptability of cooperatives has become particularly obvious in Latin America during the decade of the 2000s, as cooperatives like unions had a great deal of interactions with politically progressive governments of the 'Pink Tide', an array of left-leaning yet often growth-based governments.

### **Movements and civil society**

As the introduction has made clear, cooperatives are political institutions as much as they are economic ones. Frequently, they are therefore close to social movements, endorsing for example 'postcapitalist and anticapitalist politics' (Miller 2015). Co-ops may unite and fuse with other social movements or even antagonise them, as has been the case with the trade union movement (Kasmir 1991, 2000). Their explicitly political nature requires attention to the [values](#) co-op members and contractual workers endorse, not just



at [work](#) but also in their lives and livelihoods. Co-op members' attempts to better their livelihoods have been rooted in specific concepts, of which 'community' has been one of the most important. This is not least due to the fact that co-ops are tightly linked to the notion of 'community economies' (Gibson-Graham 2006: 110-27), expressing broader concerns and representing wider local interests, rather than those of their stakeholders as in the case of conventional corporations. Yet, relying on the notion of community can also be problematic, when it describes actual praxis that is in fact detrimental to egalitarian principles (as in the Sicilian mafia, see Rakopoulos 2017b: 167-172).

The practicality of cooperatives is important, as co-ops are active parts of what has been recently called the solidarity economy (see, e.g., Laville 2010). Promoting social solidarity, they are potential channels of social change in times of crisis (Gibson-Graham 2013). Their capacity for ['prefigurative' politics](#), that is, to show how economic life beyond corporate capitalism and labour exploitation is indeed possible, brings them in coalition with social movements (Maeckelberg 2012). It is the social relations that are produced within and around cooperatives that inspire both a need to liaise with other movements and a need to survive by forming coalitions (Rakopoulos 2014). Cooperatives as community paradigms (Nash 1976), coalesce with similar grassroots collective organizations to become part of the broader milieu of movements galvanised in areas such as the Mexican Chiapas. Here the co-ops' issues start taking the shape of wider civil society issues.

This broader influence of the cooperative movement speaks to the issue of whether, and to what extent, co-ops are [resilient](#) institutions. Anthropologists have been useful in pointing out that we need to see co-ops not only as institutional associations with innate durability, but actually as ephemeral associations in a state of flux and volatility (Vargas-Cetina 2005). For example, cooperatives tend to be associated with crises. They frequently come into being to salvage jobs that would otherwise be lost in economic downturns. This was the case in Argentinian recuperated factories, post-2001. The fluctuating nature of cooperatives may be one of the reasons why this institutional form has persisted over time.

The blend of co-ops into networks of similar grassroots organizations of [care](#), provision, self-help, and mutuality has been called a 'social economy' (Bryer 2012). Co-ops in Argentina, for instance, have established this social economy by taking over factories and other corporations that had gone bust (see Lewis 2004), inspiring people in Italy to follow suit (Orlando 2019). The 'social responsibility' that cooperatives take on board is at once a source of inspiration and a struggle for their members (Bryer 2010), who wish to show that they are part of 'something bigger'. The movements that inspire them can be historical utopias whose present residues have taken new paths – like Zionism in contemporary urban Israel (Russel 1995). They can even be residues of a utopian past, like collectives that still operate in the face of the Soviet Union's collapse (Humphrey 1998). At any rate, cooperatives have necessarily always operated in a broader climate, an 'ecology' of mutual and necessarily political associations (Lomi 1995).

## Conclusion

By mobilising participation and community engagement cooperatives teach us two interesting lessons. Firstly, they play a salvaging role for [labour](#), land and its produce, in the name of local communities and in the name of [democratic](#) ideals. These protective features of co-ops are twofold: against external forces, such as the market or the state, coops are meant to salvage local life, while internally, they aim to protect their members and their means of production. They provide shelters from globalising, un-redeeming powers of greater scale (as, e.g., per Stephen 2005; Vargas-Cetina 2005) and save jobs in transition and crises (Sitrin 2012). Thereby, co-ops often play the role of enclaves from which people can defend themselves against dispossessions of all sorts. Security of people, safety for work, protection of labour rights and the environment, as well as a relative decommodification of some cooperatively-held assets are the main aspects of this protective function.

Secondly, co-ops elucidate important debates about political economy and social life at large. They enable people threatened by unemployment to procure labour, grounded in an ethos of self-help and often building on existing social relations. They thereby have evolved from a set of ideas that recognised the conflict of capital and labour, aiming to bridge what may be unbridgeable (Restakis 2010). It is for these reasons that the anthropological literature, by and large, is committed to questioning whether cooperatives actually promote [egalitarian](#) values, and why anthropologists are often sympathetic to co-ops. This entry has focused primarily on topics to do with democracy, scale and social movements. By way of concluding, it pays to reflect on how social science has possibly helped the actual development of cooperatives.

In criticising the distinction between civil society and the state, anthropologists have asked how cooperatives became a technology of government for working people and poor populations. This critique has helped some cooperative organizers reflect on how they should not lose sight of the egalitarian principles of Rochdale when developing their co-ops. What is more, the importance of [ethnicity](#), kinship, gender and identity in shaping cooperative practice cannot be underestimated. People participate in co-ops as gendered persons and often through their kinship networks, and co-op practice cannot take place without accounting for these realities. This empirical insight has helped contemporary cooperative movements to embrace local kinship idioms, belief systems, and community forms. Highlighting local practices in similar movements has been part of engaged anthropological thinking (Durrenberger 2018). Thus anthropologists have been avid developers of participatory action research, which allows for exchanging knowledge and expertise between researcher and interlocutor, often both members of the same cooperative organization (Gibson-Graham 2006).

Cooperative platforms also exist in anthropological thinking and practice: the online forum known as ‘Open Anthropology Cooperative’ worked for a few years to bring together thinkers and practitioners of the discipline from around the world in a [digital](#) platform. Cooperative open access publishing has also been

widely thought about and informally practiced, creating online scholarly communities that render their work available to the wider public. Locked behind paywalls, anthropological publishing is, like that of all academic publishing, under the control of corporate entities. Yet, cooperative open access publishing has been democratising knowledge to a good extent, even if often through informal means. It is this spirit of cooperation that characterises anthropology, a discipline that works not with 'subjects' or 'samples' but with 'interlocutors' and 'research participants'. In many ways, anthropology is cooperative by definition.

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