



Co-operative identity and the dual nature: From paradox to complementarities

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ABSTRACT

Multiple roles and objectives are naturally inherent in the co-op idea, captured by the Statement on the Co-operative Identity (ICA, 1995) and thus in co-operative enterprises' practices. This complex nature derived from the co-operative mission has been conceptualized as the dual nature, which is in the DNA of all co-operatives. However, the concept is somewhat ambiguous and a comprehensive theoretical framework is missing. Prior research has approached duality at different, and not clearly delineated levels, either as individual member motivations, organizational characteristics, or community impact, discussed in this paper. Further, we examine duality and paradox framings in co-operative enterprise research to underscore complementary features that define co-operative enterprise, and contribute an elaboration on the associative practices at the heart of these debates. Associationalism is described in this paper as the common action and responsibilities of membership regarding collective contributions, ownership, benefit, decisionmaking and control. Further, we extend the argument that co-operatives have the strongest impact when they acknowledge and take advantage of their unique organizational values and characteristics, informed by their associative foundations.

1. Introduction

While scholars have long recognized that most organizations embody multiple logics, and that organizations must continually respond to multiple external and internal institutional demands (Besharov & Smith, 2014), this is particularly evident in co-operative contexts due to their complex nature. Organizational duality, as applied in the co-operative literature, as well as organizational paradox (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003) are frames often used to simplify complex contexts. Dualities, binary characterizations or opposing poles, as cognitive constructs help us to make sense of complexity and manage perceived tensions between oppositional forces. Co-operative enterprise is known to be a hybrid organization with dual characteristics, as an enterprise and an association of members (Dracheim, 1952; Draperi, 2021; Fauquet, 1948; Malo & Vezina, 2004; Vienney, 1994 as cited in Malo & Vezina, 2004). While co-op duality can be argued from multiple viewpoints and disciplines, most co-operative theory development has occurred in the area of neoclassical economics, which is thus the dominant, but also a much criticized paradigm. This reductionist approach however, tends to analytically homogenize assumptions, goals and objectives and thus ignores the

complexity of co-ops including their diverse economic and non-economic objectives, which makes the co-op duality a dilemmatic issue (Mooney & Gray, 2002; Puusa, Mönkkönen, & Varis, 2013). According to Torgerson, Reynolds, and Gray (1997) both social and economic philosophies of co-operation are being used in the differing orientations inherent in the co-op idea that include being profitable, providing services to members and realizing meaning. In this paper we argue that co-operatives benefit the most when they are able to find a balance between the business and association roles and position opposing dualities as synergetic forces.

When it comes to co-operative research, duality fundamentally refers to the tension in values between economic and social characteristics of co-operative enterprise. In that sense, duality is inherent to all co-operatives that adhere to the ICA Statement on the Co-operative Identity (ICA, 1995). A co-operative, by definition, contains a social dimension in order to uphold co-operative purpose, normative values and principles, while satisfying social needs through economic means. Achieving a balance between social and economic purpose requires a commitment to the co-operative values-based model, combined with active management of a dynamic, ever changing environment. The seemingly contradictory (yet complementary) aspect of these

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characteristics is a significant area of tension within the co-operative sector. Emerging from the philosophy and theory of co-operation and the co-operative movement, on the one hand, and from the practice of co-operation as realized in organizations functioning to meet their goals within the economy, on the other (Torgerson et al., 1997), current literature offers many interconnected polemic themes, perspectives and points of departure, some of them conflicting with one another.

We argue that co-operative duality is a multifaceted concept, which requires more in-depth examination. Prior research describes co-operative organizational duality as a basic division into business and member community roles (Puusa, Hokkila, & Varis, 2016); economic and social characteristics (Levi & Davis, 2008); financial and social purpose (Novkovic, 2012); while the in-depth content and meaning of duality, its manifestation in practice, micro-economic foundations, and especially their interconnectedness are still largely under-theorized. This paper attempts to fill that gap by bringing the above notions under a coherent framework, aligned with the ICA Statement on the Co-operative Identity. The framework is developed through insights that are only possible through a multi-disciplinary perspective.

We seek to treat the topic on a general level while we simultaneously acknowledge that there is significant variation among different co-operative types (consumer, producer, worker, multistakeholder), sector of activity (e.g. agriculture, credit, technology production, retail, social welfare provision, housing), “political orientation (i.e. the degree of participation in the values and actions of a capitalist economy and/or reformist commitment)” (Nelson et al., 2016, p. 289), and purpose of the enterprise. We will draw on some of those differences for illustration in what follows.

The structure of the paper is the following: in the next section we summarize how the dual nature of co-operatives has been understood in the literature on co-operative organizations, with linkages also to organizational paradox literature. A deeper examination of associationism implicit in co-operative duality framings is explored in the third section, followed by a presentation of the collective co-operative enterprise encompassing associationist organizational structure. A discussion firming up ideas presents section five, while section six concludes.

2. Duality and its interpretations in co-operative literature

The overarching concept of duality has been defined by Graetz and Smith (2008) as “the simultaneous presence of competing and ostensibly contradictory” (p. 270) qualities, while paradox is similarly defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Smith & Lewis, 2011). At the same time, “the elements are complementary in that each is necessary but not sufficient for the wellbeing of the organization” (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014). Duality and paradox are used interchangeably in organizational studies, and serve as a method to identify tensions that have “dynamic, symbiotic and mutualistic” properties and turn concepts into manageable reality (Graetz & Smith, 2008, p. 273). In short, a duality or paradox is a tension that exhibits between a set of characteristics: contradictory (simultaneous), interrelated (relational, inseparable), persistent, and dynamic (Graetz & Smith, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Dual nature in co-operatives typically implies that they are two things in one: a business enterprise and an association (Côté, 2019; Draheim, 1952; Fauquet, 1948; Laville & Mendell, 2007; Levi, 2006; Vienney as cited in Malo & Vezina, 2004). The two sides of the coin are seen to rest on different sets of values, and are often perceived to be contradictory. However, the dual nature represents the core co-operative identity which implies one unified set of values, thus not paradoxical in theory. However, in practice, the meaning and implementation of duality remain somewhat ambiguous, and rife with tension (Puusa et al., 2013, 2016).

The duality can also be interpreted as a presence of multiple logics within organizations in which each provides a coherent set of organizing

principles for a particular realm of social life, yet acknowledging that logics can overlap and/or be inconsistent with one another (Besharov & Smith, 2014). As Lewis (2000) points out, paradoxes are cognitive and social constructs, “polarities that mask the simultaneity of conflicting truths” (p. 761). The challenge for co-operative enterprise is in the simplified understanding of the co-operative purpose and nature, often ignoring or separating one side of the coin from the other. Besharov and Smith (2014) argue that sometimes *one logic can be so dominant that it eclipses the other logics, rendering them immaterial to organizational functioning*. However, this is completely up to the actors: they influence how logics are instantiated in organizations. This becomes risky when there is a dominance of leaders with a one-sided ideology, absent an understanding of an integrated co-operative values-based logic. In practice, poorly managed dual nature can be destructive: If short term financial benefit is emphasized, long term member and societal value will become neglected, and relational aspects of co-operation will be jeopardized. On the other hand, if social demands dominate, fatigue and member attrition may set in and the economic side may suffer in the long term. Seeing social and economic as non-separable and interdependent is an important step to understanding this duality; however, it will continue to be a struggle to achieve appropriate balance if the paradigms do not align.

Co-operative identity is ambiguous and according to Nelson et al. (2016) this is partly because in general co-operatives receive less attention from the media, from business and government institutions, and from the suppliers of hierarchy-oriented managers (i.e. business schools), affecting their overall awareness and making the identity formation more complicated: “co-operatives must define and enact their values while embedded in a system with which they are more or less at odds”. Considering their impact, co-operatives have attracted relatively little interest among (business) researchers and thus the model has been largely overlooked within mainstream management theory (Kalmi, 2007; Mazzarol, Limnios, & Reboud, 2011; Puusa et al., 2013; Puusa, 2018), and misspecified in mainstream economics (Dow, 2003). Further, co-operatives are known to be complex organizations with a variety of goals, some of which may be in conflict with one another (Draheim, 1952; Jussila, 2007; Mooney & Gray, 2002; Puusa et al., 2013; Skurnik, 2002). “One of the vexing issues in the evolution of co-operative thought and the review of new theoretical treatments [...] concerns the existence of multiple purposes and objectives for the co-operative business organization. Some of these are embedded in different interpretations of the social and economic philosophies of co-operation. They derive from various interpretations of internal (member) and external (societal) benefits of co-operative organization assessed from both short- versus longer-term perspectives.” (Torgerson et al., 1997, p. 9).

We argue that co-operatives are strongest when they take advantage of their unique organizational characteristics and position dualities as synergetic forces. While this is claimed to be the case for organizations in general, associative foundations give co-operatives an edge due to close relationship with members (Tuominen, 2012) and the unique ownership structure. Co-ops have a competitive advantage in terms of firm-specific knowledge, increasing their understanding of the member needs in the context of their business environment.

Duality, ultimately, is approached at different, and not clearly delineated, levels in the co-operative literature: individual member motivations, organizational level, and community (impact) level. The latter refers to acknowledging co-ops’ positive impact on communities and their viability. It is also widely recognized in the literature that cooperative movement has a wide-ranging impact on individuals and societies due to their organizational values, and the implied dual nature. We will briefly discuss the approaches next.

2.1. The individual level

A number of studies examine member motivations to join a co-operative their behavioural characteristics, and values (see Birchall & Simmons, 2004). Co-op members are often described as ‘idealists’

compared to 'pragmatists' (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014), or are ascribed a psychological need to belong. As described in Audebrand, Camus, and Michaud (2017), belonging relates to the co-operative activity of creating and maintaining identity, and the fundamental paradox of collaboration and autonomy.

Others look at the strong linkage between the individual members and the co-op, culminating in collective ownership as the co-op specific feature (Jussila & Tuominen, 2010). According to Normark (1996), "the co-operative form of organization has the potential to develop unusually strong linkages between the user and the focal enterprise" (p. 433), which can partly be explained by the fact that the members can influence the co-op both through their role as a user and as an owner. This can create psychological ownership which refers to a subjective, personal sense/feeling of owning an immaterial or material subject likely to produce positive attitudinal and behavioural effects (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001). It is regarded as both cognitive and affective state in which the ultimate meaning of ownership is the fusing of the target of ownership with one's identity (Dittmar, 1992; Jussila, Tarkiainen, Sarstedt, & Hair, 2015). Psychological ownership in the co-op context refers to the member's feeling that the co-op or a part of it is "theirs" and that the co-op is part of the member's extended self. Thus, psychological ownership is indicative of the special relationship between members and their co-op, which develops when members exercise control over the co-op, through knowing the co-op well, and through the investment of personal resources into the co-operative (Jussila & Tuominen, 2010). Member loyalty increases with psychological ownership (Cote, 2019), as well as with trust and stewardship relationship (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997).

Micro-behavioural foundations rooted in psychology further suggest that dual motives (Cory, 2006) are an integral part of human brain and decisionmaking. This contrasts the assumptions behind *homoeconomicus* in neoclassical economics. Intrinsic motivations and dual motives align with the socio-economic nature of co-operative organizations¹ since in the co-op context individuals are perceived as active and equal participants (holding values of self-help and self-responsibility) who co-operate towards achieving a shared goal (solidarity). In co-op literature the term *homo co-operativus* has been coined for this purpose (Laurinkari, 1997; Puusa & Saastamoinen, 2021; Puusa et al., 2016).

Further, individuals can behave differently in different types of organizations, or in relationship to different member roles they assume in a co-op (Mamouni Limnios, Mazzarol, Soutar, & Siddique, 2018). Etzioni (as cited in Borgen, 2004) emphasizes the importance of social context in analyzing human behavior, as a counter point to rational utility maximizer responding purely to external financial incentives. It is also understood that oversimplifying assumptions of economic rationality result from the reductionist nature of the dominant neoclassical micro-economic model (Zamagni, 2008).

Another line of inquiry at the level of an individual member has been the functional nature of membership. Rather than investor motivation ('owner'), members have a user-relationship² with the enterprise (Borgen, 2004; Dunn, 1988; Mazzarol et al., 2011; Nilsson, 2001). Unlike in investor owned firms, co-operative ownership is not speculative by nature, but associational instead, meaning that the owner benefits through use and ensures an equal voice in governance (Hansmann, 1996). In other words, members are patrons and join a co-operative to gain access, increase scale of production, pool resources, and collectively resolve issues of common interest. This user relationship (Dunn, 1988) also follows from the Statement on the Co-operative Identity - co-operatives

are associations of people meeting their common needs and aspirations via a business enterprise. Members become a part of the collective as owners and 'patrons' (workers, consumers, suppliers). There are distinct individual and collective rights of membership, with the usership an individual right and responsibility, while ownership and control are collective (see below). This owner-patron duality has been explored at length in co-operative literature, and is at the heart of understanding of member heterogeneity and isomorphism (Cook, 1995, 2018).

These micro behavioural assumptions feed into the organizational structure and strategy.

2.2. Organizational level

According to Davis (1995), the purpose of a co-op is "to unite and involve its members in an economic and social community to provide countervailing market power and access to economic and social resources that as individuals the membership would not be able to accumulate for themselves" (p. 24). Thereby, the dual nature of the co-operative enterprise form is at the root of its distinguishing features. However, this economic and social duality has been dealt with in co-operative literature in multiple ways. Skurmik (2002) states that co-operatives are about jointly owned communal entrepreneurship and indeed, it has been stated that the main differentiating characteristics relate to the nature of ownership and the resulting business objectives (Somerville, 2007).

Dual nature of co-operative enterprise is rooted in its social origins (associationalism, where ethical values of solidarity, equity, equality and democracy prevail) and meeting the needs of members through an enterprise (economic activity)³. The nature of the enterprise differs depending on its purpose, the level of competition, strategic market behavior, and regulatory pressures, among other. Therefore, differences in the level of market or regulatory pressure will have varied impacts on co-operatives and their ability to strategically deploy their associative 'toolkit'. At the organizational level, duality has been described as pursuing collective and individualistic member interests (Puusa et al., 2016) or social and financial goals (Novkovic, 2012).

The reason for cooperative entry, its purpose, can be understood differently in different types of cooperatives, termed Type 1 and Type 2 (see Novkovic, 2018; Spear, 2011; Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010). Type 1 cooperatives address 'market failures', including market power, such as monopoly or monopsony markets; externalities brought on by economic activity; and a lack of access to goods or services because their provision is not profitable enough and therefore not provided by investor owned businesses. At the heart of these reasons for entry lies economic injustice, inadequate pricing or a lack of access to markets. On the other end of the spectrum are Type 2 cooperatives focused on social and environmental (in)justice as the reason for entry. As an enterprise form deliberately chosen by their members for the shared values, they address social and environmental inequities created by the dominant investor-driven economic paradigm. In this case, cooperatives are entering the market to change the economic paradigm and make a difference in how goods and services are produced, powered, consumed, traded and disposed of. It is not necessarily about a lack of access to a good/service, or its price, but the concern that the system is not socially or environmentally sustainable or equitable, and that it needs to change.

Further, duality of co-operative purpose - using economic means to resolve a social concern - is often misunderstood by policymakers. Levi and Davis (2008) venture into a discussion about the misconstrued not-for-profit nature of co-operatives in light of their income distribution practices. Patronage dividend and investment dividend are often confused, as illustrated by the exclusion of co-operatives from the definition of Non-Profit Institutions in the UN System of National

¹ Borzaga and Depedri (2005) explore intrinsic motivations in worker co-operatives; Novkovic (2012) develops a model of dual purpose building on Cory's dual motives theory; Novkovic and Miner (2019) discuss crowding out of intrinsic motivations to elaborate on compensation philosophy in co-operatives.

² The term 'users' includes consumers, producers, workers, and community members in different types of co-operatives.

³ See the ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

Accounts 2003, based on the non-distribution constraint requirement in the definition⁴. As a result, [Levi and Davis \(2008\)](#) elaborate that co-operatives are too economically oriented to be included in the non-profit sector and too socially oriented to be considered as an economic for-profit organization. They elaborate that co-ops are *not-for-profit* organizations, implying that profit (return on capital invested) is not the purpose of co-operative operations. When they have an optimization objective, it is to maximize benefits to members ([Torgerson et al., 1997](#)), but increasingly, co-operatives also include broader societal benefits and creation of well-being in communities in their decisions and objectives. As Levi and Davis conclude, co-operatives have always been part and parcel of the social economy (see also [Laville & Mendell, 2007](#)).

These understandings have slowly been increasing among policy-makers and economic actors, particularly with the rising popularity of hybrid organizations, including social enterprises, social purpose organizations, and B-corporations. Related shifts in mainstream research and practice have remained focused on the capitalist hybrid offspring and have largely failed to include the long-standing existence of the co-operative enterprise form as a holistic and people-centred model for delivering positive social and economic results.

2.3. Community level and social impact

Often times social impact of co-operatives is indirect ([Erdal, 2014](#)), lauded because they are locally rooted ([Novkovic & Gordon-Nembhard, 2017](#); [Puusa & Saastamoinen, 2021](#)), yet difficult to quantify ([Bouchard & Rousselière, 2015](#)). A more often reported type of measurable impact belongs to the sphere of charitable donations as an indicator, however limited, of care for community (the 7th ICA co-operative principle, and a value), although social impact can also be the purpose of a mission-driven co-operative enterprise focused on ‘general interest’ beyond its members (i.e. a social enterprise, see [Borzaga & Defourny, 2001](#); [Defourny & Nyssens, 2012](#)). Some authors describe co-operatives as having a social mission with economic returns ([Neck, Brush, & Allen, 2009](#)), while others argue they have an economic mission with social impacts and social outcomes ([Mazzarol et al., 2011](#)). Given the close ties among a community of people (members) and the organization, co-ops work in an interactive symbiosis in their operational area. While they impact the community, their success is also affected by the vitality of the community they operate in ([Dilger, Konter, & Voigt, 2017](#); [Puusa & Saastamoinen, 2021](#); [Spear, 2000](#); [Tuominen, Jussila, & Saksa, 2006](#)).

Despite their social function, co-operatives are not created for social purposes alone as many co-operatives are driven by economic self-interest. In other words, some may have a purely economic rationale (see section 2 above, and [Novkovic, 2018](#); [Spear, 2011](#); [Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010](#)). One can argue, however, that a minimum threshold of pro-social behavior is inevitable by the mere fact that a group of people makes decisions democratically in co-operatives. Further, co-operatives will have an economic impact even when their motivation is social, which ([Nilsson, 2001](#)) described as “a positive cycle: when members become motivated by co-operative values, the membership rate grows, whereby the volume increases, and economies of scale are consequently reaped” (p. 333). A fact of the matter remains that the nature as well as the ownership structure of co-ops allow individuals to join forces and thus by collaborating and networking in the spirit of the co-operative movement, they produce effects in the environment in whatever aspects members together decide to pursue (for example [Jussila & Tuominen, 2010](#)).

To further emphasize the minimum threshold characteristic, note that it “reflects a tacit assumption in the literature that each quality is necessary for organizational health” ([Ashforth & Reingen, 2014](#); [Novkovic, 2012](#)), the challenge is to consider when imbalance is achieved (e.g. emphasis on one over the other). If the social orientation is prioritized without due consideration for economic sustainability, the co-operative struggles to be viable. If economic is too heavily weighted, the co-operative is at risk of being managed solely using an instrumental (business case) logic based on financial return. What is most relevant regarding tension between interdependent, oppositional tendencies is the dynamic and ever-changing nature within which co-operatives must flourish as social and economic enterprises.

Studies attempting to quantify the impact of co-operatives on community and the economy abound, and include their stabilizing effect due to local embeddedness and countercyclical entry ([Pérotin, 2006](#); [Tuominen et al., 2006](#)), economic multiplier ([Zeuli & Deller, 2007](#)), longevity ([Smith & Rothbaum, 2014](#)) and resilience in crises ([Birchall & Hammond Ketilson, 2009](#); [Birchall, 2013](#); [Merrien et al., 2021](#); [Roelants et al., 2012](#); [Sanchez Bajo & Roelants, 2011](#)). The multiplier effect (direct and indirect jobs; secondary impact on economic activity) is of particular relevance in rural communities where co-operatives are often the only business in the area. Further to these, co-operatives are focused on the long term and build community wealth through indivisible reserves, and with intergenerational transfer of assets (for example, see [Hesse & Cihak, 2007](#); [Sanchez Bajo & Roelants, 2011](#)).

Table 1 summarizes the types of dualities addressed in the literature on cooperatives.

Table 1

A summary of approaches to cooperative duality at different levels of analysis.

Level of analysis	Duality as oppositional values	Sources
Individual	-‘idealists’ vs ‘pragmatists’ -individualism vs collectivism -autonomy vs collaboration -user vs owner -extrinsic vs intrinsic motives	Ashforth & Reingen, 2014 ; Audebrand et al., 2017 ; Davis et al., 1997 ; Dittmar, 1992 ; Jussila et al., 2015 ; Jussila & Tuominen, 2010 ; Côté, 2019 ; Borzaga & Depedri, 2005 ; Birchall & Simmons, 2004 ; Borgen, 2004 ; Dunn, 1988 ; Laurinkari, 1997 ; Puusa et al., 2016 ; Mamouni Limnios et al., 2018 ; Mazzarol et al., 2011 ; Nilsson, 2001 ; Normark, 1996 ; Novkovic & Miner, 2019 ;
Organizational	-pursuing collective vs individualistic member interests -social vs financial goals -for profit vs not for profit -business vs association -Type 1 vs Type 2	Côté, 2019 ; Davis, 1995 ; Levi & Davis, 2008 ; Laville & Mendell, 2007 ; Malo & Vezina, 2004 ; Mazzarol et al., 2011 ; Neck et al., 2009 ; Novkovic, 2012, 2018 ; Somerville, 2007 ; Spear, 2011 ; Skurnik, 2002 ; Puusa et al., 2016 ; Torgerson et al., 1997 ; Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010 .
Social and community (external)	-member interest vs general (societal) interest -social mission vs economic mission -Type 1 vs Type 2 cooperative -long term community wealth orientation -social economy vs capitalist economy	Ashforth & Reingen, 2014 ; Borzaga & Defourny, 2001 ; Bouchard & Rousselière, 2015 ; Defourny & Nyssens, 2012 ; Dilger et al., 2017 ; Erdal, 2014 ; Hesse & Cihak, 2007 ; Jussila & Tuominen, 2010 ; Mazzarol et al., 2011 ; Neck et al., 2009 ; Novkovic, 2012, 2018 ; Novkovic & Gordon-Nembhard, 2017 ; Puusa & Saastamoinen, 2021 ; Spear, 2011 ; Spear, 2000 ; Tuominen et al., 2006 ; Sanchez Bajo & Roelants, 2011 ; Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010 .

⁴ Article 23.21. states that a co-operative can be included in the Non Profit Institution accounts only “if the articles of association of a co-operative prevent it from distributing its profit, then it will be treated as an NPI; if it can distribute its profit to its members, it is not an NPI (in either the SNA or the satellite account)” (SNA 2008, p 457)

3. Associationalism at the root of framings of co-operative dual nature

According to etymology dictionary co-operative means "operating or striving jointly for the attaining of certain ends" originating from Latin *co-operari* "to work together". Co-operatives are associations of members with shared needs and goals. Associationalism speaks to social relations and collective action, while the means to achieve members' common goals is a business enterprise.

Associationalism, then, is about common action and solidarity; creating an entity larger than the sum of its parts. "A co-operative is more than an association of members; it is also a collectivity" (MacPherson, 1996). Recalling the early days of co-operative formations, Ian MacPherson reminds us of "associative intelligence, a belief that there is a special kind of knowing that emerges when people work together effectively; a conviction that people through working together could learn skills that would make collective behavior more economically rewarding, socially beneficial and personally satisfying" (MacPherson, 2002, p. 90). Associationalism is embedded in the Statement on the Co-operative Identity, captured by co-operative values; relations of trust, reciprocity, and mutuality (as opposed to equivalent exchange relations-see Zamagni, 2008); and the purpose of co-operative organizing to meet member needs and aspirations.

In an enterprise jointly owned and democratically controlled by its members, who also use the cooperative and contribute to its capitalization, associationalism – common action and responsibilities of membership – is understood here to incorporate mutual (joint):

- i) member contributions,
- ii) ownership,
- iii) decisionmaking and control; and
- iv) benefit.

These essential relational characteristics engrained in the 'associative intelligence' of its members are contrasted with the necessary transactional characteristics of an enterprise functioning in a capitalist economy.

We suggest that the more aligned the purpose, culture, structures and business decisions are with an integrated view of the co-operative enterprise model's associational characteristics, the more likely the demonstration of the 'dual' nature as synergistic, forming the co-operative advantage. In other words, when the relational aspects associated with contributions, ownership, control, and benefit are embedded holistically throughout all dimensions of the organization, a co-operative is less prone to non-congruent⁵ isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and more likely to succeed as an evolving, inter-generational 'Type 2' co-operative.

3.1. Collective⁶ contributions

The foundational relationship that a member has with a co-operative is as a user, and this user relationship is discussed here as the sum of

⁵ Bager (1994) differentiates between congruent and non-congruent isomorphism, with the latter having negative impact on the survival of the co-operative organizational form.

⁶ In what follows, we use the terms 'collective' and 'common' interchangeably, with an understanding that both the means and the ends are held in common in a co-operative enterprise, i.e. members pursue a common goal as a defining feature of co-operative enterprise (Zamagni, 2014). "There are various types of common action, depending on what is held in common, which may be the means or the end. If it is the means, the enterprise will be seen as a capitalistic type, itself a commodity that can be bought and sold [...] and interpersonal relationships will typically take the form of a contract. [...] On the other hand, when what is held in common is the end, the enterprise is co-operative". (p160)

member-usership⁷ relationships and transactions, equaling collective contributions. Member contributions to co-operative enterprise include financial contributions, patronage, voluntary work ('sweat equity'), participation in governance, and in co-operative operations, education, or social engagement opportunities. These contributions are made to the collective enterprise, for the benefit of all, thus reinforcing the collective benefit characteristic of associationalism (see section 3.3. below) in terms of a reciprocal relationship. These contributions may be more substantial by some members than by others, and the nature and significance of contribution types will vary depending on the type of co-op (worker, consumer, producer), and the mode of participation outlined above.

The underlying co-operative values imply that the principle of reciprocity which builds trust and solidarity (Bruni, 2008; Gui & Sugden, 2005; Molm, Shaefer, & Collett, 2007; Zamagni, 2008) dominates social relations in co-operative enterprises. Zamagni in particular points to the proportionality of this relationship; every member contributes fairly in proportion to their ability, rather than engage in equivalent exchanges. Co-operation involves interpersonal relations, rather than purely transactional such as in (anonymous) market exchanges. Zamagni (2008) further speaks of 'contributive justice' in the context of healthy associational functioning, as opposed to distributive justice, although the latter is also given prominence in worker co-operatives where decisions about income distribution are collective (see below). "Contributive justice, as opposed to distributive justice, is the responsibility each of us has to contribute to civil society, and to our collective well-being. Contributive justice matches a person's obligations with his or her capabilities and role in society." (Zamagni, n/d, also see Gombert, 2016 in relation to work).

3.2. Collective ownership

Private property rights in most countries imply the right to use, profit from, and dispose of an asset (*usus, fructus, and abusus* - see ICA Guidance notes (2015), p.39). Co-operative members own the enterprise and earn the right to control it as a personal right, rather than as a property right (Ellerman, 1990; Gray, 2004; Lutz & Lux, 1988), with one member one vote in primary co-operatives being key to the co-operative democratic principle. The collective nature of co-operative assets implies that use and benefit are individual membership rights, while the right to dispose of co-operative assets is collective and limited (see the ICA Guidance Notes, 2015). This collective nature of cooperative capital is misinterpreted as 'vaguely defined [individual] property rights' by the neoclassical economics theorists advocating re-privatization of cooperative assets (see Gray, 2004 for a discussion).

In the spirit of maintaining the co-operative as a going concern, members (voluntarily, or in some cases within the legal frameworks) often set up indivisible, or unallocated, reserves (Gray, 2004; Navarra, 2016; Tortia, 2018). These reserves form collective, pooled capital, used for risk mitigation as well as securing finance, solidarity funds, and other purposes. This feature, coupled with democratic decisionmaking, serves as a 'poison pill', or a deterrent to hostile takeovers, but also a barrier to internally initiated demutualization.

Capitalist institutions rooted in individual property rights theories often do not recognize specificities of the co-operative model. This is illustrated in the difficulties to access conventional finance (who 'owns' the assets?), confusions about employment contracts by workers-owners (are they bosses, or employees?). Furthermore, legislation and regulation, coupled with public sector policies and programs are often framed using a capitalist lens, thus creating barriers or excluding co-operatives.

⁷ Member-usership means that users (consumers, workers or producers) of the co-operative's operations and services simultaneously use (patronize), own, control, and benefit from the enterprise.

3.3. Collective decisionmaking and control

Collective decisionmaking is a foundation to the co-operative enterprise model, with democracy being a value and a principle (ICA, 1995). “Co-operatives are jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprises” (ICA, 1995) is elaborated by MacPherson in the background document as follows “...within co-operatives control is distributed among members on a democratic basis. The dual characteristics of ownership and democratic control are particularly important in differentiating co-operatives from other kinds of organizations [...]” (MacPherson, 1996).

Co-operative logic emphasizes local responsiveness, decentralized decision making, participation and involvement (Torgerson et al., 1997). Collective decisionmaking is twofold, one, members collectively decide the ‘rules of engagement’ (constitution, and policies), and two, they engage in democratic processes of decisionmaking on an ongoing basis.

In some types of co-operatives, systems of collective decisionmaking and control are simplified to the point that member control is reduced to voting at the general assembly (e.g. consumer co-operatives); while in other types of co-ops, it is an ongoing integrated feature of the organizational approach (e.g. member consultations, delegate structures, networked governance). Member engagement can also extend into direct participation in operations (e.g. worker, or housing co-operatives). The type of democracy (direct or representative), nature of collective decisionmaking and control structures and practices varies, as stated above; it is situational and dependent on the size of the co-operative, type of membership, regulations, and other factors. However, it is not an either/or choice; to meet the expectation laid out in the Statement on the Co-operative Identity, decisionmaking and control must be placed in the hands of the collective membership.

3.4. Collective benefit

Collective benefit in co-operatives is a multifaceted combination of qualitative and quantitative elements, and results from collective contributions (greater than the sum of its parts): pooling of effort, risk, or resources; distribution of surplus according to patronage (or work, in worker co-operatives); to co-production of relational goods (Gui, 2013) and creation of social benefit.

Risk pooling, as an implicit insurance scheme in working teams, producer co-operatives, and other co-operative forms, benefits individual members as it allows them protection that they could not secure on their own. In a reciprocal and solidarity relationship, members gain a safety net by joining others in pursuing a common goal.

Further, financial surplus is a result of operations that is only possible due to the collective member-user contributions. Income distribution is hence based on individual levels of patronage/work, instead of investment. Since patronage is the reason for membership, income distribution according to patronage serves as the ‘price adjustment’ to members, rather than division of surplus earned by profit maximization, or in relation to capital-based ownership. In worker co-operatives, surplus is distributed according to hours worked in a given period, and fair income distribution is the concern of and collective decision by the members. Solidarity is a key value in co-operatives, as exemplified, for example, by Mondragon’s principles, solidarity practices, and governance structures (Arando, Freundlich, Gago, Jones, & Kato, 2010).

Benefit from co-operative membership and engagement spreads beyond operational transactions. There is value in co-creating and contributing to a shared purpose. “Unlike conventional goods, relational goods cannot be enjoyed by an individual alone but only jointly with others. They are like a specific kind of public good, in that they are anti-rival –their nature requires that they be shared. As a consequence, participation in their consumption actually creates an additional benefit to others and increases the value of the good itself.” (Restakis, 2010; also see Bruni, 2008). Further, “consumers [members] may get additional

social benefits just from trading with an organization they own.” (Spear, 2000, p. 517)

Table 2 below integrates the paradox/duality approaches at different levels of analysis (first two columns of Table 1) with the associationalist roots of the synergetic approach and complementarities as indivisible features of a cooperative enterprise.

4. More than association of members: a collective enterprise

Borgen (2004) makes a point that there is a misalignment between membership strategy and co-operative ownership structure. We expand on this line of thinking, relating it to associationist nature underlying the co-operative model of enterprise, its organizational design and strategy. Our point of departure, as discussed above, is the ideal-type of co-operative aligned with the ICA Statement on the co-operative identity (Spear, 2011). Further, the intent here is to suggest that a complex multi-dimensional view rather than duality is a more fitting conceptualization of the micro-foundations and organizational characteristics of co-operatives as collective enterprises.

Paradox and duality literatures point out the cognitive nature of the binary presentation of oppositional forces in order to simplify complexity in organizations. What we intend to highlight is that the associative (social and relational) nature of co-operative enterprise is the source of their unique advantage when deployed in values-aligned areas of activity. This point of departure is shared with the paradox literature on sustainability, for example, (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse, & Preuss, 2018), stating that sustainability needs to be perceived as a value, rather than a business case. Authors posit when instrumental initiatives (sustainability actions create financial benefits) are balanced with moral initiatives (firms address environmental and social issues in their own right) firms will address sustainability in a meaningful way. For that to materialize, businesses need to be ‘repurposed’ (White, 2019).

Such repurposing is the *raison d’être* of co-operative (and social solidarity economy) enterprises. When adhering to the Statement on the Co-operative Identity, decisionmaking in co-operatives is guided by co-

Table 2
Contrasting duality with associationalism.

Level of analysis	Duality as oppositional values	Associationalism as a source of complementarities
Individual	-‘idealists’ vs ‘pragmatists’ -individualism vs collectivism -autonomy vs collaboration -user vs owner -agency vs stewardship -extrinsic vs intrinsic motives	-associative intelligence; -mutual self-help; -pooling of resources, risk, effort; -trust and reciprocity; -human dignity (voice); -benefit tied to use (patronage)
Organizational	-pursuing collective vs individualistic member interests -social vs financial goals -for profit vs not for profit -business vs association -Type 1 vs Type 2	-common action for shared goals -mutualistic; -democratic member control; -organizational values- equity, equality, solidarity; -people-centred with member sovereignty; -collective capital; -co-production of value (use, relational, societal) -collective benefit; -solidarity; -ethical values; -intergenerational transfer; -care for community
Social and community (external)	-member interest vs general (societal) interest -social mission vs economic mission -Type 1 vs Type 2 cooperative -long term community wealth orientation -social economy vs capitalist economy	

operative ethical values, aligning strategy and organizational structure for a more meaningful impact. However, this is not always well understood in the co-operative literature or practice. Collective nature of cooperative capital, as well as the use (rather than investment)-value is misunderstood by the neoclassical and new institutional theorists (Borgen, 2004; Gray, 2004). Borgen (2004) explored the source of 'problems' in co-operatives identified in the institutional economics literature that resulted from misspecification of member-motivation: "The pivotal point is whether members are essentially ascribed the reasoning and strategies of a rational investor or a rational user" (p. 388). Besides subscribing to Borgen's point of view and treating members primarily as 'users', we are broadening conceptualization of the co-operative enterprise model starting from associative logic. With this lens, members of worker co-operatives for example are motivated by high quality jobs, autonomy and voice in the workplace, promoting human dignity at work, and synergy in common action. Producer co-operative members, on the other hand, gain access to markets, benefit from scale economies through joint production or cost reduction, pool risks and resources, and have a voice in major strategic decisions. Members of consumer co-operatives rally around access to fairly priced products and services that are sourced in alignment with the values and interests of the members.

Typical dualities explored in the co-op literature (Audebrand, 2017; Puusa et al., 2013, 2016) are about individual-collective interest dichotomy (collaboration vs autonomy; collective benefit vs personal benefit; communality vs individuality). However, self-determination theory in psychology (Deci & Ryan, 1985) suggests that autonomous motivations and organizational systems that support it, result in best collective outcomes. In other words, collectives with a shared vision, and providing tools and knowledge that allow one to act on their own will, reach the healthiest results and are the most valued workspaces (ibid). The two concepts are not contradictory, but rather complementary in the right context. Co-operatives and other social economy organizations acting on their values (equity, equality, self-help) can create such organizational context (also see Malo & Vezina, 2004).

We can see a direct parallel between autonomy-supporting features in the literature on motivations and worker co-operative structure (nonalienability of labour; working collectively in teams; peer-monitoring). If anything, worker co-operatives can go further than the investor-owned (as well as other types of co-operative) alternatives because they are fully owned and controlled by the workers themselves. Workers have control over their working lives; they choose their salary scales, pay differentials, distribution of income between surplus sharing, reinvestment and indivisible reserves. They also design their working times and spaces. Often, worker co-operatives are non-hierarchical work places, where 'management is a function, rather than a status' (Cannell, 2015).

It may be a challenge, however, to support workers' autonomy when 'the way we do things' has been marked by years of extrinsic rewards and expectations⁸. The challenge is both in the leadership, and in the employees themselves. A lack of exposure to alternative workplaces, and a lack of 'radical imagination' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014) may be an obstacle to implementation (Novkovic & Miner, 2019).

Of note is that the duality literature highlighting tensions between communality and individuality in co-ops often looks at the example of producer co-operatives, with independent producers (self-employed or business entities) and separable outputs. They can be agricultural farms, or self-employed professionals, artists, etc. (Puusa et al., 2016; Puusa & Hokkila, 2020). There, the challenge is to understand and strengthen the collective nature/purpose, contributions and benefits of the

co-operative and find the right strategic and operational balance.

Similarly, the stewardship school of thought, influenced by research findings in organizational psychology, sociology and, more recently, behavioural economics (Bowles, 2016; Davis et al., 1997) advocates a human being shaped by social and contextual circumstances, ethical considerations, reciprocity and trust (Novkovic & Miner, 2019). Under the assumptions of the stewardship model, manager's interest and measures of success are aligned with collective interest and goals of the organization. While under 'pure' stewardship, the individual is driven by common goals and results, and perceives their interest as aligned with that of the organization and its owners, it is pointed out that relational aspects matter in organizations more broadly (Wiseman, Gomez-Mejia, & Cuevas-Rodríguez, 2012). In co-operatives, with association as their foundation, relational aspects form the pillar of organizational culture.

Another aspect of associationist thinking, yet autonomous acting, lies in the subsidiarity principle. This is the key aspect of polycentric governance often found in co-operative groups and networks (Desrochers & Fischer, 2003; Novkovic & Miner, 2015; Turnbull, 1997, 2002), as well as in co-operative teams⁹ where information is shared with those impacted by a decision, and authority for decisionmaking is delegated to the lowest level possible within organizations or systems. The function of subsidiarity principle is to increase the power of autonomous incentives (Desrochers & Fischer, 2003).

On the benefits side, co-operative members usually care about fairness, rather than necessarily personal (opportunistic) gain. Members develop the rules for income distribution, benefit distribution, price, pay (in worker co-operatives) and other aspects of the co-op member-value proposition. Ostrom (1990) points out that the 'core design principles'¹⁰ are key ingredients in successfully managing common resources by local communities. Arguments connecting co-operative design principles to Ostrom's have been made in the co-op literature suggesting that collective ownership, control, and decisionmaking can be a more effective way to organize economic life, use and protect common resources, contrary to findings in mainstream economics. Borgen (2004) elaborates on these counter arguments when members are interested in long term-use value of the asset, rather than short-term investment gain.

Lastly, co-operative enterprise is collectively run. Democracy in organizations is often interpreted to mean a vote by all members on all decisions. That is very rarely a part of the design structure, and becomes impractical once organizations grow beyond a handful of members. Democratic decisionmaking is very diverse and context dependent. From 'democratic hierarchies' (Viggianni, 1997) where a hierarchical decisionmaking structure is adopted by the members, to flat sociocratic structures, or collectives, collective decisionmaking implies there are systems in place that invite member (democratic) engagement. Zamagni (2014) elaborates "[...] co-operation presupposes a special form of deliberative democracy: the exercise of the 'voice' option between members. [...] The true significance of co-operative action is that of extending the 'voice' option to the sphere of economic relations." (p. 162). Therefore, the dichotomy between democracy and hierarchy is not necessarily an issue for co-operatives, but oligarchic tendencies with information asymmetries and power nested in a few individuals may be.

Table 3 summarizes Sections three and four, presenting the elements of the enterprise model rooted in associationalism, and captured in collective member contributions, ownership, decisionmaking and control; and benefit.

⁹ These are more likely to function well in worker co-operatives, or in small co-operatives of other types.

¹⁰ Principles: common purpose; fair distribution of costs and benefits; collective decisionmaking; monitoring; graduated sanctions (consequences/accountability); fast and fair conflict resolution; local autonomy; polycentric governance

⁸ Incentives theory in psychology suggests that human behaviour is altered by external rewards. Studies show that motivations can in fact be extrinsic as well as intrinsic, and that the latter can be crowded out by external rewards, in contrast with assumptions behind 'homoeconomicus' in neoclassical economics.

Table 3

Associationist elements of the cooperative enterprise model.

Associationist roots	Co-operative collective enterprise characteristics	Related complementarities (from Table 2)
Purpose	Economic and social purpose are inseparable elements of the organization that builds on a foundation of associationalism and integrates all perceived dualities of mission, goals, rationale, returns, activity, behavior, outcomes, and impact. Reciprocity and non-market exchanges dominate relationships (contributive justice; member-owner as user; living wage; solidarity pay; fair trade; sustainable practices are examples), based on solidarity and other cooperative values.	Associative intelligence Mutual self-help, mutualism, mutualistic Trust and reciprocity Organizational values – equity, equality, solidarity Ethical values Plus, integration of all dualities as complementarities (not as oppositional values as shown in column 2, Table 2)
Collective contributions	Individuality and communality results in autonomy to act, but with a shared common purpose and vision. Contributions can include financial, patronage, sweat equity, participation in governance or operations, education, social engagement, etc. Use is an individual membership right with individual participation contributing to the collective creation of goods/ services, including relational goods.	Common action for shared goals Pooling of resources, risk, effort People-centred with member sovereignty Self-responsibility
Collective ownership	Disposal of assets is collective (and limited). Residual rights are based on patronage, and limited by a joint decision. Property rights in co-operatives are both individual (based on patronage) and collective, affecting the nature of the control rights. Co-ops create collective reserves (unallocated equity) and may use dual accounts (e.g. Mondragon).	Collective capital Intergenerational transfer
Collective decision-making and control.	Control is a personal right of membership (not a property right), but it is acted upon through collective structures and processes. Hierarchy and democracy co-exist in most co-ops, and democracy is central in governance systems. Democratic hierarchies are at one end of the spectrum; sociocracy and flat structures at the other. Hierarchical arrangements are often operationally necessary in large or more traditional organizations. Deliberative structures; peer monitoring and member engagement opportunities;	Human dignity (voice) Democratic control People-centred with member sovereignty

Table 3 (continued)

Associationist roots	Co-operative collective enterprise characteristics	Related complementarities (from Table 2)
Collective benefit.	management as a function, and not a status. Qualitative and quantitative elements of benefit result from collective contributions. Co-production of relational goods for the benefit of all members and broader community. Pooling of effort, risk, resources; members gain a safety net by joining others in pursuing a common goal. Creation of individual benefits from common action; fair distribution of surplus by patronage or work. Care for community and ethical values results in positive and broad social, economic, and environmental benefit.	Benefit tied to use (patronage) Organizational co-production of value (use, relational, societal) Collective benefit (external - social and community) Care for community

5. Discussion

The source of ‘co-operative duality’ as a social and economic entity with multiple objectives lies in the associationist nature of co-operative enterprise. Elaborating on the characteristics of co-operative associative roots above, we note that co-operatives are collectively owned and controlled by their members who are users (workers) and beneficiaries of the enterprise as a going concern, rather than investors. While associationalism implies contributive justice and reciprocity ([Zamagni, 2008](#)), reality may in some cases be different.

What is presented above does not always work for co-ops given their specific context for various reasons. Firstly, a capitalist entrepreneurial culture has taken root in most western societies in at least two ways: investor-owned firms are the dominant form of enterprise and people’s general sense of property is dominated by the principles of entrepreneurship (see [Hahnel, 2005](#); [Puusa et al., 2013](#)). This follows the logic popularized by the neoclassical school embodied in Milton [Friedman \(1970\)](#), who stated that “the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits” and as a result the capitalist idea of what is an enterprise has overshadowed co-operative ideology. Although increasingly social enterprises and B-corporations populate spaces with a dual-social and economic-purpose, it is still understood that social benefits of entrepreneurial activity should generate financial returns to capital investments (see [Bakan, 2021](#)). Secondly, many researchers point out that the shortage of co-op related scholarly research available poses serious challenges for overall awareness, understanding and management of co-ops ([Puusa et al., 2013](#)). Besides that, the majority of existing research is marked by neoclassical and new institutional economics framing of the enterprise (see [Gray, 2004](#)), giving the impression that cooperatives are inefficient, unstable, and a transitory kind of enterprise ([Ben-Ner, 1984](#)). Thirdly, the co-op model is widely ignored in education, which also results in a poor level of knowledge regarding co-ops and the ideology behind them ([Fontrodona & Sison, 2006](#); [Kalmi, 2007](#); [Puusa et al., 2013](#); [Puusa, 2018](#)).

All co-operatives are not made equal, and all members do not act the same way. A lack of participation and commitment is evident in some types of co-operatives (e.g. consumer) more than in others (e.g. worker), for a number of reasons - from a different level of awareness about the co-op purpose, membership responsibilities and their implications, to a much larger stake in the operations by workers than consumers, to increasing competition and consumer mobility, opportunism, member heterogeneity and stage in the lifecycle, and other factors.

Understanding the co-operative advantage that can be realized due to the inter-connectedness among the individual members as a collective, the organization, and the community is a challenge for co-op governance and management structures and approaches as they too are mostly embedded in the capitalist institutional systems. Furthermore, cooperative governance and management theory focused on Type 2 cooperatives is lacking and in need of systematic development.

Within individual co-operatives and the sector as a whole, the lack of comprehensive and consistent alignment with co-operative identity may not be by design or due to governance or management malfeasance. Instead, misalignments point to the systemic barriers that exist in operating co-operatively in a capitalist sea. And, while the need for a paradigm adjustment is imperative, it is difficult to achieve. The Statement on the Co-operative Identity is very clear on the importance of education and training in its Principle 5, and the sector has within its power the ability to address the knowledge gaps associated with governance and management of co-operatives (as co-operatives), thus acting on the co-operative advantages when faced with inhospitable circumstances whatever the context.

Evidence of managerial misconduct suggests there is strategic misalignment between the associative nature of co-operative enterprise and incentive structures that do not fit the user-owned co-operative enterprise. Within many co-operative enterprises, we observe a consistent disconnect in the area pertaining to Key Performance Indicators, and accounting and reporting in general, for example. Co-operatives often rely on traditional (financial) business indicators that align with strategic investor logic, but not strategic member logic (Borgen, 2004) and therefore ignore the co-op difference (Brown et al., 2015; Puusa & Saastamoinen, 2021; Rixon, 2013). This gap reinforces isomorphism and misses the opportunity to measure and manage the collective dimensions of the enterprise model, and adherence to the Co-operative Identity.

Further, Puusa and Saastamoinen (2021) find that elected representatives in Finnish consumer and producer co-operatives focus on business operations and profitability in management and governance-related work. Social and community aspects are treated as externalities, and addressed only if profitability margins are met. This study confirms what others have found in different contexts (Cook, 1995; Fulton & Girard, 2015), that Type 1 co-operatives need not be ICA-Identity aligned, and instead, can be concerned solely with member financial benefit. Often, these types of co-operatives demutualize, because membership is no longer about a common purpose, contributions, collective ownership, collective decisionmaking, and user-benefit, but is dominated by a consumer (producer) self-interest and perception of co-operation as a problem (Couchman & Fulton, 2015), confirming theoretical predictions of the neoclassical school. Worker co-operatives may also stray from their original purpose, but in their case, recovery may be easier to orchestrate once isomorphic tendencies are identified (Cornforth, 1995). Nevertheless, a number of case studies also show that co-operatives build in structures to protect co-operative nature as a complex social and economic entity (see Lund & Hancock, 2020; Lund, 2021; McMahon, Miner, & Novkovic, 2020; McMahon & Novkovic, 2021, for example), and that cooperative demise is not the necessary outcome of organizational maturity and success.

6. Conclusions

Literature on co-operative duality is diverse, but it rests on tensions between social and economic aspects of the enterprise, and individualistic and collectivist motivations. An alignment between economic and individualistic, versus social and collective is implicit in the discussions, and related to micro behavioural foundations in various fields of inquiry - economics and business on the one hand, and sociology and psychology on the other. We highlight the essence of co-operative purpose and structure in associative practices - shared goals, and joint contributions; ownership; benefits; and decisionmaking - aligning with the vision of co-

operatives captured in the ICA Statement on the Co-operative Identity. We extend the argument that co-operatives have the strongest impact when they take advantage of their unique organizational values and characteristics, informed by their associative foundations.

Conceptualizing dual nature as a tradeoff is not fitting with the co-operative enterprise model informed by the ICA Statement. Instead, we imagine a distinct model that goes beyond social and economic duality to include the unique feature of associationalism among a collective of members (as user-owners, -controllers, and -beneficiaries) at the member, organization, and community scale. This is particularly relevant in extending beyond pure economic activities into social, cultural, and environmental value-creation, thus requiring management and governance systems that adapt to an everchanging context. Discussion in this paper contributes to the understanding the mutual nature of cooperatives at the intersection of association and entrepreneurship, and its creation of user-value.

However, the co-operative form is diverse in its application and influenced by internal and external factors. Key among them is the nature of membership (workers, consumers, or producers), member motivation to join a co-op (use, or investment); proximity of members to co-operative operations (insiders, or outsiders); maturity or lifecycle stage of the co-operative; and numerous external factors such as local culture and regulatory frameworks. Limited worldview/mindset of membership in some contexts are holding back the co-op organizational form's potential, but we also see a surge of holistic / systems thinking approaches taken in many new and emerging co-ops that are committed to change and transformation.

Data availability

Raw data and other supplementary material are available at the following repository: osf.io/7zpcj

No data was used for the research described in the article.

Data will be made available on request.

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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