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Exploring the performance of democracy and economic diversity in worker cooperatives

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Exploring the Performance of Democracy and Economic Diversity in Worker Cooperatives

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Sheffield Hallam University of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Adopting the lens of diverse economies theory, this thesis explores the role of democratic praxis in supporting a shift from the perceived dominance and homogeneity of capitalism towards performative post-capitalist praxes of economic diversity and interdependence. Through a reflexive account of an 18-month ethnographic study it makes four contributions to knowledge. First, that democracy in worker cooperatives constitutes interconnected ways of thinking, being and acting. Central to this praxis of democracy is an understanding of the organisation as a conversation and product of individual-collective alignment that, when supported by and expressed through democratic practices, create spaces for ongoing and constitutive deliberation. Second, that this praxis of democracy lays the epistemological and ontological grounds necessary for the emergence of post-capitalist worlds. These grounds constitute the development of an anti-essentialist position, post-fantasmatic and weak theoretical stance, and learning to be affected vision on the world. Third, that these grounds and democratic praxis itself enable ongoing thinking-actions of re-appropriation and negotiation, through which members deconstruct capitalist homogeneity, foster economic diversity and interdependence, and cultivate post-capitalist subjectivities. Finally, the thesis contends that these understandings were enriched by reflexive engagement with the emotional and relational experience of research, and the epistemological and ontological congruence of research methodology, theoretical framework and organisational practice.

Through the first three contributions the thesis adds a UK perspective to a narrow body of empirical literature exploring direct democracy in small worker cooperatives. More specifically, it adds to debates on the purpose and practice of workplace democracy in relation to the development of diverse economies thinking and practice. By reframing feelings of anxiety, frustration and contradiction as analytical starting points, the fourth methodological contribution furthers understandings of the role of emotion in organisational ethnography. Beyond these contributions, this thesis opens opportunities for shared learning both between researchers, and cooperative practitioners. In relation to the former it brings to the fore the ethical challenges of researching with close-knit communities and highlights the need for spaces of silence and slowness in maintaining a researcher's ethical sensibilities. In relation to the latter, it offers an account of the imperfections, joys and struggles of democratic praxis, and makes visible both the possibility and messy reality of post-capitalist worlds. Most significantly, it reframes the contradictions inherent to cooperatives' dual social-economic characteristic, not as risks of degeneration, but as creative moments that help worker-members to constantly reassess their practice, and their place within, against and beyond the capitalist economy.

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I am indebted to members of Beanies and Regather, not only for the time they dedicated to the research and their invaluable insights, but for their friendship and encouragement. The interpretations presented in this thesis are my own but would not have been possible without your critical and thought-provoking reflections on past and present cooperative practice.

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1: Introduction

This thesis examines the day-to-day praxis of democracy in two small, UK worker cooperatives. Adopting the lens of diverse economies theory (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; 2008) it progresses to explore the role of democracy in supporting a shift from the perceived dominance and homogeneity of capitalism towards performative praxes of economic diversity and interdependence (Gibson-Graham, 2006b). This focus is grounded in the premise that 'it is the way capitalism has been 'thought' that has made it so difficult for people to imagine its supersession' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: 4; see also Miller; 2014). As such, the research engages with, and contributes to, a growing body of theoretical and empirical literature concerned with everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy (Amin et al., 2003b; Community Economies Collective, 2009; Davies, 2013; Fickey, 2011; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Jonas, 2010; 2013; Lee et al., 2008; Leyshon et al., 2003; North, 2014; Samers, 2005; Seyfang, 2010). More specifically, it adds to debates on the purpose and practice of workplace democracy in relation to the development of diverse economies thinking and practice (Cornwall, 2012), and to the question of what it means to be at once within, against and beyond capitalism (Chatterton, 2006; 2010b; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). Furthermore, through its initial concern, it contributes a UK perspective to a narrow body of empirical literature exploring direct democracy in small worker cooperatives (Luhman, 2007; Land and King, 2014; Kokkinidis, 2014; Nolan et al., 2009).

Adopting the role of academic-activist, my explicit aim through these contributions is to make more visible both the possibility, and messy reality of post-capitalist worlds. Engagement with debates around this contested and provocative term lie beyond the bounds of this thesis. Reflecting the foci outlined above, I follow Chatterton (2016: 405) in understanding post-capitalism, not as a thing, but as a process of ongoing anti-paradigmatic transformation. This process constitutes the formation of the individual and collective self as thinking, theorising economic subjects; the identification and opening up of cracks in capitalism; and the utilisation of these cracks to expand already existing practices of economic diversity and interdependence. As such, the thesis seeks to celebrate the many no's and yes's that necessarily make up a post-capitalist world, promote an economy based on equality, openness, mutuality and an ethic of

care (ibid.)¹, and foreground a sense of hope necessary for (but not a guarantee of) the transition from theory to practice (Cameron and Hicks, 2014; Fickey and Hanrahan, 2014; Fuller et al., 2010; Gibson-Graham, 2009; McKinnon, 2010).

Before outlining my research questions in section 1.6, the following discussion explores the dual practitioner/academic motivations underlying this research. In doing so, it brings to the fore the challenges facing cooperatives operating within and beyond a capitalist context, as emphasised in claims made by the degeneration thesis (Cornforth et al., 1988; Cornforth, 1995; Chaves et al., 2008; Borzaga et al., 2009). In addition to delineating the current need for, and relevance of, this research, the chapter highlights gaps in academic literature that the thesis will address. It ends by introducing the two case study organisations involved in the research.

1.1: How did I get here? Curiosity from cooperative practice.

The need for a praxis of re-thinking introduced in the opening paragraph was exemplified by the constitutional crisis that consumed the Cooperative Bank in 2013. The causes² and consequences of this crisis spoke clearly to claims made by the degeneration thesis that cooperatives, faced with pressures towards improved efficiency and growth, will inevitably abandon 'radical ideals' (Cornforth et al., 1986: 113) and 'adopt the same organizational forms and priorities as capitalist business in order to survive' (Cornforth, 1995: 1; section 1.3). Response to the crisis from the media and public reinforced this sense of inevitability by laying the blame, not on the financial context, but on the governance structure and board composition of the Cooperative Group (Byrne and Mangan, 2017; see also Bibby, 2012). As Cheney et al. (2014: 594) similarly found following the closure of one of Mondragon's factories, the press did, for the most part, take the opportunity to 'question the resilience of [...] the cooperative model in general'. Such narratives, combined with the broadly defensive reaction of the UK cooperative movement, framed this crisis as a crisis of

¹ Understood as such, post-capitalism encompasses, but cannot be limited to, non-capitalist practices. In the context of this thesis, non-capitalist practices constitute the multiple actions and relations through which we meet our day-to-day needs that surpass the logics of capitalism and the inevitability of commodification.

² Including the purchase of Britannia and attempted purchase of Lloyds TSB.

cooperativism, not as a crisis of capitalism. Reflecting White and Williams' (2016: 2) claim, this framing served to illustrate that our immersion in dominant capitalist thinking shapes, not only our understanding of what constitutes 'the economy' and what is considered valid and valuable in economic space, but also our 'impression as to what is possible, preferable and achievable'. As the Cooperative Bank de-mutualised into a (majority) shareholder organisation and forged a clear separation between the means and ends of organising by focusing (restorative) promotional efforts on their ethical rather than their cooperative credentials, questions over the purpose and practice of democracy took on new salience.

The importance of these questions was reinforced through reflection on my own experience as a cooperative practitioner. Working as a practitioner prior to my PhD I attended numerous events offering support and advice on establishing, financing and growing social enterprises³. Situated in the context of reducing grants (Dey and Teasdale, 2013; Zahra et al., 2009) and moves to 'reduce public sector costs and responsibilities' through the application of 'market-based approaches to service delivery' (Dayson, 2017: 395; Eikenberry, 2009; Tomlinson, 2013; Cornforth, 2014)⁴, these events sought to offer third sector and social enterprise practitioners with an organisational 'toolkit': a 'how-to' guide on economic models of impact measurement⁵

³ Social enterprise is a contested and debated term (Zahra et al. 2009) but has been used most commonly to refer to the bringing together of market-based solutions and social aims. Based on this understanding, social enterprise is framed as a 'panacea that brings the efficiency of markets to bear upon social problems that neither the state nor traditional third sectors were able to solve' (Dey and Teasdale, 2013: 248). Drawing a clear distinction between enterprise and social enterprise, Austin et al. (2006: 2) add that common to all definitions is a drive to create social rather than personal or shareholder value and a commitment to 'the creation of something new rather than simply the replication of existing enterprises or practices'.

I do not wish to draw parallels between cooperatives and social enterprises. For the reasons outlined in this paragraph, such equivalence is problematic (and a topic of a thesis in its own right), particularly in the UK context (see Defourny (2009) Defourny and Nyssens (2010) and Ridley-Duff and Bull (2011) for discussion on the difference between the US/UK and European context). Like Dey and Teasdale (2013: 263) I found both the cooperatives I worked with and those I met at cooperative events 'displaced' the social enterprise label through the foregrounding of 'an alternative democratic [...] (cooperative) discourse'. The purpose of drawing attention to social enterprise discourse here is to (re)emphasise the need to re-think the economy beyond dominant capitalist narratives.

⁴ Alongside the event I was working with a colleague on Regather's (see section 1.7 for introduction) Social Return on Investment. The monetisation of our social value sat uncomfortably with our broader aims and desire to move towards a post-capitalist (and post-commodified) economy. We believed like Miller (2008: 1130) that 'populations remain far better off if they can prevent the assets they value being taken away and turned into more abstract value'. As a consequence, the exercise was never finished. For further discussion on the translation of values (inalienable) to value (alienable) see Miller (2008).

⁵ Such as Social Return on Investment (Arvidson et al., 2013).

(Dayson, 2017), ‘sound business practices’ and entrepreneurial characteristics⁶ (Dey and Steyaert, 2010: 89) that would enable organisations to compete for public sector contracts⁷ and access new funding models⁸. While not wishing to downplay the diverse motivations and practices that constitute social enterprise, or their potential to subvert the profit motive and the heroic individualistic view of the entrepreneur (Bandinelli, 2013; Borgaza et al., 2009; Doherty et al., 2014; Spear, 2006; Knutsen, 2013; Spear et al., 2009), I observed both these ‘toolkits’, and the consequent ‘hybrid’ organisations, being framed as a means to achieve social change without disrupting dominant (neoliberal-capitalist) economic narratives. Thus, in addition to restricting social enterprises to the treatment of the symptoms rather than the causes of social problems, the extension of narratives, organisational forms and performance measures from commercial to social enterprise, and the concept of hybridity⁹ itself, limits opportunities to imagine an economy other than capitalism (Dey and Teasdale, 2013; Teasdale, 2012; Mauksch, 2012; Langer, 2008). As Miller (2011: 5) recognises, ‘it is all-too-easy for us to challenge the inequalities of our economy without questioning the very concept of “the economy” itself’. As a practitioner working in a small cooperative with a strong collective “do-it-yourself” ethos and aspirations to ‘mutualise the local economy’¹⁰, this de-politicisation of social change seemed at odds with both our own ethos and values, and those of the wider third sector (Dey and

⁶ Read economic rationale, individualism, tolerance of risk, and self-reliance.

⁷ Specifically, opportunities created by The Public Service (Social Value) Act 2012.

⁸ Such as Social Impact Bonds (Fraser et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2011).

⁹ During the early stages of my PhD I drew on the concept of hybridisation as a framework through which to understand the dual social-economic nature of cooperatives; bring to light the challenges and tensions that accompanied this dual characteristic (see for example, Ashforth and Reingen, 2014); and explore the ways in which these informed and enabled the emergence of new organisational forms. However, as I engaged with the work of Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2006b; 2003) I began to view the concept as problematic, specifically because it continues to position social enterprise in relation to capitalism: as ‘caught *between* the competing demands of the market logic and the social welfare logic that they combine’ (Pache and Santos, 2013a: 972, emphasis added). An expanded critique of the concept is presented in appendix 1. While moving away from the concept it is important to acknowledge that the work of Pache and Santos (2013a: 996) helped me to understand organisational members, not as ‘actors compromising on their actions’ but as ‘bricoleurs who perform institutional work’.

¹⁰ This aspiration reflects the finding of Luvienne et al. (2010: 5) that ‘shared ownership of the local economy helps root wealth in communities, keeping resources from “leaking out” of the area’.

Steyaert, 2010; Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004; Sepulveda, 2009; Parkinson and Howorth, 2008)¹¹.

In line with much of the literature cited above, within cooperative practice I found myself and fellow cooperators grappling with contradictions between our social mission and financial needs. As will become apparent over the course of this thesis, these contradictions were experienced as an 'ontological characteristic': a form of work in and of itself that became embedded in the organisations' practice, structure and focus (Langer, 2008: 13). Combined with ongoing experiments in democracy, this 'contradiction work' (ibid.) constituted a performative process through which "alternatives"¹² to capitalism were continuously developed, problematised and redeveloped: an experience that sat in stark contrast to the neoliberalising discourse of the events discussed above.

This section has outlined three experiences that shaped the focus of my PhD research. The first and second expressed and recreated a homogenous capitalist narrative and, in doing so, reinforced the inevitability of degeneration. Moreover, they demonstrated a problematic disconnection of means and ends that, as Parker et al. (2014a: 34) argue, 'makes us assume that we have no choice but to use particular methods, or attempt to achieve particular goods'; and restricts opportunities to challenge 'political assumptions that are solidified in organisational configurations' (ibid.: 634). The third experience - my own involvement in cooperative practice - told a different story. This experience challenged the positioning of managerialism as the most desirable and efficient means to social change, and dispelled the myth of capitalist homogeneity by foregrounding and utilising economic diversity. In doing so it reframed approaches to organising as ends in themselves: prefigurative acts that sought, not simply to enable decisions to be made or services to be delivered, but to question the inevitability and necessity of capitalist socio-economic relations (Parker et

¹¹ In response to this there is a widening debate on the role of democracy in social enterprise (Ridley-Duff (2010). However, as recognised by Spear et al. (2007) and Cornforth and Brown (2014), focus has tended to remain on larger scale organisations and related issues of representational democracy.

¹² The plural is important here. As will be explored in chapter 3, cooperatives were not viewed as *the* alternative but as one amongst a necessary plurality of non-capitalist practices.

al., 2014a; Chatterton, 2010a). Again, turning to Parker et al. (2014a: 35), and linking back to concerns over the depoliticisation of social change, I began to see the politically laden nature of means-ends distinctions and consequently became suspicious of claims that 'any means are acceptable to achieve certain ends'. Bringing these three experiences together thus raised curiosity over the role played by organisational form, and more specifically organisational democracy, in both challenging the contention that 'there is no alternative' to capitalism, and opening spaces for post-capitalist praxis. Following an introduction to cooperatives, sections 1.3-1.5 delve deeper into the origins of this curiosity by turning attention to academic literature and claims made by the degeneration thesis.

1.2: A introduction to cooperatives

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA, n.d.) defines a cooperative 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.

Alongside this identity statement are seven principles to which cooperatives should adhere (expanded on in appendix 2): voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; co-operation among co-operatives; and concern for community. Exploring the interconnection between the principles and identity statement Birchall (2012) identified four concerns. These concerns reveal the diversity of the cooperative form, and the positioning of ownership and democratic control as defining features.

First, by reflecting on the historical development¹³ of the cooperative principles and continued debates over what they should include¹⁴, Birchall highlights their socially and contextually constructed (and therefore necessarily fluid) nature. Challenging Puusa and Hekkila's (2015: 5) description of the principles as 'concrete boundaries of conduct and standards for operations', this framing supports instead a view of the cooperative principles as a 'floor' that creates opportunities for, but does not guarantee, collective action (Krishna, 2013: 106; sub-section 4.1.2).

Second, Birchall observes that the identity statement encompasses the first four principles but ignores the latter three. This, Birchall (2012: 73) claims, 'strengthens the argument that there are really four primary and three secondary principles'.

Combined, the 'primary principles' lay the foundations to the member-owned structure of cooperative business. They encompass what Novkovic and Miner (2015: 11) identify as the 'building blocks' for cooperative governance: namely a people centred approach, joint ownership and control, and democracy (see appendix 3 for further detail). In contrast, the 'secondary principles' are conceived as 'aspirations that may or may not be realised' (Birchall, 2012: 73; see also Tomlinson, 2013)¹⁵.

Third, Birchall recognises that, while seeking to encompass all forms¹⁶ and sizes of cooperatives in a variety of contexts (Webb and Novkovic 2014), in practice the identity statement and principles remain best suited to consumer cooperatives. Through experience as a practitioner I found, for example, tension between the

¹³ The current principles were developed from nine principles identified by the Rochdale Pioneers. The Rochdale Pioneers are widely viewed as the founders of the cooperative movement, establishing the first successful consumer cooperative in 1844. A wider discussion on the history of the cooperative movement lies beyond the scope of this thesis. For an interesting insight into the history of worker cooperatives in the UK readers are directed to Bibby (2015). For a wider historical account, see Williams (2010b).

¹⁴ Amongst practitioners' current debates are around the inclusion of employee participation and environmental sustainability.

¹⁵ Prior to carrying out my research I would have concurred with this interpretation. However, analysis presented in this thesis shows the latter three principles to be crucial to both the expression and development of democratic cooperative governance (see also Vieta, 2010; Lewis and Klein, 2004). I would however contend that 'cooperation amongst cooperatives' is too narrow in its focus. Reflecting members' belief that post-capitalist economies encompass 'many no's and many yeses' (Kingsnorth, 2003; chapter 3), my own research revealed cooperation to extend to multiple "alternative" organisations that shared in certain values and aims. Moreover, cooperation extended beyond the temporal bounds of their cooperatives to include 'cooperation' with future cooperatives.

¹⁶ Consumer, producer, worker, community and solidarity (or multi-stakeholder) cooperatives.

principle of ‘voluntary open membership’ and the needs of worker cooperatives, where membership is limited by financial considerations and business demands. These tensions have been acknowledged in the development of ‘The Worker Cooperative Code’ (Banton et al., 2012; see also Cannell, 2008; Northcountry Cooperative Foundation, 2006¹⁷). The Code, once again, highlights the diverse nature of cooperatives, drawing attention to the different legal forms (see also Cheney et al., 2014), and varying governance and management structures (including collective control, self-managing work teams and a hierarchy system; see appendix 4 for details) that worker cooperatives can adopt. Reflecting also a focus on ‘primary principles’ seen in the ‘identity statement’, the Code (Banton et al., 2012: 1) defines worker cooperatives as:

[...] trading enterprises, owned and run by the people who work in them, who have an equal say in what the business does, and an equitable share in the wealth created from the products and services they provide.

Finally, Birchall (2012: 73) observes that the identity statement ‘contains a hidden assumption that there are two organisations – an association of persons and an enterprise’. Recognising that this distinction supports perceived tensions between democratic structure and business strategy, Birchall (ibid.) advocates an approach that ‘integrates these, seeing the value of good governance and treating members as an asset rather than a liability’. Supporting this interconnection and foregrounding members as assets, Ridley-Duff (2012) explains that what distinguishes cooperatives from their capitalist counterparts is the admittance of stakeholders as members for a reason other than the supply of financial capital. In the case of worker cooperatives, admittance is based on members’ ability to contribute labour. This re-framing reflects and supports two conditions that Zamagni (2014: 161), following Bratman, identifies as central to facilitating cooperation:

¹⁷ While written in the US this guide highlights the unique challenges and considerations facing worker cooperatives. It does however continue to emphasise representative democracy over more collectivist approaches.

[1] a commitment to joint activity, which means that it is impossible, in practice, to measure the specific contribution of each participant to the joint product [2] a commitment to mutual support, whereby each engages to help the other in their efforts to attain the best possible final results.

Together, these conditions, combined with a third – ‘mutual responsiveness’ (Zamagni, 2014: 161) – capture the essence of cooperative working.

Adding to this core essence Novkovic (2012) describes cooperatives as having a ‘dual character’, in which social and economic goals are understood as interdependent (Somerville, 2007; Atzeni and Vieta, 2014; Cornforth, 2004; Zamagni and Zamagni, 2010). This dual character frames ‘profitability [as] a means to an end rather than an end in itself’ (Cornforth, 2004: 13) and brings together ‘market’ and ‘non-market’ transactions and labour relations, monetised and non-monetised exchange, and paid and voluntary labour. Such weaving together of different economic logics and ‘seemingly incongruent practices’ is understood as a core component of cooperatives’ ‘definitional work’¹⁸ (McMillan, 2012: 6), and central to the identity and mission of the organisation (see also Puusa et al., 2013).

The dual characteristic referred to above is reflected in academic and practitioner literature that argues the cooperative case on two fronts. First, on the basis of their contribution to GDP¹⁹, the number of members using their products or services, and their benefits in relation to employment; and second on the basis of their contribution to tackling sustainable development goals, including issues of poverty, environmental sustainability and inequality. The former adopts both a celebratory and defensive tone, highlighting the size and global reach of the cooperative sector as proof that

¹⁸ The work of identifying conceptually what ‘holds objects together in a boundary, what distinguishes them from other entities, what is in and why, what is out and why’ (McMillan, 2012: 6).

¹⁹ For example, the third edition of the World Co-operative Monitor (ICA, 2014) revealed that the turnover of the largest 300 co-operatives has grown by 11.6% to reach 2.2 trillion USD in 2012, equivalent to the GDP of Brazil. The overall turnover of the next 2,000 co-operatives in the 65 countries surveyed by the Monitor totals 2.6 trillion USD.

cooperatives offer a viable alternative to capitalism²⁰. Much of this literature draws on economic language, using quantitative data to argue cooperatives' potential in relation to efficiency, productivity and economic growth (Burdin and Dean, 2009; Fakhfakh et al., 2012; Pencavel et al., 2006; Podivinsky and Stewart, 2007; Maietta and Sena, 2008)²¹. Consideration over the advantage of democratic control in this literature is similarly limited to questions of economic efficiency, productivity and competition (see also Johnson, 2006; Luhman, 2007). While these arguments go some way to challenging the rhetoric that 'there is no alternative' to capitalism, the shifting of performance measures from commercial to cooperative organisations has the reverse effect (Novkovic, 2012; Borzaga et al., 2009; Puusa et al., 2013). Such approaches underplay 'associative factors and social movement factors' and 'the principles and values that have long determined the activities of these enterprises' (Borzaga et al., 2009: 16)²². Moreover, in bringing to the fore cooperatives' contradictory desire to offer an alternative to capitalism and to compete with it on a global scale, the literature concurs with the framing of cooperatives as a (Sandoval, 2016: 58 following Marx; see also Tomlinson, 2013):

²⁰ For example, immediately after highlighting the need to move debate on democratisation beyond 'the typical business case', Cheney et al. (2014: 595) state: 'Thus, it is necessary to identify which worker-owner cooperative organizations are successful, with special interest in those competing in the global markets, such as Mondragon. At the same time, it is important to identify the features and experiences that are transferable not only to other worker cooperatives but also to other organizational forms'. This is representative of cooperative double-breath speak (see section 1.3). More worryingly, it is representative of the pervasive nature of dominant of capitalist narratives that equate success with organisational size and growth (see chapter 5 for further discussion). Continued concern over growth and efficiency in relation to the number of firms, the number of employees and revenue generated (e.g. Luvienne et al, 2010) is reflected in practitioner debates over approaches to "scaling-up".

I do not wish to suggest here that growth in cooperatives is unwelcome or that it should be discouraged, but rather that focusing on growth and size detracts from the benefits of small worker cooperatives and the potential for 'expansion' through the connection of existing and diverse organisations. It acts, in other words, to delegitimise the potential of small change.

²¹ The tone of this literature is captured by Altman (2014: 177, emphasis added) who explains: 'Although cooperatives don't dominate the market, they are important, especially in some sectors. This relative success needs to be explained and modelled. Indeed, the cooperative model for organising business is adopted by individuals because it is *deemed to be a pathway for economic success*'. This economic success, Altman (2014: 176) argues, is a result of the 'incentive environment in cooperative organisations that encourages relatively high levels of productivity and reduces transaction costs'.

²² Reflecting a fellow co-operators' comment, '*the word coop is not enough*' (Langmead, 2012: 63; see also Krishna, 2013) we are reminded here that, if cooperatives are to fulfil a social role, measures of progress and accounting must go beyond concerns over economic added value to include ongoing reflection and critique of practice based on cooperatives' identity and measures of well-being (see Mills and Davies, 2013). This point will be explored further in section 1.4.

[...] pre-figurative project that simultaneously challenges capitalist reality and is constrained by it [...] naturally reproduc[ing] in all cases, in their present organisation, all the defects of the existing system.

The second argument focuses on the contribution cooperatives make to tackling the social and environmental consequences of capitalism (see for example Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Jackson, 2011; Harvey, 2014; Springer, 2016). Reflecting this potential contribution, the 'Co-ops for 2030 campaign' (ICA, 2016; see also ILO, 2014) states:

The co-operative business model has sustainable development at its core, being based on ethical values and principles. Locally rooted and people driven, co-operatives contribute to sustainable economic growth²³, social development and environmental responsibility.

Fisher (2013: 142) supports this claim, arguing that cooperatives are able to incorporate the social, economic and ecological imperatives of sustainable development through the 'cultivation of economic democracy at a community level'. Reflecting the 'building blocks' (Novkovic and Miner, 2015: 11) of cooperative governance Zamagni (2014: 195) highlights that, in cooperatives 'people rather than capital form the focus of activity'. This focus increases opportunities for the pursuit of ethical rather than economic aims (Birchall, 2013) and is indicative of cooperatives' relational nature and concern over meeting the needs of members and serving the 'common good' (Zamagni, 2014). Adding to this argument, Cato (2012: 47) draws attention to the principles of equity and solidarity which 'mean that we cannot consider our well-being to the exclusion of the well-being of others'. Drawing together these latter claims, cooperatives are conceived as spaces where economy, society and environment reconnect in and through the (re)negotiation of economic priorities and the re-claimed 'right to judge what is of value' (Cato, 2012: 49). These advantages

²³ In the use of the oxymoron 'sustainable growth' we see another example of the contradiction discussed above. As Jackson (2009: 8) explains: 'simplistic assumptions that capitalism's propensity for efficiency will allow us to stabilise the climate and protect against resource scarcity are nothing short of delusional. Those who promote decoupling as an escape route from the dilemma of growth need to take a closer look at the historical evidence – and at the basic arithmetic of growth'.

combine to support a new economic paradigm 'built on social relationships' (Novkovic and Webb, 2014: 288) and aspirations for greater equality, sustainability and resilience: a steady-state economy that serves people and not the other way around (see Mellor, 2012; Phelan et al., 2012; Rees, 2014).

Turning to issues concerning participants in this study, academic literature has also explored the role worker cooperatives have played in creating resilience against, and responding to, the impacts of economic crisis (Birchall, 2013; Birchall and Ketilson, 2013; Cheney et al., 2014; Novkovic, 2008; Roelants and Sanchez Bajo, 2011)²⁴. Since the collapse of the Argentinian economy in 1999 (Birch and Mykhnenko, 2010) South America has seen an increase in the occurrence of worker-recuperated firms in response to factory closures (Leyshon, 2005; Atzeni and Vieta, 2014; Chatterton, 2005; Ranis, 2016). Similarly responding to challenges of unemployment and work precarity, North America, the UK and Europe have experienced a rise in cooperatives set up to support the growing number of self-employed workers, and those working in the creative industries and informal economy (Krishna, 2013; Restakis, 2010; Sandoval, 2016; Stir, 2016; for examples see Cultural Cooperatives, undated)²⁵. Focusing on an alliance between a US steel workers facing closure and the Mondragon Cooperative Complex, Seda-irizarry (2011: 377-8) thus claims:

The instalment of cooperatives has become an alternative solution to the problems of unemployment that accompany capitalism and its crises. In other words, cooperatives have arisen, not necessarily as an all-out confrontation with capitalism in the prevalent understanding of taking power, but as ways to ensure the immediate survival of their members by providing them with sources of income.

²⁴ Reflecting on the development of the cooperative movement in the UK and America from 1800's to today, Birchall (2013) and Krishna (2013) show this response to be a common historical trend. While this stimulus has remained, Krishna (2013: 116; see also William, 2007) explains that both the proponents of worker cooperatives and their motivations have changed: 'The cooperatives of the 1880s were part of a broad-based labor movement; skilled and semi-skilled workers explicitly used cooperatives as a way to guarantee employment. The 1960s surge in the cooperative movement came from an educated, middle-class countercultural and anti-authoritarian base that rebelled against American individualism and materialism'. More recently we have seen these two motivations entwine.

²⁵ The need for cooperative working models and employee ownership in relation to worker rights and work security is also discussed in relation to the sharing economy (see for example Ranis, 2016; Shor, 2016; Srnicek, 2016).

Supporting the potential for an economic paradigm shift, longitudinal studies of worker-recuperated firms offer a more nuanced view (for example see Harnecker, 2009). These studies reveal worker cooperatives' potential to create 'new subjectivities and new kinds of politics' and, over time, become sites of resistance that reject 'both hierarchical control and alienated labour as well as (self-)exploitation and precarity' (Sandoval, 2016: 55). Krishna (2013; see also Williams, 2007a; Seda-irizarry, 2011) adds that cooperatives can become sites of collective action and political consciousness by challenging conceptions about work and capital ownership. Through a review of academic literature, Luhman (2007: 463) brings the historical nature of these aims to the fore, explaining that:

A worker coop is held as an organisational solution to the alienation of workers from their labour [...] Experiments in worker cooperatives are inspired in part by a social consciousness that prioritises shared economic opportunity rather than the maximisation of individual wealth.

This transformative potential, and its connection to the praxis of democracy, is empirically explored in chapter 5.

1.3: The degeneration thesis and democratic praxis

The previous section highlighted the finely balanced line that cooperatives tread between their social aims and economic needs, and the challenges of operating within the capitalist system. The case of the Cooperative Bank exemplifies this fine line and associated risks of degeneration (Cornforth et al., 1988; Cornforth, 1995)²⁶. Following this example, and the experiences outlined in section 1.1, concerns over degeneration played a central role in the development of this research project. Over the course of

²⁶ Claims of the Cooperative Bank's degeneration are supported by Cannell (2016) who explains: '[the Cooperative Group's] societies were ruled by management hierarchies – and members, with their clumsy and slow representative democracy, had little say or control in the face of that power [...] Certainly the quest for gigantism, ever larger combined societies, was good for senior managers who enjoyed an astonishing escalation in remuneration. Top executive pay is a good indicator of the power of a hierarchy. In its nine years of existence, the Co-op Group chief executive salary differential (compared to shop floor staff) increased from approximately 33:1 to an eye-watering 200:1 (but is now apparently going down to nearer 90:1). Are Co-op Group member owners genuinely in control of 'their' top executive pay packages?' In this quote, Cannell highlights the link between degeneration and democracy, discussed in sub-section 1.3.2 (see also Bibby, 2012).

my PhD the concept lost some of its hold as focus moved progressively towards diverse praxes of re-thinking and re-making the economy. While I no longer consider the main contribution of this research to be towards literature countering the degeneration thesis, the concept continues to serve a purpose. Most prominently it highlights the importance of studying democratic praxis and maintaining the means-ends interconnection as an act of re-politicisation. Exploring the link between democratic praxis and risks of degeneration illustrates that if cooperatives are to remain 'rebel and insurgent' (Meira, 2014: 714) democratic praxis needs to be, not only maintained, but re-understood as an end in itself: an emergent, transgressive and prefigurative act through which cooperatives engage in ongoing 'contradiction work' (Langer, 2008: 13). Furthermore, the degeneration thesis brings to the fore specific challenges associated with efficiency, hierarchy, and understandings of success, which this thesis empirically explores. The factors contributing to risks of degeneration, and the centrality of democracy to its resistance, forms the focus of the next two sub-sections.

1.3.1: The degeneration thesis

Cornforth et al. (1986) divide proponents of the degeneration thesis into three groups determined by what they identify as the key drivers. The first focus of 'constitutional degeneration'. This position assumes that 'economic self-interest', and specifically a desire to maximise individual returns on profit, will lead to the exclusion of workers from membership and, consequently, to the degradation of worker ownership and control (Cornforth et al., 1986: 115; see also Gibson-Graham 2003). Reinforcing this concern, Puusa and Hokkila (2015: 11) position tensions between individuality and communality, rather than those arising from cooperatives' dual characteristic, as the 'most inherent contradiction in worker co-operative operations'. We will see this argument challenged in section 5.2.

The second group adopt a Marxist position arguing that, when operating as 'islands of socialism in a sea of capitalism' (Tomlinson, 1980: 58; Atzeni, 2012), worker cooperatives will be subject to relations of production that drive down wages and push towards the adoption of organisational structures conducive to profit maximisation

(Cornforth et al., 1986). Reflecting concerns raised through my own attendance of social enterprise events (section 1.1) Chaves et al. (2008) similarly identify institutional contexts and policies that promote 'market-based solutions to social problems' (Eikenberry, 2009: 585) as external sources of degeneration. In this context, cooperatives are positioned to appeal to both critics and moderate reformers of capitalism, with the latter viewing them as supportive of 'neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurship and individual responsibility' (Sandoval, 2016: 58)²⁷. As illustrated in the previous section, those in the latter camp seek to legitimise social enterprises through logics of financial self-sufficiency and the use of 'mainstream business practices' (Cameron, 2010: 93) characterised by hierarchical structures and the specialisation and division of labour (see also Amin et al., 2003a). Expanding on these arguments and linking back to concerns over constitutional degeneration, Borzaga et al. (2009: 3) add that by reinforcing the assumed prevalence of self-interested and competitive behaviour, policies such as those referred to by Chaves et al. (2008) and outlined in section 1.2, make individual and collective interests *appear* incompatible. As suggested by 'the rise of enterprise culture at the grassroots' (Chatterton, 2010b: 196; Hodkinson and Chatterton, 2006), demands for efficiency, productivity and rapid responses to market changes, thus create an environment discouraging of cooperatives' solidaristic ethic (Harnecker, 2012: 119)²⁸ and interrelated praxes of direct democracy. Reflecting on their own experience of these demands in Brazil, Meira (2014: 714; see also Seda-irizary, 2011; Spear and Thomas, 2015) concluded that cooperatives are 'contradictorily intertwined with the capitalist system' and proposes 'an understanding of workers' praxis as situated and constrained but also rebel and insurgent'. Examples of this entwinement, and consequent moves towards 'specialized and autonomous management' (Harnecker, 2012: 121), can be found in literature on worker-recuperated firms (Atzeni and Ghigliani, 2007; Meira, 2014; Vieta, 2012).

²⁷ This was illustrated in David Cameron's 'Big Society' and its promotion of public sector buyouts (Wells et al., 2011) and the development of policies such as the Public Service (Social Value) Act 2012. The latter was 'developed with the explicit aim of facilitating the growth of social enterprises, charities and cooperatives' (Dayson, 2017: 397).

²⁸ This is further illustrated by the case of Mondragon where, in contrast to the case cited here, 'the heritage of communitarian philosophy' supports a solidaristic ethic (Ridley-Duff, 2010: 138). To the challenges identified here, Mills and Davies (2013: 9) add a prevailing 'consumer culture' that they claim has the 'tendency to make us apathetic, complacent, or just plain lazy. It discourages civic participation, and encourages the pursuit of personal pleasure and satisfaction'.

Bringing these arguments and examples together, we are heeded of Chatterton and Pickerill's (2010: 487) warning that cooperatives may find themselves 'cornered by modes of neoliberal governance, self-discipline and a creeping individualism' that simultaneously challenge their democratic form and their underlying social mission.

Beyond, but interconnected with, these external sources of degeneration Cornforth et al. (1988) highlight sources of 'internal degeneration', including 'indiscipline, lack of knowledge of the market and an unwillingness to adopt technical innovations' (Cornforth, 1995: 4). Attributed to democratic worker control, it is argued that these 'shortcomings' lead to either failure or the development of hierarchical forms of management and ownership. The latter outcome is perpetuated by the context and legitimising narratives outlined above that create and reinforce managerialism (Cornforth et al., 1986: 119; see also sub-section 4.2.3). Looking beyond the impact of neoliberal discourse, Ng and Ng (2009: 184) explain that 'power based on personal attributes is difficult to eliminate'. While such attributes are viewed as beneficial leadership qualities in hierarchical organisations they 'are a more complex and nuanced issue in co-ops' (ibid.), bringing with them the potential to increase or create gaps between 'leaders' and 'followers'. The development of informal hierarchies, in which control comes to lie in the hands of a few charismatic or founder members, may therefore limit capacities to resist, or create pathways for, degenerative tendencies (Varman and Chakrabarti, 2004; Kokkinidis, 2014). Similarly focusing on the potential impact of members, Somerville (2007: 9) highlights the risk of degeneration arising from the recruitment of workers based on their understanding and experience of market-based economic relations and competition, with little regard for the alignment of personal and organisational values²⁹. Conversely, members who have prior experience of solidarity and democratic participation can help to increase collective democratic consciousness and thus reduce risks of degeneration (Harnecker, 2012).

²⁹ This occurred in the case of the Cooperative Bank where CEOs of capitalist firms were brought into the cooperative to address financial issues. It highlights also the importance of finding the 'right mix of people' discussed in chapter 4.

Recent literature empirically countering the degeneration thesis is limited, with research focusing on large scale cooperatives and employee-owned firms (Bakikoa et al., 2004; Storey et al., 2014; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014), and cooperatives arising from worker take-overs, specifically in South America (Meira, 2014; Vieta, 2012; Harnecker, 2012). Reflecting arguments made in relation to internal and constitutional degeneration this literature highlights the importance of maintaining 'ideological resistance to the *concepts* of leadership and management' (Ng and Ng, 2009: 198, emphasis added) and a concomitant commitment to an ethos of solidarity. Building on these claims, the next section expands on why this thesis concentrates specifically on democratic praxis.

1.3.2: Degeneration and organisational form

Literature on the degeneration thesis draws clear connections between the risk of degeneration and the praxis of democracy (Cornforth, 1995; Ng and Ng, 2009; Somerville; 2007). Illustrating this connection, Chen et al. (2013: 857) explain that capitalism, through the adoption of hierarchy and managerialism, prioritises profit, market efficiency and individual ownership over 'values of egalitarianism and social justice'. Similarly, Polletta (2012: 5) claims that both democratic and hierarchical organisational forms may be adopted for ideological reasons, with the latter connoting 'efficiency and seriousness'. Based on the understanding that values are expressed through both the way organisations are run (means) and the outcomes they produce (ends), it follows, that when exposed to the pressure to adopt non-democratic organisational forms, cooperatives will face deep challenges to the values and practices that shape their mission and actions. Thus, a cooperative's democratic organisational form can be understood simultaneously as a way of resisting degeneration and as a specific point of vulnerability that is heightened if the link between values and organisational form fails to be recognised and enacted (Somerville, 2007; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014).

The centrality of democracy to degenerative resistance is further reinforced through the four approaches to regeneration, identified by Cornforth (1995). Through a review of empirically-based literature Cornforth (1995) highlights the importance of

reproducing active membership through ‘careful selection and socialization’ (p.30); reperforming values and democratic structure through everyday action; and maintaining an openness to opposition, criticism and difference, in and through meaningful member participation. Speaking to the epistemological and ontological values of democracy, Eikenberry (2009: 583, emphasis added) argues that ‘one possible way to resist colonization by the market is to pursue a *counterdiscourse* to democratize everyday life’. Drawing direct links between this contention and cooperative practice Nolan et al. (2013: 107) contend that, by distinguishing themselves as democratic and community focused, cooperatives:

[...] can have an educative role to play as agents of progressive social change and give workers the skills to analyse [and develop new identities against] the existing economic and cultural hegemony.

Adding strength to this argument, Chatterton and Pickerill (2010: 481) explain that creating spaces where people can act collectively to solve social problems, rather than as individualised consumers of the market, enacts a ‘society [that] can be bettered through the achievement of collective goals rather than individual aspiration’. The creation of such spaces helps to dissolve the mask of capitalist inevitability by revealing perceived shared ideologies and aspirations for consumption, competition and infinite growth to be a *product* of certain practices and interactions³⁰. Through these combined claims we see that our collective flourishing is constituted in ‘the sorts of people we create and the sort of organisational arrangement that they make and that make them’ (Parker et al., 2014a: 632).

Following the arguments presented here, cooperatives are increasingly being identified as sites of economic re-thinking and re-making (Novkovic and Webb, 2014; Restakis, 2010; Mellor, 2012; see also Wolff, 2012). This shift has (re)gained momentum³¹ following the 2008 financial crisis that brought the problems of the

³⁰ Following Fournier’s (2008) work on degrowth economics, such moves to escape from the economy as a system of representation offers a point of departure from dominant and inevitably degenerative capitalism.

³¹ This momentum was captured by an international conference on cooperative economics, held to celebrate the declaration of 2012 as the International Year of the Cooperative (Webb and Cheney, 2014). This conference sought to offer cooperative leaders a ‘profound understanding of the importance of cooperatives in creating a new

capitalist system (once again) to the fore (Chatterton, 2016). Further supporting this momentum, social movements such as Occupy have 'brought the practical necessity and ethical desirability of leadership into question' opening opportunities for alternative modes of organising to be explored (Sutherland et al., 2014: 270; section 1.5)³². Bringing together the 'rise of ideas of democracy in organizations' with cooperatives' ability to respond to crisis, Cheney et al. (2014: 592) conclude:

Cooperatives, including worker-owned enterprises, have important roles to play in reimagining and reconfiguring the economy as a whole, as well as bringing to the table alternative forms of governance.

Despite such claims, there is limited empirical investigation into how processes of re-imagining and re-performance are played out in cooperatives, or how they are supported by the day-to-day praxis of democracy. In the cases that exist, focus remains on large, well-established cooperatives such as Mondragon in Spain (Gibson-Graham 2003; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014; Heales et al., 2017), or on worker-recuperated firms (Restakis, 2010; Arthur et al., 2010)³³. Both debates on, and empirical evidence for, the transformative potential of smaller scale worker cooperatives are more limited (Cornwell, 2012; Byrne and Healy, 2006; Kokkinidis, 2014)³⁴. This thesis contributes to these debates, arguing that democratic praxis helps to transform risks of degeneration into creative and productive moments of 'self-

economy and a better world' (Novkovic and Webb, 2014: 9). The maintenance of this momentum is reflected in sessions held during the 2016 International Symposium of Cooperatives and in recent books, including 'Cooperatives in a post-growth era' (Novkovic and Webb, 2014) and 'Cooperatives confront capitalism: challenging the neoliberal economy' (Ranis, 2016), and journal special issues (for example, Journal of Cooperative Studies, 2012 (Cato, 2012); Organization, 2014 (Cheney et al., 2014)).

³¹ This supports Kallis et al's (2009: 15; emphasis added) claim that 'the current crisis provides opportunities at an *epistemological* level, to escape from economism'. Economism is the notion that all areas of life, including social problems, can be reduced to economic dimensions, and that 'market power is the most important feature' (Diamantopoulos, 2012: 43).

³³ Following Pickerill and Chatterton (2006), Arthur et al (2010; 2004) argue, through their study of cooperatively run mines in Wales, for social enterprises to be reframed from a New Social Movement Perspective as 'autonomous geographies'. This reframing shifts the focus towards their transgressive potential to create free, diffuse and alternative economic spaces that challenge logics of domination through 'symbolic explorations and expressions of identity' (Buechler, 1995: 458).

³⁴ In cooperative practice these debates are played out in zines, magazines and events established to share information between grassroots and community organisations, and are deeply embedded in the anarchist sphere (e.g. STIR; Radical Roots; Seeds for Change).

scrutiny, self-cultivation and economic self-determination’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p.xxvi; 2006a: xxvi).

1.4: Moving forwards: an introduction to why we need economic reframing

If we see the global economy as a kind of evolutionary, adaptive system then we can expect one type of business to thrive at the expense of another. However, if one type dies out completely then the stock of existing solutions will have declined. (Birchall, 2013: 14)

This quote brings to the fore two concomitant needs: the need to reframe the economy and the need to embrace economic diversity. First illustrated through my own experience, these needs have been reinforced in section 1.2 and 1.3.1 where the challenges of living within, against and beyond capitalism were explored. In the former section, we saw that the persistent casting of the ‘social economy in the image of the mainstream’ (Amin et al., 2003a: 125) reinforces economic-rational perspectives and positions cooperatives as an ‘inherent, if elusive, part of the neoliberal agenda’ (Dey and Teasdale, 2013: 249). The latter section, revealed that claims made by the degeneration thesis are born from the perceived necessity of competition and hierarchical organisational forms³⁵ as a means to success and efficiency, and the assumption that individual interests will prevail over those of the collective (Burkett, 2011; Cornforth et a., 1986). In both cases, capitalism is portrayed as a homogenous monolithic form that shapes not only the production, distribution and circulation of capital but, more fundamentally, the way we think of and situate ourselves within the economy. Positioning cooperatives as “alternative” to this all-encompassing capitalism restricts opportunities to ‘represent economic difference’ (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 41); account for and validate non-economic perceptions and enactments of growth

³⁵ Tomlinson (1980: 59) adds that the assumed inevitable adoption of hierarchical organisational forms is reinforced by the positioning of hierarchy (and specifically ‘scientific management’) as ‘an essential form of capitalist management’ that encompasses and expresses ‘the essence of capitalism’. This ignores the already existing diversity of organisational forms that exist under capitalism (ibid., 63).

(Cameron, 2010; Cornwell, 2012); and recognise the contribution that cooperatives make to society beyond GDP (Borzaga et al., 2009). These restrictions highlight a need for new approaches to conceptualising and measuring the impact and value of cooperatives: approaches that depart from the application of “rational” logics of efficiency and economic growth and enable instead the envisioning of ‘a plurality of entrepreneurial forms’ and outcomes (Borzaga et al., 2009: 14). Concomitantly they need to take into account values of equality, egalitarianism and democracy so as to reconnect the means and ends of organising (Ng and Ng, 2009).

Following Gibson-Graham (2006b), and returning to Birchall’s quote, I go a step further and argue that we need to engage in the more fundamental process of reconceptualising the economy. This reconceptualisation occurs through an ongoing process of deconstructing the hegemony of capitalism, fostering a language of economic difference, and cultivating post-capitalist subjectivities (Gibson-Graham, 2006b). As will be explored in chapter 3, combined, these processes support a shift from the performative dominance of capitalism to the performative plurality of (post-capitalist) economic diversity. This reconceptualisation encompasses a growing scepticism towards revolutionary change³⁶. It promotes instead relational challenges to capitalism, constituting the expansion and connection of already existing and localised non-capitalist practice and the re-making of socio-economic relations in the here and now. These relational acts necessarily accept cooperatives’ identities as ever-becoming, plural and contestable, determined not by neoliberal narratives alone, but through multifaceted and discursive economic engagements and relationships within and beyond the capitalist economy (Dey and Teasdale, 2013; Chatterton, 2010b). As such it offers an ‘alternative to [the] reductionist thinking’ (Diamantopoulos, 2012: 43) of economism and embraces ‘wider networks of influence and aspiration’ (ibid.: 44).

Limits to our impression of “the possible” are exacerbated by a focus on ‘studies concerning the collapse of equality [and] democratic participation’ that Nolan et al.

³⁶ For a review and historical perspective on the challenges associated with utopian revolutionary positions and their connection to the degeneration thesis, see Gibson-Graham (2003: 129-138).

(2013: 104) recognise as outnumbering those advocating and exploring non-capitalist practice. Wolff (2012: 183) adds to this concern the need to balance the elaboration of worker cooperatives in theory with their ‘concrete practical establishment and expansion’. Capturing the need to bring together theory and practice, Rothschild-Whitt (1979: 525) explains:

It is in the conceptualisation of alternative forms that organisation theory has been weakest, and it is here that [the] experimentation of collectives will broaden our understanding.

The next section expands on the need for further empirical studies into collective organising. In doing so it highlights my rationale for carrying out an ethnographic study through the lens of diverse economies theory.

1.5: The absence of the small worker cooperatives (practices of direct democracy)

Having explored the role of organisational form in resisting degeneration this section outlines why I chose to focus on the praxis of collective, direct democracy in small UK cooperatives³⁷. This approach to democracy is described in the Worker Cooperative Code (Banton et al., 2011: 3) as follows:

When people first³⁸ come together to form a small worker co-operative, they often work as a collective, so that governance, management and operations are not separate spheres. Members are at the same formal level as directors, or they act as if directors, using a flat structure where everyone has an equal say. Some people may take the lead in particular areas or activities, but roles can be changed depending on circumstances.

³⁷ I define a ‘small worker cooperative’ as any cooperative that is able to sustain direct democracy and collective, consensus decision-making.

³⁸ Reflecting arguments made in the remainder of this section, this definition frames collective organising as a transitional phase, implying a progressive tendency towards representational democracy.

The review of literature presented here reveals that discussions on, and empirical studies of, this approach are limited in both practitioner and academic spheres. Through an 18-month ethnographic study this thesis contributes to these discussions, offering a UK perspective together with new insights on the purpose and day-to-day practice of direct democracy in two worker cooperatives.

A systematic literature review on worker-ownership carried out by Luhman (2007) revealed only 22 ethnographic or case-based studies on UK cooperatives. My own searches, focusing on literature on worker cooperatives published since the financial crisis of 2008³⁹, found only three studies: Nolan et al's (2009) reflexive article on worker cooperatives in Northern Ireland, Gavin et al's (2014) review of worker cooperative sector in Ireland, and Cannell's (2015) ethnographic account of Suma Wholefoods. Delving further into this limited literature, both within and beyond the UK, I found like Luhman (2006) and Land and King (2014) a specific gap in studies describing and engaging with the messy realities of collective democratic organising. Despite recognition that democracy 'permeates the entire organisation' (Novkovic, 2013: 93), as demonstrated by Beeman et al. (2009), Kokkinidis (2014) and Ng and Ng (2009), discussions on cooperative governance have tended to be restricted to practices of representational democracy⁴⁰ and associated issues of board competencies and practices⁴¹, with a specific focus on larger scale organisations

³⁹ Literature on worker cooperatives is far more prolific between 1970 and 1990 following a resurgence in the 1980s (Spear and Thomas, 2015; for example, Cornforth et al, 1988; Oakeshott, 1978). My decision to exclude this literature and focus instead on research published since 2008 was four-fold. First, as discussed in section 1.1, the policy context that has emerged since the financial crisis of 2008 has placed new and distinct pressure on cooperatives and their organising practices. Second, cooperatives are working against a different political and economic backdrop that, as expressed through Occupy Movements, has brought with it a growing desire to prefigure alternatives to representative democracy (Raza and Kurnik, 2012; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Mills and Davies, 2013). Third, and interrelatedly, Occupy Movements have 'brought the practical necessity and ethical desirability of leadership into question, opening up a space to examine alternatives to leadership within organisations' (Sutherland et al., 2014: 760). Finally, since the research of the 1980s and 90s, understandings of direct democracy and consensus decision-making have changed. Specifically, the latter has shifted from a concern over 'unanimity of opinion' and the suppression of difference 'in the interest of unity' (Maeckelbergh, 2009: 17; Polletta, 2012) to a stance aligned with agonistic pluralism (Mouffe, 1999). While I am referring here to a shift in social movement thinking, my own experience suggests that such shifts influence grassroots cooperatives, not least because of cross-overs in involvement and worldviews.

⁴⁰ For a critical discussion on representational democracy in a small worker cooperative see Jaumier (2017).

⁴¹ A similar trend can be seen in wider research on non-profit organisations (Renz and Anderson, 2014; Guo et al., 2014; Reid, 2014). Freiwirth (2014) introduces the concept of 'community-engagement governance' that seeks to extend governance responsibility across the organisation to include multiple key stakeholders. While an interesting development that recognises the distinction between 'the board' and governance functions and the limits of representational democracy in terms of meaningful participation, the board retains its presence.

(Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014; Forcadell, 2005; De Normanville et al., 2015; Cheney, 2002; Spear et al., 2007)⁴². This focus is mirrored in the chosen cover image (see appendix 5) and content of a recent International Cooperative Alliance report (Novkovic and Miner, 2015) focused on cooperative governance, and in the principle of democratic member control included below (emphasis added). In both cases the practice of collective consensus decision-making and direct democracy remain relatively absent⁴³.

*Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women **servicing as elected representatives are accountable to the membership**. In primary co-operatives members have **equal voting rights** (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.*

Discussions on direct democracy have been far more prevalent in the practices of, and academic literature on, anti-capitalist social movements. Focusing on the former, and linking back to worker cooperatives, a grassroots commitment to direct democracy and consensus decision-making is expressed in zines and handbooks produced by organisations such as Seeds for Change (2013) and Radical Routes (2015). Reflecting on personal experience, these organisations, and the democratic approaches they promote, have a strong presence at worker cooperative (Cooperatives UK Worker Cooperative Weekend, Oxford, 2015) and anarchist gatherings (for example, Sheffield Anarchist Book fair, 2015; 2016; 2017) that seek to promote cooperatives as part of a wider movement towards post-capitalist visions of work and economy. Turning to the

⁴² The focus on large rather than small cooperatives may be due to difference in their governance success. As Novkovic and Miner (2015: 10) explain: 'In terms of co-operative governance effectiveness, small co-operatives seem to be doing better than large'. Reflecting this, discussions at cooperative practitioner events often turned to the question of how to 'scale-up' without losing direct and collectivist approaches to democracy that have been successful at smaller scales. While this may be one reason, reflection on the literature cited here suggests also that that focus is grounded in a concern for demonstrating cooperative potential to be economically successful and competitive in a global market.

⁴³ Direct democracy is mentioned four times in the International Cooperative Alliance report (Novkovic and Miner, 2015), once as a way to describe what representative democracy is not (83), twice in a definitional capacity (18) and once to describe the practice of 'small independent units' involved in networked governance (20). As Bibby (2012) and Cannell (2016) problematise the prominence of representational democracy highlighted here is also reflected in practice where, in large scale cooperative such as the Cooperative Group, managers retain control over the running of the business and the elected board can make decisions without consultation of members.

latter, ethnographic research carried out at sites of activism and Occupation offers rich and inspiring accounts of organising that bring to the fore both the challenges and prefigurative potential (see Murray, 2014 for critical perspective) of self-organising and consensus decision-making (Della Porter and Diani, 2009; Graeber, 2013; Miller, 2011; Maeckelbergh, 2009; 2012; 2011; Notes from Nowhere, 2003). Most prominently this literature has helped me to understand democracy as ‘a process of becoming-other-that-one-now-is through encounters with difference’ (Razsa and Kurnik, 2012: 240). This framing grounds democracy in ongoing processes of learning-through-action and ‘norms of openness and mutual respect’ (Polletta, 2012: 7); positions conflict as a source of creativity and innovation; and recognises the non-fixity of individual and collective ways of thinking and being. Furthermore, this research places emphasis on starting from where we are: from our experiences of contradiction and frustration at the barriers we face, rather than from a vision of where we wish to be. Alongside these positive images, and following an understanding of democracy as a product of its own critique, the literature also identifies issues of inequality, exclusion, and inefficiency arising from lengthy decision-making process and invisible structures of friendship and shared values (Della Porta, 2005; Polletta, 2012; Smith and Glidden, 2012). As will become evident in chapter 4, these framings and identified challenges have informed the analysis of my own findings. However, while contributing to my understanding of the meaning and role of democracy, transferable learnings in relation to day-to-day practices of democracy are limited by differences in the scale, temporality and purpose of organising.

Investigation into the praxis of direct democracy in small scale organisations took me to Pickerill and Chatterton (2006), Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) and Chatterton's (2006; 2010b) research carried out with Social Centres. Land and King (2014), Cornwell (2012) and Kokkinidis (2012; 2014) have also made valuable contributions by analysing democratic practice through a lens of anarchist and diverse economies theory in a UK voluntary sector organisation, and a US and Greek worker cooperative. Byrne and Healy (2006) situate their research in the same theoretical space, reporting on conversations with cooperative members attending a practitioner's conference to highlight a plurality in understandings of organising, economy and economic relations. These articles challenge the perception of ‘cooperatives’ as a single, monolithic

movement, revealing instead messy, nuanced and anti-essentialist understandings of democracy and economy. In doing so, they foreground diversity, deliberation and the transformative potential of inter-being and, in line with the social movement literature discussed above, frame organising as a prefigurative act rather than a means to an end. It is to this literature that my thesis contributes, adding a UK perspective.

1.6: Reflections, questions and contributions

Before outlining my research questions, I want to respond to the oft-asked question: 'Can cooperatives really offer an alternative to capitalism?' I do so first, to demonstrate how my own thinking has evolved over the course of my research, and second to emphasise my 'explicitly performative research agenda' (Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 54). Like Ruccio (2011) I find the question both promising and troubling. Promising because it harbours an unspoken conviction that an "alternative" is needed. Troubling because it expresses intense doubt, fuelled by a belief that cooperatives are 'naïve and utopian, already coopted, off-target, too small and weak' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 3) to challenge dominant capitalist practice.

Before researching for my PhD my answer to this question would have been an emotionally charged 'of course they can', followed swiftly by a critique of everything that is wrong with capitalism: a critique that would have spoken more of my desperation for an alternative than the promise of cooperatives. Now my answer would be more nuanced. Again, looking to Ruccio (2011), asking cooperatives to offer *an* alternative is to ask of them too much. It is to replace one problematic strong theory with another, and to expect cooperatives, not only to provide all the answers, but to exist outside of capitalism; a feat that Tomlinson (2013) stresses at length (and section 1.3 shows) is not possible (see also Sandoval 2016). The small cooperatives I worked with and met during my research did not see themselves as 'alternatives' but as spaces of experimentation where contradictions could be debated and different ways of being in and with the world tested and critiqued (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2011; Parker et al., 2014b). They were spaces where members could respond to specific challenges and experiences of inequality, disempowerment, redundancy and precarious work, and where they could connect with other struggles.

Furthermore, they were spaces where the undercurrent of doubt flowing beneath the 'alternative question' could be challenged through self-transformation and acts of prefiguration. My research shows that the under-investigated praxis of direct democracy plays a central role in both regards.

The move from a mainstream/alternative dichotomy towards a more pluralistic view is gaining traction in cooperative literature (Birchall, 2013; Novkovic and Webb, 2014; Zamagni, 2014). It is a shift that I think needs to gain more ground if we are to expose the myth of the degeneration thesis, embrace the inspiring possibilities of contradiction and contingencies, and build post-capitalist worlds (Byrne and Healy, 2006; Gibson-Graham, 2006b). I would suggest therefore that we should not be asking whether cooperatives can offer an alternative but *how* they can open spaces for new economic possibilities to be explored and tested.

1.6.1: Research questions and contributions

Following reflections narrated above, and my aim to explore the role of democracy in relation to the emergence of post-capitalist worlds, this thesis responds to three research questions:

1. How is democracy understood and performed in small worker cooperatives?

This question is concerned with members' lived day-to-day experiences of democracy, and forms the focus of chapter 4. This chapter provides the foundation for questions two and three, where the concern shifts from the praxis, to the purpose, of democracy.

2. What role does democratic praxis play in laying the necessary grounds for members to break away from capitalist hegemony and open spaces for post-capitalist possibilities?

In addressing this question the thesis starts to draw connections between the praxis of democracy and diverse economies theory discussed in chapter 3. More specifically, the question is concerned with the role of democratic praxis in relation to the epistemological and ontological work required for members to move from the performativity of capitalism to performative, post-capitalist praxes of economic diversity and interdependence. The question is addressed in section 5.1.

3. How do cooperative members use democratic praxis, and the everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making that it enables, to deconstruct the hegemony of capitalism, foster economic diversity and interdependence, and cultivate post-capitalist subjectivities?

Continuing to explore the role of democracy through the lens of diverse economies theory, the final question focuses on how the epistemological and ontological grounds identified through question 2, and the praxis of democracy itself, are used to challenge dominant capitalist narratives, and foster post-capitalist relations and subjectivities. Together, sections 5.2-5.6 responds to this question, first by exploring how these

challenges, relations and subjectivities manifest in everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy (section 5.2-5.5); and second by connecting these acts to theoretical discussions presented in chapter 3 (section 5.6). The interconnection between these three research questions is outlined in figure 1.1.

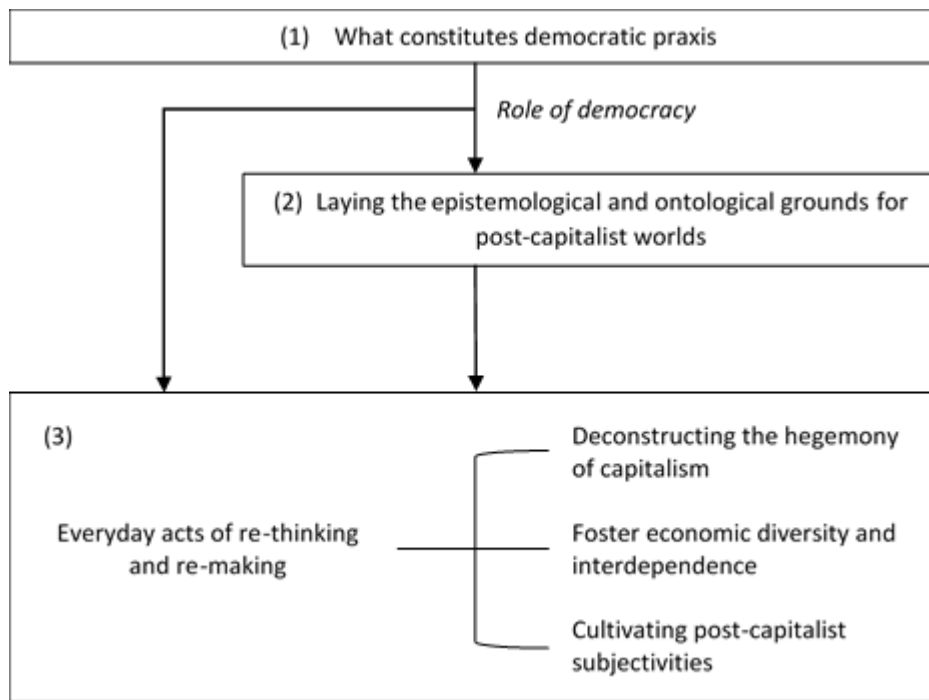


Figure 1.1: Research questions

In addressing these research questions, this thesis makes three key contributions to knowledge. First, it argues that democratic praxis constitutes, not formal structures or decision-making processes alone, but interconnected ways of thinking, being and acting that emerge and evolve over time. Central to this democratic praxis is an understanding of the organisation as a conversation and product of individual collective alignment, and the concomitant framing of governing documents as loose and contestable frameworks for action. Combined, these understandings serve to create and maintain opportunities for meaningful member participation, including the questioning and negotiation of deeply embedded assumptions and practices.

Building on this understanding, the thesis goes on to claim that democratic praxis plays two key roles in enabling a shift from the perceived dominance and homogeneity of capitalism towards performative, post-capitalist praxes of economic diversity and

interdependence. Focusing on the first of these two roles, my second contribution contends that democratic praxis lays the epistemological and ontological grounds necessary for this shift to occur. These grounds constitute the adoption of an anti-essentialist and weak theoretical stance (Roelvink and Carnegie, 2011), and a 'learning to be affected vision of the world' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 325). The third contribution argues that these grounds, and the praxis of democracy itself, enable day-to-day acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy through which members deconstruct capitalist homogeneity, foster economic diversity and interdependence, and cultivate post-capitalist subjectivities.

In addition to the three contributions outlined above, this thesis makes a fourth, methodological contribution. Through a reflexive account of participatory and solidarity action research, ethnography and narrative inquiry, recounted in chapter 2, I make two claims. First, that understandings of democratic praxis are enhanced through the epistemological⁴⁴ and ontological⁴⁵ congruence of research methodology, theoretical framework and organisational practice. In this thesis, congruence emerges in a shared participatory worldview, weak theoretical position, and anti-essentialist stance that, together, brought theory and actions into the same space where their performative effect could be explored. Second, I claim that reflecting on, and writing about, emotional and relational experiences of research is an ethical and analytical imperative, that offers transparency over the process of knowledge construction and insights into the lived reality of organising. In addition to these benefits, reflections on the conceptualisation, performance and analysis of research informed the structure of this thesis (see figure 1.2), as explored in the next section.

⁴⁴ Epistemology is described by Blaikie (2000: 18) as the theory of the grounds of knowledge; how we come to have knowledge and know what we know, how this knowledge can be judged as legitimate and how our relationship with reality informs knowing.

⁴⁵ Ontology is described by Blaikie (2007: 3) as the nature of reality; 'what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact'.

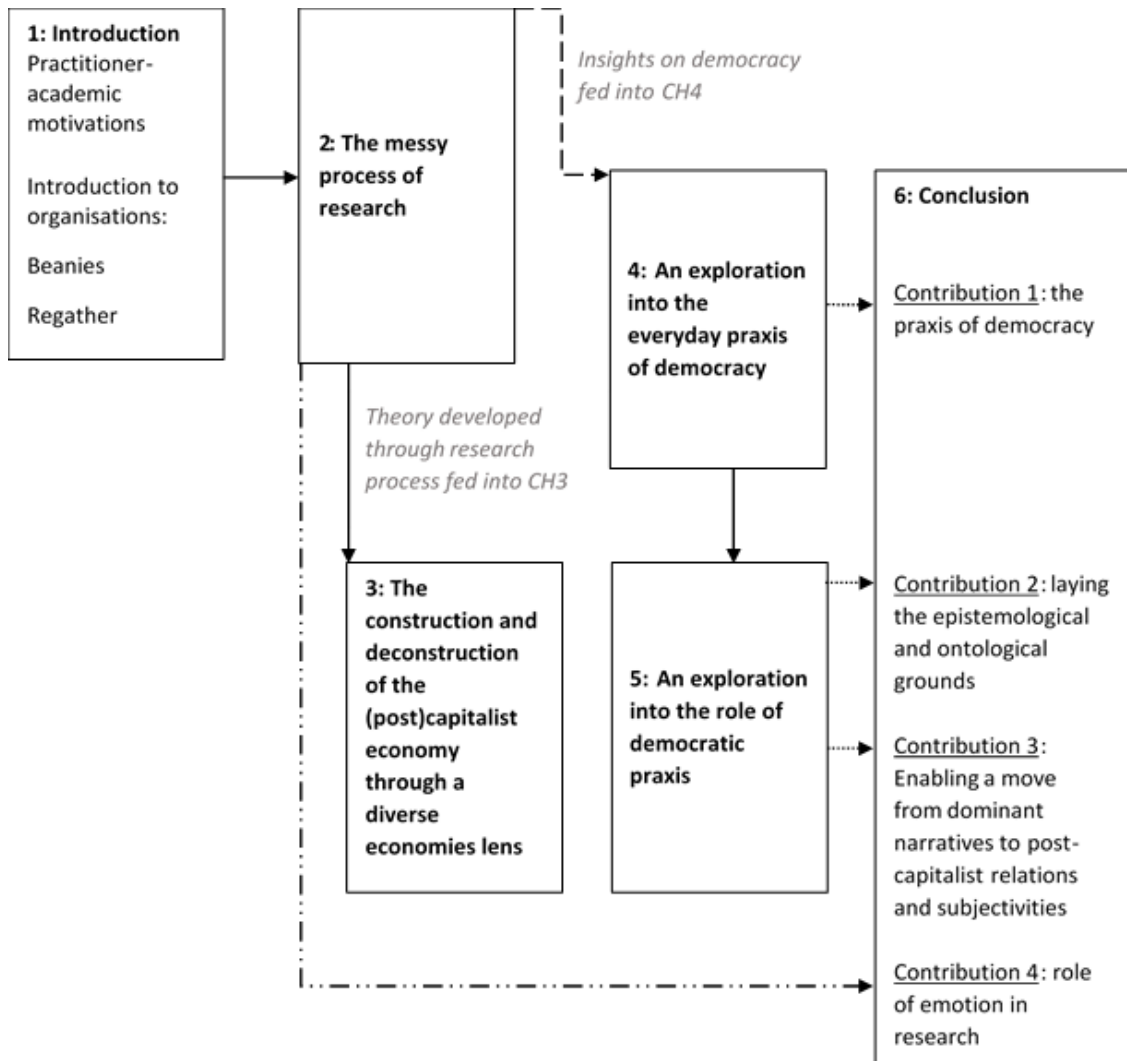


Figure 1.2: Thesis structure

1.6.2: A note on structure

This section explores why have I departed from the conventional thesis structure⁴⁶. The simple answer is that this structure failed to reflect my own lived experience as a practitioner-researcher. The ordering of words here is not inconsequential. As illustrated in section 1.1, I was a practitioner first and a researcher second. My experience of cooperative working provided, not only the inspiration for my research focus, but the thread from which my participatory worldview and desire to blur the researcher/practitioner divide were woven. Like the structure of a cooperative, the structure of this thesis is an ontological statement that speaks of this worldview and epistemological stance, and reflects the practical grounding of the research questions.

⁴⁶ Understood as introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, findings, and conclusion.

It does so by foregrounding participants' words; situating dialogue and personal experience at the centre of my understanding and curiosity; and allowing observations and narratives collected through the research process to overflow the confines of the findings chapters and weave through the thesis. As such, the early introduction of participants, and the positioning of my methodology before my theoretical framework is an ontological choice, an epistemological expression and a practical necessity: it reflected the formative impact of my methodological approach on my theoretical framing of (post)neoliberal capitalism and enabled me to understand the latter through participants' stories and experiences, and thus reconnect theory and action.

This foregrounding and weaving speaks also of my commitment to an overdeterminist position. Here, I follow Graham (1992: 143) who explains:

Unlike some of their essentialist counterparts, the overdeterminist researcher will never be able to say that they have conducted complete or definitive analysis. Instead they will view their work as partial and particular. They will be careful, then, not to claim that they have found the singular and universal truth about, or the best explanation of, the object at hand. From their perspective, they have produced analyses that differ from and conflict with other analyses, ones that start with different interests and concerns. This is what makes their analyses special and important, not the identification of fundamental causes and constituents to which complex phenomena can be reduced.

As such, my aim in this thesis is to offer potentially transferable rather than generalisable knowledge. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990: 8) such knowledge is achieved through the creation of a sense of plausibility understood to arise from resonance: a feeling that a narrative account 'ring(s) true' (ibid) in a general sense with one's own experiences or understandings. It is through these experiences of resonance and divergence that we are able to reflect on our own practice and engage in acts of meaning-making and restorying. Again, this aim necessitated the early positioning of contextual information, which forms the focus of the next section.

1.7: Participating organisations

This thesis involved two case studies (see appendix 6 for rationale): Beanies and Regather. Following a discussion on why these cases were selected, sub-section 1.7.2 and 1.7.3 provide information on each organisation.

1.7.1: Rationale for case study selection

The selection of these two cases was determined primarily by the similarities and differences between them, as summarised in the table 1.1.

	Beanies	Regather
Size	7 members	17 members
Location	Crookesmoor, Sheffield	Sharrow, Sheffield
Location demographic	Higher income area	Lower income, diverse area
Age of organisation	30 years	5 years
Core business focus	Retailer of vegetarian, organic and non-organic fruit, vegetables and wholefoods.	Cultural centre focused on food, events, low carbon economies and social enterprise development.
Core social aim	Act cooperatively to promote vegan/vegetarian, organic and locally sourced food	Create opportunities for people to live, work and play cooperatively and create a mutual local economy; Create meaningful work/relieve unemployment.
Legal form	Company Ltd by guarantee operating as a cooperative	Industrial and Provident Society (now Cooperative Society)
Structure	Worker cooperative	Formally cooperative consortium. In practice, worker cooperative
Governance	Direct democracy, consensus decision-making	Direct democracy, consensus decision-making
Operating principles	Cooperative values and principles	Cooperative values and principles
Core membership	Employed workers	Individuals engaged with the cooperative through work (paid and unpaid)
Staff	Paid workers	Paid workers, self-employed, volunteers
Primary income	Sale of goods	Sale of goods and service (additional sources include: grants, loans, donations)
Prior involvement	5 years as employee	4 years as member and employee/volunteer
Involvement during research	Researcher only	Researcher and member Cooperative secretary

Table 1.1: Similarities and difference between the two case studies (March 2016).

Prior involvement in both organisations offered a historical perspective and more detailed understanding of the organisations' form and purpose. Moreover, it supported ongoing self-reflexivity, further enabled by the varying and changing nature of my involvement within and between Beanies and Regather (see chapter 2). This helped me to think critically about how democracy was conceived and practiced in each organisation. As such, prior involvement both informed and supported the ethnographic methodology used in this study.

From a practical perspective, the close proximity of the case studies enabled me to carry out participant observation in both organisations simultaneously. This supported a prolonged period of ethnography and ongoing reflexivity through constant comparison. The size, governance structure, operating principles and core membership of both organisations situated them within identified gaps in literature. These similarities, considered in the context of Beanies' and Regather's different legal forms and structures, highlighted cooperative diversity and helped me to reflect critically on the role of formal structures relative to day-to-day organisational and business practices. Differences in the organisations' age brought to the fore the impact of founder-member presence on democratic engagement and the ways in which longevity embeds certain principles and practices into an organisation's ethos. Moreover, it revealed a common recognition of the ongoing work needed to maintain democratic praxis. The next two sections expand on these similarities and differences.

1.7.2: Beanies

Beanies is a Company Limited by Guarantee, run as a worker cooperative. According to its articles (1986), its objects are:

To act cooperatively and collectively as purveyors and promoters of whole and organically grown foods and such other related products and to create general awareness of such benefits as may be derived from the consumption and utilisation of such products.

In addition to these objects, the organisation seeks to promote a vegetarian and vegan diet and the sale and production of local food. They fulfil their objects by running a small shop selling wholefoods, and fruit and vegetables; operating a city-wide organic fruit and vegetable delivery service; and promoting vegetarian and organic food through the sharing of recipes and participation in national events such as Vegetarian Week and Organic September.

Location

The shop is situated in Crookesmoor; a relatively affluent area 1.2 miles from Sheffield City centre and 0.7 miles from the University of Sheffield's main campus. The four storey mid-terrace building housing the cooperative is rented from a private landlady for low monthly rate. It constitutes a cellar used for packing vegetable boxes and storing fruit, vegetables, and chilled and frozen foods; a ground floor shop; a first floor used for storing wholefood stock; and an attic which accommodates the office.

Members agree that the building is poorly suited to its use and is in need of structural and cosmetic improvements (an issue discussed in numerous meetings).

Consideration has been given to relocating but the organisation's embeddedness in the Crookesmoor community, and the enormity of the decision to move have prevented action⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ Alongside financial concerns, members identified the absence of risk-takers as a key issue here.



Figure 1.3: Beanies members in the vegetable shop (taken by Murdo Macleod for the Observer following Beanies' receipt of the Observer Food Award, 2015).

Membership and working practices

The organisation constitutes 7 full-time (40 hours/week) worker-members⁴⁸, between 7 and 9 part-time⁴⁹ workers, and one part-time, non-member book-keeper. All 7 full-time workers and the part-time book-keeper were invited, and collectively agreed to participate in the research (for information on the process of negotiating access see Langmead (2017b) and appendices 7, 8a and 8b). Participants are listed in table 1.2.

Following a six-month probation period and acceptance to membership, all members automatically become company directors and are paid the same hourly wage⁵⁰. This rate has fluctuated considerably during my 5-year involvement, from £10/hour to £8.50/hour, in line with reductions in turnover⁵¹. Recent improvements in the

⁴⁸ Increased to 8 members in 2016.

⁴⁹ 16 hours/week plus overtime to meet both the workers' and the organisation's needs.

⁵⁰ Although equal pay is a shared feature of Beanies and Regather that distinguishes them from their capitalist counterparts, it is not discussed in this thesis. The primary reason being that it did not emerge as a key concern from discussions or observations. For exploration into this issue readers are directed to Atzeni and Vierta (2014), and Webb and Cheney (2014).

⁵¹ The reasons underlying this reduction are unclear and an exploration into them lie outside the scope of this thesis

organisation's financial position have enabled an increase to £9/hour plus bonus payments made at Christmas.

Participant	Membership status	Length of membership
Evan	Director	13 years
Heather	Director	11 years
Dave	Director	18 months
Chris	Director	18 years
Gemma	Director	15 months
Jake	Director	5 months
Mark	Director	14 years
Rocky	Non-member	8 months

Table 1.2: Participant information at time of focus group (Beanies)

Part-time workers work alongside members on the shop floor but do not attend meetings or participate in the running of the organisation. Cooperative members aim to keep part-time wages 20-50p above minimum wage. However, while members' wages were at £8.50/hour, part-time staff received minimum wage (£6.70 when I was an employee). When members increased their wage to £9/hour, part-time staff wages were increased to £7/hour. In contrast to members, part-time staff wages are never reduced. In addition to hourly pay, part-time workers get a 10% discount on goods sold in the shop (introduced in 2015) and free access to out of date and low-quality produce (known as 'chod').

In addition to cooperative members and part-time workers, there is a non-member book-keeper. Rocky felt that working for the member wage would not be worth his while and that being employed at a higher rate would be 'immoral'. The contractual agreement, to pay Rocky a set amount to perform distinct tasks, was considered to fit in with the cooperative's principles while also meeting Rocky's needs. Although not a member, Rocky attends meetings and contributes to strategic decisions through his knowledge of the organisation's finances.

My involvement

I worked part-time for Beanies for five years prior to my PhD. I left in 2013 and re-entered as a researcher in 2014. In contrast to Regather where I remained heavily involved in the organisation throughout my research, at Beanies my role was limited to participant observer⁵². I volunteered in the shop, attended meetings and adopted the role of 'mole' (Dave), attending and feeding back on cooperative events (chapter 2).

1.7.3: Regather

Regather registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act⁵³ as a cooperative consortium⁵⁴ in 2010. Since its establishment, Regather has developed organically (and somewhat chaotically) in response to the success and failure of projects, and changes to organisational structure (discussed further in chapter 4). To reflect these changes, members revised their rules (cooperatives' governing documents) in February 2016. According to these rules:

The objects of the Co-operative shall be to carry on the business as a co-operative and to carry on any other trade, business or service and in particular to engage in community economic development by creating opportunities for cooperative trading and employment and by provision of: goods and services; education and training; projects; facilities; and recreational activity to the economic and social benefit of members and the wider community.

According to their website Regather's mission is (Regather, March 2016):

[...] to give people the choice and opportunity to live, work and play co-operatively and create a mutual local economy.

⁵² This difference in roles is further explored in sub-section 2.2.1.

⁵³ This has since been updated to Cooperative and Community Benefit Society Act 2014.

⁵⁴ A cooperative consortium is a cooperative of self-employed individuals or small organisations with a shared aim/area of interest. While this remains its legal form Regather operates, in practice, as a worker cooperative.

Included in this mission is the 'delivery of positive social impact' (Regather, September 2016), the creation of meaningful work, and the relief of unemployment.

Regather's mission is fulfilled through the development of projects, centred on the core areas of events, food, low carbon economies and social enterprise support. Projects are run by a combination of employed and self-employed people and volunteers, collectively known as 'traders'. A project is defined as (Regather, September 2016):

[...] a response to an opportunity or problem that exists locally. It should be entrepreneurial - in that it uses existing resources effectively and efficiently to get something useful done and has the ability to become self-sustaining, and it should be co-operative - in that it enables people to work together, support each other and develop values such as self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

In addition, members described aspirations to create a 'real social hub' and 'a centre for social action in the area, [...] empowering people to take more action on things that they are passionate about' (Tim, Regather member). In response to these aims, the organisation has been varyingly described, during my time as a member and researcher, as a cooperative, a community centre, a social action centre, and (currently) a 'cultural centre'.

Location

Regather is situated in an old Horn Handle Works⁵⁵ in Sharrow; a relatively low income and culturally diverse area 1.1 miles from Sheffield City centre (see figure 1.4). Despite renting the building, Regather has done significant cosmetic and structural work to provide a commercial grade kitchen, café, bar, studio, microbrewery, storage area and office. Further work has been carried out, in collaboration with the council and highways contractor, to improve the immediate outdoor spaces, including the

⁵⁵ Originally used to make umbrella and cutlery handles.

reinstatement of planters and the installation of bike racks. Improvements to outdoor space forms part of a wider strategy of community engagement, aimed at generating interest from local residents and providing a backdrop for free outdoor events.



Figure 1.4: Past and present image of Regather Works (Cunnington Architects).

In addition to having a strong connection to the local community in the present, Regather makes historical connections to place through the building's former use as a Little Mesters⁵⁶ workshop and the area's history as a community garden (see appendix 9). In more recent history, members commented on their connection to the punk and underground music scene. Through these connections, the organisation emphasised collective and cooperative traditions to working and responding to financial crises, and a strong sense of community that they seek to revive.

⁵⁶ Little Mesters were a network of craftspeople working out of small workshops or from their own homes. They were self-employed and carried out the different stages of the production of goods, which were ordered and sold by Master Manufacturers. They mostly concentrated on individual aspects of forging, grinding or finishing and would also specialise in particular products, such as razors or penknives (Goss and Shaw, 2016: np.).

Membership and working practices

Due to its constitution as a cooperative consortium and its ongoing fluidity, membership is more complex in Regather than it is in Beanies. According to its rules (February 2016):

The Co-operative may admit to membership any individual, corporate body or nominee of an unincorporated body, firm or partnership that wishes to use the services of the Co-operative and has paid or agreed to pay any subscription or other sum due in respect of membership or the use of the Co-operative's services.

In reality active members, by which I mean those involved in the organisation's activities and decision-making processes on a weekly basis, constitute employees, volunteers and self-employed people delivering work for the cooperative. Over the course of my research self-employed active members have increasingly opted to move to employment, viewing this as more secure. As such, in practice, Regather operates as a worker cooperative rather than a cooperative consortium.

Regather continues to rely on a high volume of voluntary labour, specifically in relation to project development and meeting attendance. Employment benefits that are well-established in Beanies, such as a pension, paid holiday and sick-pay, remain an aspiration⁵⁷. For the time that employees get paid, they receive the same hourly rate (£8/hour) regardless of their roles. The same does not apply to self-employed members who invoice the organisation for their time at an agreed hourly rate.

Unlike in Beanies, there is no automatic link between membership and the role of director. Rather, directors are elected from and by the members. The election process is considered legally necessary but practically insignificant, formalising roles accepted naturally by active members. As was the case with the organisation's objects, clarity over the purpose and extent of membership continued to be debated throughout my

⁵⁷ Partly because of the financial status of the organisation and partly because no-one has taken responsibility for putting these benefits in place (see chapter 4). After my research ended, more formal employment contracts, including paid holiday, were instigated.

research. By the end of the research it was established that the organisation has 17 members, the majority of whom are involved in running projects.

Six individuals who, prior to or during the course of the study became formal members of Regather, participated in the research. Due to a lack of clarity over membership at the start of my research, participants were selected based on their level of involvement in, and physical presence at, Regather (see Langmead (2017b) and appendix 7, 8a and 8b for more information on the process of negotiating access and participant selection). Participants' involvement in the organisation is summarised in table 1.3. The table highlights the fluid and changing nature of the organisation.

Participant	Membership status (start of research)	Membership status (end of research)	Length of involvement (at group session)	Main project area	Paid hours at start/end of research
Fran	De-facto director	Director	17 months	Food	16/20
Lisa	Member	No longer members	6 months	Food	8/0
Rachel	Member	Director	2 years	Enterprise	Self-employed
Nicole	De-facto director	No longer member	15 months	Food/events	16/0
Tim	Member	Director	5 years	Events	16/16
Gareth	Director	Director	6 years (founder member)	Events	24 (plus 16 voluntary)/ibid.

Table 1.3: Participant information (Regather, September 2016)⁵⁸.

My involvement

I became a member of Regather in 2010 and spent the next two and a half years developing and running food projects. Neither comfortable nor competent at the business and marketing side of the role I gradually shifted my attention to the organisation's governance structure and social reporting systems before leaving to pursue my PhD in October 2013. Four months later, and aware of the need to re-establish myself as a member prior to the start of my research, I accepted the informal and voluntary position of 'research and governance assistant' (e-mail from Gareth, 14/02/14). I "re-entered" the organisation as a researcher-member in November 2014

⁵⁸ Lisa and Nicole left Regather during the course of my research.

and was tasked, in the first instance, with reviewing and updating the members register.

Over the course of my research, this role expanded to include reviewing the purpose and function of membership and member communication strategies. These tasks were developed in response to issues raised through observations and conversations, including members' limited understanding of the organisation's cooperative form, relatively low levels of transparency and information sharing, and both a desire and recognised need for, greater member engagement and shared responsibility. To support me in this role Regather paid for me to attend a one-day training session entitled: 'The Roles and Responsibilities of a Secretary' (22 July 2015, Coops UK, Manchester). Following this, I informally adopted the role of Secretary, tasked with re-writing and seeking agreement over updated rules, and organising general, and annual general meetings (AGMs). As I was no longer involved in running a project I felt poorly placed to perform this role and resigned from my role as secretary at the AGM in February 2016.

2: The messy process of research

The previous chapter identified the gaps in knowledge this thesis will address, and outlined the origins and purpose of the research aims and questions. The chapter also introduced the two case study organisations, and the members who participated in the 18-month ethnographic study, focus groups and narrative inquiry that constitute this research. This chapter gives a reflexive account of this process.

Reflecting on the theoretical practices underlying the degeneration thesis, and drawing on my own experience as a practitioner-researcher, the opening section of this chapter deconstructs the boundaries between theory, action and research, and positions methodology at their intersection. In doing so it brings to light my positionality, and the epistemological and ontological stance that underpin both the methodology and approaches to reflexivity, explored in sub-section 2.1.2. Section 2.2 focuses on my research methods. Building on the theories outlined in section 2.1, it starts by exploring and problematising participatory action research (PAR). Having identified the challenges I faced in relation to PAR, sub-section 2.2.1 introduces solidarity action research (SAR). This framework shaped a performative understanding and enactment of ethnography (sub-section 2.2.2) and the interconnected choice to use emotion as a source of data (sub-section 2.2.3); and informed the decision to combine narrative inquiry with focus groups (sub-section 2.2.4). Section 2.3 describes the process of data analysis that began with the initial seed of the research idea and continued as data was generated and written into the thesis. The chapter concludes with a grounded account of ethics in practice.

Woven throughout the chapter is an expressed commitment to embodied and intersubjective reflexivity. Such moves beyond epistemic-reflexivity and associated aims of legitimacy are rare in organisational research (Cunliffe, 2003a). As Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013: 365; see also Wray-Bliss, 2003; Turner and Norwood, 2013; Gilmore and Kenny, 2015) recognise, despite the impact that emotional and relational experiences have on the research process, they are 'often ignored in research accounts and descriptions'. Similarly, Wray-Bliss (2008) and Bell and Wray-Bliss (2009) explain that, in literature grounded in the discipline of Critical Management Studies (CMS),

coverage of methodological issues, including decisions around what and how to research, how to write, and whose voices to include, are rarely made explicit. Recognising that such omissions sit uncomfortably with the critical stance and emancipatory aims of both my own and wider CMS research (Brewis and Wray-Bliss, 2008; see also Parker et al., 2014b; Parker and Parker, 2017⁵⁹) this chapter contributes to CMS literature by resisting the urge to present a factual account of what worked, and paying reflexive attention to emotional and relational experiences of research, and their role in knowledge construction.

To this end, the act of returning to and questioning methods, practices and procedures is understood as 'part of the object of study': both a means to better understand the organisations' democratic praxis and as an ethical imperative to unveil the uncertainty and experimentality of research (Castañeda, 2006). As such, I have included throughout extracts from fieldnotes and transcripts that have shaped the direction, and subsequent understandings of, the research methodology and methods. Table 2.1 and 2.2 summarise the five main components of the research: participating in and observing day-to-day practice; collecting written narrative of participants' employment journeys; sharing and analysing these narrative in focus groups; discussing key points emerging from the focus groups; and taking initial interpretations back to participants for their comments and reflections (collective findings review).

⁵⁹ The critical and political nature of CMS was evident in session run at the 10th International Critical Management Studies Conference (entitles 'Time for Another Revolution, 2-5th July 2017, Liverpool). During a session held at the 2017 Symposium of Ethnography (Manchester) Martin Parker further argued that organisational ethnography is political. Unpicking this claim, he framed ethnography as a (political) intervention: an intervention in a particular place, for a particular reason, that will support or contest certain views and belief, and has the potential to make unseen practices (people and organisations) visible.

Member	Observation and participation	Written narrative (Collected April to June 2015)	Focus group (date, length) [location]	Focus group follow-up meeting	Collective findings review [Office]
Beanies					
Evan	Nov 2014- March 2016	E-mailed	FG1 (19/05/15, 2 hours 11 minutes) [office]	04/06/15 Used start of members' meeting to share key points from FG1 and FG2 with all members. The meeting highlighted action points including the updating of governing document and the potential development of member contracts. ⁶⁰	19/05/16 Dave did not attend. E- mailed feedback on 3/06/16. Rocky did not attend. Received hard copy of summary but did not give feedback.
Heather		Hand written			
Dave		Typed			
Chris		E-mailed	FG2 (26/05/15, 2 hours 39 minutes) [office]		
Gemma		Typed			
Rocky		(Narrative shared verbally in the focus group and expanded upon over the course of the research).			
Jake		E-mailed	Expressed preference not to attend.		
Mark		--	Could not find suitable date for Mark to attend.		

Table 2.1: Methods summary (Beanies).

⁶⁰ I suggested sharing the main points from the two focus groups with all members in a meeting on 21/05/15. I noted the following in my fieldnote book (21/05/15): *Evan and Heather agreed that it would be useful for me to feedback main points for them to add to, so it doesn't end up rambling. We agreed to having this in meeting on 4/6/15 for 30-40 mins. Heather said that in terms of what we want in next 4 months it is hard to say what I can do for Beanies. I said it was something to think about. Evan said that a lot of stuff came out of discussion on Tuesday that we might want to focus on. I asked if they wanted me to feedback things I have learnt from worker coop weekend. Evan and Heather said that would be good. Heather suggested having a small group dealing with some of job description and articles stuff otherwise it might take over meetings; 'it is nice having short focused meetings'.*

Member	Observation and participation	Written narrative (Collected April to June 2015)	Focus group (date, length) [location]	Focus group follow-up meeting	Collective findings review [Office]
Regather					
Fran	Nov 2014- April 2016	Typed	FG3 (09/06/15, 2 hours) [office]	27/06/15 Meeting arranged to discuss key findings from the focus group and potential points of action, including: the development of information sharing systems, increased regularity of members' meetings, and the revision of governing documents	07/06/16 Nicole did not attend. E-mailed summary on 8/06/16, but not receive feedback.
Lisa		Typed			
Rachel		Typed			
Nicole		Typed			
Tim		Typed			
Gareth		Typed			

Table 2.2: Methods summary (Regather).

2.1: Questioning convention and blurring boundaries

Sub-section 1.6.2 explained why I departed from the conventional thesis structure and framed the early positioning of this chapter as an ontological choice, an expression of my epistemological stance, and a practical necessity. In the two sub-sections that follow I delve deeper into this rationale, reflecting first on my experience as a practitioner-researcher to problematise the theory-action divide.

2.1.1: Blurring the theory-action-research divide

In chapter 1 we saw that the risk of degeneration is constantly (re)created through the casting of cooperatives in 'the image of the mainstream' (Amin et al., 2003a: 125). This casting occurs, not only through the shifting of narratives and performance measures from commercial to cooperative enterprise, but through the adoption of ontological resistance that positions cooperatives as a unified (and revolutionary) "alternative" to the dominant (capitalist) other. When viewed as such, failures in one single case are

seen to represent the 'homogeneous insufficiency' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 7) of 'the alternative', and consequently 'shore up a vision of structural power' (ibid.: xxx). Thus, as Healy (2008: 12; see also Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007) explains:

[...] the perceived expansiveness and dominance of market exchange is performatively constituted even (perhaps especially) by those critical of it.

As became apparent through the crisis in, and subsequent de-mutualisation of, the Cooperative Bank (2013), and in the media's and cooperative movement's response, the performative (re)constitution of capitalism⁶¹ occurs through the adoption of a critical, and self-reinforcing paranoid stance. This stance harbours our uncertainties and suspicions, makes us defensive of our 'purity', and ultimately restricts our ability to 'remain open to the other' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 324), and therefore to opportunities for transformative learning. Starting from a moral argument and position of resistance that situates us at a theoretical crossroads gives rise, in other words, to ontological oppression (Davies, 2013: 500). We become locked in a hierarchical relationship with a singular conception of the economy that can only be overcome if we 'obliterate [and] transform it, making the radical shift from a controlling, dominating power to an enabling, liberating one' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 6).

Reflecting on his experience as an academic and activist, Routledge (1996: 401, emphasis added) contends that in the (re)performance of such strong theoretical stances we distance ourselves from direct lived experience:

*[...] we become engaged in representations of another's reality. As such we are **alienated from the lived moment**, enmeshed in the **theory market**, where the production of theory becomes another part of **spectacular production, another commodity**. This commodification*

⁶¹ See chapter 3 for further detail.

implies that a mediation has occurred, and with every mediation so our alienation from lived experience increases.

Routledge's metaphorical use of markets, production, commodities and alienation serve to emphasise Healy's claim. When situated alongside conceptions of theory as a representation of reality, our acts of re-performing dominance are grounded in an understanding of mind and world as separate entities, reconciled only at the point of truth (Graham, 1992: 147). This dichotic understanding of theory and action, mind and world sits contra to my own experience as a practitioner-researcher. As I moved between the unbounded roles of researcher, activist and cooperative member, I experienced knowledge as a conversation and 'process of social interaction' (Graham, 1992: 148; Cunliffe, 2003b). I did not think and theorise as an objective researcher separate from my own and my participants' lived experiences, but rather thought and theorised in and through these experiences. Similarly, I observed participants thinking and theorising cooperative practice through collective processes of reflexivity, forming and re-forming knowledge and action at the intersect of multiple social, economic, spatial, political and ethical determinations (Graham, 1992). I found, in other words, that (White et al., 2016: 2):

[...] every theorisation always implies practices – even if in a not totally conscious and therefore insufficiently critical way – and every action potentially affects the space-time where social imaginary significations (values, worldview, utopias, myth, prejudices etc.) are constituted.

Experiencing, in both research and cooperative practice, the blurring of the theory-action/mind-world divide, and the positioning of experiential knowing as central to everyday processes of sense-making, informed my methodological and theoretical approach in three interconnected ways (Wicks et al., 2008).

First, it gave rise to a participatory worldview. The participatory worldview rejects the positivist 'separation of the knower from the known' (Duberley and Johnson, 2009: 345) adopting instead a subjective-objective view of reality. This view understands the world to be inhabited by multiple subjectivities and constructed through the

engagement of the body-mind and world in a ‘cocreative dance’ (Heron and Reason, 1997: 279; Finlay, 2005). From this perspective, all (propositional) knowing is a ‘mediated – subjective and intersubjective – relativistic account’ (Heron and Reason, 1997: 278) of what is there: an ever-becoming and evolving process that tells us not only of the objective cosmos ‘out there’ or of ourselves within the world, but also of our interrelation and co-presence with the world and other subjects. Expanding on this constructionist understanding of knowledge, Heron and Reason (1997) explain that we participate in and articulate this subjective-objective reality in four interdependent ways; experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing. Our understanding of the world is shaped by these ways of knowing *and* by their association and dissociation with one another, as depicted in figure 2.1.

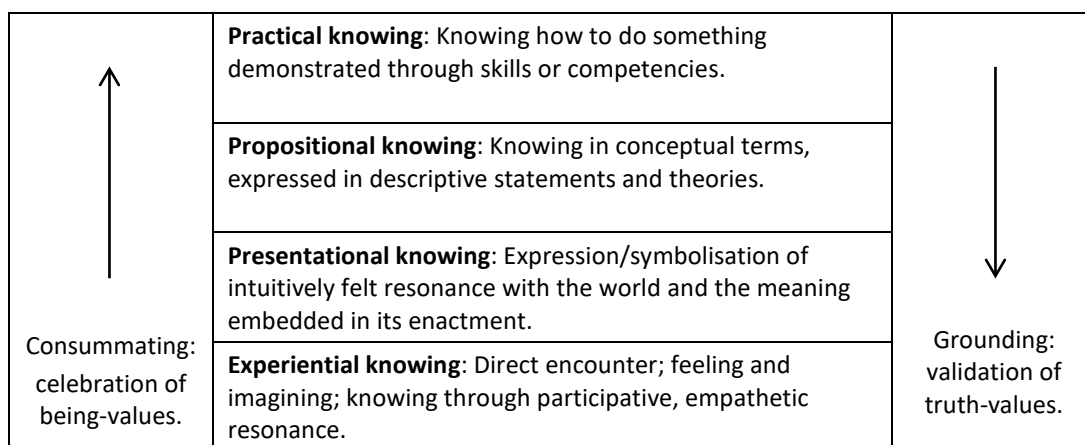


Figure 2.1: The extended epistemology of the participatory worldview (adapted from Heron and Reason, 1997: 281-2)

In line with challenges to the theory-action divide this ‘extended epistemology’ offers ‘an alternative to the traditional academic privileging of theoretical, abstract, propositional knowledge’ that understands ‘legitimate’ knowledge to come from outside practice (Banks and Armstrong, 2014: 38; Dadd, 2003). As such, the participatory worldview is understood as both a theory of knowing and a political statement (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). It conceives human persons as ‘communal beings’, capable of ‘self-awareness and self-direction’ and immersed and evolving within their community (Reason, 1998: 3). It recognises the capacity of human agents to (re)construct knowledge and shape realities, positioning participation in collective

action as a fundamental human right, and as necessary to social change (Reason, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Scherer, 2009; Driver, 2016). Furthermore, it recognises knowledge, and its expression in and through practice, as ‘socially constructed and held in place by cultural-discursive, social and material-economic fields that precede and shape the conduct of practice/praxis’ (Kemmis, 2007: 123). It thus accepts cooperative practice and research as always open to the influence of interconnected knowledge-power and the narratives these relations create and (re)enforce. While recognising this influence, it accepts that power lies, not only in the knowledge that we report (or the positions that we hold), but in the frameworks that shape, validate and determine the value of this knowledge. As Duberley and Johnson (2009: 346) argue, in ‘constituting assumptions about the nature of truth, human behaviour [and] representation’, these frameworks answer epistemological and ontological questions, thus shaping not only our understanding of the world, but the very nature and direction of our curiosity; and our perception of what is valid, valuable, possible, and even open for discussion⁶².

Second, experiencing the blurring of theory and action, and recognising the impact of our framing practices, has encouraged me to adopt a ‘reparative stance’ of weak theorising (Roelvink and Carnegie, 2011: 127; Sedgwick, 2003). Recognising that spaces of creativity and possibility are limited when ‘everything is *seen* to be decided’ (Tonkiss, 2008: 306, emphasis added), weak theory encourages us to become radically open to the unknown and welcoming of the unexpected. It does so by offering ‘little more than a (rich) description’ (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 619; Massey, 2005) that refuses to ‘extend explanation too widely or deeply’ (ibid.) and opens the ground for resubjectification, coexistence and plurality. As will be explored further in chapter 3, adopting this position in relation to economy reframes economic space as forever incomplete, interrelational and heterogeneous, rendering it unamenable to replacement with (or even description as) a ‘single totalising project’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 100). We are pushed to abandon the view that capitalism can be ‘defeated or replaced by a mass collective movement’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 263) and embrace

⁶² This claim was similarly made through reflection on the Cooperative Banking crisis in section 1.1 and is explored further in chapter 3.

instead the incremental change of everyday revolutions. In relation to research, weak theory emboldens us to move beyond critique. It pushes us to embrace experimentation, collaboration and uncertainty; accept the coexistence of multiple interpretations; seek out difference and possibility; and engage in creative thinking-action that utilises plurality and difference as a source of new understanding and practice (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 625).

Finally, embedded within the move to weak theory and the adoption of the participatory worldview is the reconceptualisation of research as praxis: the *making* of individual-collective autonomy (explored further in chapters 4 and 5) that recognises non-essentialised differences in our ways of thinking and being, and a sense of individual-collective interdependence, as a crucial part of understanding ourselves and opening opportunities for transformation (Ledwith, 2007; White et al., 2016; Chatterton et al., 2007). Taken together, these three approaches frame research as an endeavour, not to produce 'accounts of how the world works' (Watson, 2012: 15), but to engage in intersubjective and collective *world-making* processes (Yanow, 2012; Cunliffe, 2010). This understanding disrupts the academia-activism binary, embracing researchers' intentions to foreground certain ways of thinking and being, and to make 'some worlds more real and apparent and others less' (Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 54; Gibson-Graham, 2008). This directed me towards forms of participatory action research that carry an explicit activist agenda (sub-section 2.2.1), and processes of analysis that allow findings and new knowledges to emerge from data (section 2.3).

Further exploring this activist agenda and following Maxey (1999: 201; see also Routledge, 1996; Chatterton et al., 2007) I understand activism, like research praxis, to be a deeply transformative process of 'actively and critically reflecting on the world and our place within it'. It is about starting from where we are, and developing from here, creative and constructive ways to challenge dominant and oppressive narratives and power relations. Recognising the cross over between activism and research praxis, research is reconceived as an 'active third space': a space where the boundaries that surround 'the field', 'the research' and 'the researcher' are understood as fluid and discursively produced, and where 'theory is not created but lived in the immediate' (Routledge, 1996: 399). This reconceptualisation is illustrated in the following quotes

taken from FG1 (Beanies) and FG3 (Regather). In both of these quotes we see the blurring of the action (world)/research (field and mind) boundary that sees cooperative theory constructed in and through their interactions.

Evan: [...] it takes maybe one of us, or a few of us should take it upon ourselves to learn more about coops in general.

Heather: I think [that's] right. And having Kiri doing this probably brings it home, makes you think about it...or make us think about it more.

Similarly, Gareth commented:

Engaging in this process, and you know, without wanting to sound too dramatic about it, but empowering Kiri to do that - it's self-initiative, all be it - but to allow you to do that has been to me, an important part of this journey to having more of a functional coop, rather than a dysfunctional coop.

On a personal level, occupying this 'third space' was about cultivating what Gibson-Graham (2008; 2006b) refers to as a 'new ethics of thinking'. As expressed in my move from a PAR to a SAR framework (see sub-section 2.2.1), it was about re-understanding myself as an academic-activist. This meant researching, not just to produce knowledge, but to bring principles into action by 'continually choosing to feel, think and act in particular ways', while remaining consciously aware of, and open to, other ways of feeling, thinking and acting (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 620). 'Doing thinking' in this way helped me to make sense of and (re)understand my experience as a cooperative practitioner and develop a deeper understanding of the praxis and purpose of democracy. These understandings were borne out of acts of introspective, intersubjective and collaborative reflexivity which are explored in the next section.

2.1.2: Becoming a critically reflexive researcher

Few things are more difficult than to see outside the bounds of your own perspective – to be able to identify the assumption that you take as universal truths but which, instead, have been crafted by your own unique identity and experiences in the world. We live much of our lives in our own head, in reconfirming dialogue with ourselves. [...] Simply acknowledging that one's views are not inevitable – that one's positionality can bias one's epistemology – is itself a leap for many people, one that can help to make us more open to the world's possibilities. (Takacs, 2003: 27-8)

Takacs (2003) recognises here the challenge of transparently knowing ourselves. Further emphasising this challenge Rose (1997: 314) explains that our situated identities *exist through* 'mutually constitutive social relations': through our difference, but not our separation from, others. She concludes that (ibid.:314):

[I]t is the implication of this relational understanding of position that make the vision of a transparently knowable self and world impossible.

Rose (1997) recognises here that identities are performative and overdetermined. They are not reducible to a single essence but rather are reproduced through daily action and interaction; at the intersect of multiple social processes (Maxey, 1999; Gibson-Graham, 1994; Dowling and McKinnon, 2014). Burkitt (2012: 471) adds that the emotions entangled in these interactions animate and shape 'the way we reflexively see ourselves and the way we consider ourselves in relation to the social context'. As implied in this quote, acknowledging our identity as overdetermined is, Turner and Norwood (2013: 697; see also Cunliffe, 2003a; Foley, 2002) explain, an important step to recognising the intersubjective and plural nature of truth and the interdependence of the self and other.

From this perspective, reflexivity is not about self-discovery of a pre-existing identity or of a knowable agency or power (Cameron and Gibson, 2005). Nor is it about standing

back 'in order to subjectively reflect on ourselves in relation to objective circumstance[s]' (Burkitt, 2012: 464). As Ledwith (2007: 609) explains, our understanding of the world is dependent upon our participation in it. Rather, reflexivity is an embodied and intersubjective act of coming to understand ourselves, our position and our action through engagement in ongoing processes of self-construction (Finlay, 2005; Ledwith, 2007). Enabled by our interaction with the other, these processes constitute listening to the multiple, and often competing voices, actions and practices of the self and others (Cameron and Gibson, 2005; Cunliffe, 2003b); 'exploring the relational intersubjective empathic space between participant and researcher where self-understanding and other-understanding are intertwined' (Finlay, 2005: 273); and temporarily performing (and misperforming) more certain subjectivities (Rose, 1997; Cunliffe, 2003a). Reflexivity is, in other words, about exploring difference and sameness, and understanding our engagements at and with these blurred boundaries as creative moments where researcher, 'researched', and research make and remake each other. It is at these moments that we come to understand, not only how our positionality and experiences inform the type of knowledge that is produced but, more fundamentally, *how* we have come to know (Mikkelsen, 2013).

In her investigation into the varying and interconnected routes through the 'swamp' of 'interminable reflexivity', Finlay (2002: 215) identifies the potential of 'reflexivity as introspection', 'reflexivity as intersubjective reflection' and 'reflexivity as collaboration'. The first is explored in sub-section 2.2.3 where researcher emotion and experience are used as a point of departure for analysis. Here we will see that exploring my anxieties, pleasures and contradictions made me 'vulnerable to questioning [my] own voices' (Rhodes, 2009: 654); told me of the co-constructed, fluid and plural nature of reality and the self; and 'offer[ed] insights into the relation between [myself] and others' (ibid.: 666). Building on these insights, I engaged also in 'intersubjective reflection', interrogating 'the mutual meaning *emerging within* the research relationship' (Finlay, 2002: 215, emphasis added; see also Cunliffe, 2003b). Extending this path, reflexivity is pushed beyond the realm of the individual researcher to become instead embedded in a process of mutual collaboration that accepts the reflexive capacity of both the researcher and the researched (Gilmore and Kenny,

2015). Viewed as such, reflexivity not only 'subverts the notion of observational distance' (Routledge, 1996: 401) but, more fundamentally, destabilises the distinction between researcher and participant (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Maxey, 1999).

Rather than viewing these three forms of reflexivity as distinct paths, I have woven them together to concomitantly inform understandings of democratic praxis, shape research methods, and guide 'ethics in practice' (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010; section 2.4). In doing so I respond to Gilmore and Kenny's (2015: 58; Cunliffe, 2003a; Turner and Norwood, 2013; Driver, 2016) warning that reflexivity is often a 'formulaic afterthought', deployed at the end of the methodology chapter to 'authenticate one's work'. Such application risks magnifying the very concerns of authority and status that reflexivity seeks to address.

2.2: On being and becoming a practitioner-researcher

I wish to make a confession: when I entered 'the field' I did not know I was doing ethnography, or solidarity action research, or narrative inquiry. I knew only that, if I was to understand the organisations practices of democracy, I would need to see and (re)experience them for myself. (Fieldnote, 18/01/16)

This section presents an account of a messy research process, complete with its dead-ends, failures, and emergent understandings. In doing so it seeks, not only to reveal the personal challenges and failures that arise from researching with cooperative practitioners, but to frame these challenges and failures as valuable, and 'more instructive than the successes' (The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010: 245).

2.2.1: From participatory to solidarity action research

A desire to engage in PAR grew naturally from my understanding of knowledge as socially constructed and from the blurring of the researcher/practitioner divide (Cuncliffe, 2003b; Gergen and Gergen, 2008). Like Pain and Kindon (2007) and Reason and Bradbury (2008: 1) I understand PAR as ‘family of practices’ that share an ‘orientation to inquiry’. In her work on Participatory Geographies, Askins (2017: 4943) brings to the fore the ‘A’ in PAR describing it as a collaboratively centred approach in which:

[investigation] leads to action, which leads to reflection and learning, which then feeds back into investigation, in ongoing processes of ‘verification’ of research data and outcomes.

This cyclic process of action-reflection-learning conceptualises change arising from the research process as a function of intersubjective and collaborative reflexivity (Kidd and Kral, 2005). It brings into being PAR’s imperative to simultaneously challenge the Western ‘epistemological error’ (Reason, 1998: 9) that separates humans from each other and their environment, and create opportunities for us to think and act in new ways (Reason and Bradbury, 2001; 2008). Thus, we come to understand PAR not as a ‘thing’ but as ‘a form of collective self-reflective enquiry’ (Kemmis, 2008: 121): a process of people learning about themselves and their world through reflexive engagement and interaction with one another (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002; Chandler and Torbert, 2003; Kidd and Kral, 2005; Torbert and Taylor, 2008). Viewed as such PAR aims to understand, not past events, but unfolding dynamic interactions through which knowledge and future intentions are collectively developed (Chandler and Torbert, 2003). To this end it seeks to create spaces where knowledge can be exchanged and co-constructed, and where all involved can develop an awareness of their ability to change themselves, their assumptions and their circumstances (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Askins, 2017; Dadd, 2003).

While the spirit of PAR remained, over the course of my research I found myself questioning whether I could legitimately claim to be ‘doing’ PAR. This questioning arose from a feeling that I had fallen short of the *participatory* ideal, first in relation to

the development of research questions, the negotiation of access⁶³ (see Langmead, 2017b; appendix 7) and the design of research methods; and later in relation to action outputs, and collective analysis and writing (Kesby, 2007; see also section 6.4). As Francis and Pain (2003) acknowledge, there is a distinction between participatory intent and the participation actually achieved. Viewing intent as a starting point, Greenwood et al. (1993: 175-6; see also Kidd and Kral, 2005) consider PAR to be founded on a commitment to the ‘democratisation of both content and method’ and an openness to plural perspectives. From this intent, the researcher builds participatory processes into the project within the limits of participants, the researcher, and the project. The meeting of, and tension between, intent and enacted participatory processes, and the limits to PAR, came across strongly through comparison of my experience researching with Beanies and Regather (see section 6.4 for further reflections). In the former, my offers to assist in the revision of governing documents were refused, with members expressing a desire to maintain ownership over the process and develop expertise amongst themselves. Thus, while my presence instigated action (as indicated in sub-section 2.1.1), and my views and knowledge were welcomed⁶⁴, the research itself did not constitute the action-reflection-learning cycle of PAR. In contrast, Regather expressed a clear desire to instigate certain actions and address specific membership and governance issues *through* the process outlined by Askins (2017). This resulted in me arranging and chairing members’ meetings and Annual General Meetings, initiating changes to Regather’s meeting schedule and processes of member engagement, and taking a leading role in the revision of their

⁶³ This issue arose most prominently in Regather where Gareth, the one remaining founder member, agreed to the research on behalf of all other members. The absence of all members from this decision fell short of my own desire and intent for democratic participation. Moreover, while I knew that members could decide individually not to be involved, this process of consent did not take into account the positive and negative impact that the research could have on individuals *as members* of the organisation.

⁶⁴ This comes across most prominently in the following observation (fieldnote, 13/05/15):

I asked Dave if I could add something to the agenda for the next meeting. He pointed to the clip board that the meeting agenda was clipped to and said ‘go ahead. You don’t need to ask me.’ The sheet on the agenda board was from the previous week – Dave updated it with new dates and agenda items (including ‘review business plan’ and ‘education’ under the ‘low priority’ category) and passed it to me to add what I wanted.

In the meeting the following week I reported findings from the Worker Cooperative Away Weekend (specifically those relating to required working hours for members and member/job descriptions), and from my own research into the recent revision of model articles following the Cooperative and Community Benefit Society Act (2014) (see appendix 13). Combined with the focus groups carried out as part of the research, this led to ongoing discussions on the revision of governing documents. Extracts from these discussions are explored in chapter 4.

rules (see sub-section 1.7.3; for examples see appendix 14-16). As will be explored in sub-sections 2.2.3 and 2.4.1, this created discomfort within myself as I negotiated my role as insider-outsider and sought to foreground participant experiential knowledge over my own propositional knowing. We see from this comparison that, while in Beanies a failed PAR intent arose from 'limited action outputs' (Kesby, 2007: 2815), in Regather it emerged from a sense that I had failed to fully democratise the PAR cycle, and consequently (re)positioned myself as expert (ibid.)⁶⁵.

In addition to highlighting the 'necessarily unpredictable, exploratory and relational' (Pain and Kindon, 2007: 2807) nature of PAR, these experiences demonstrated that 'full' participation, from the development of research questions to the writing of research text, is rarely achievable. From the researcher perspective, Campbell and Vanderhoven (2016; see also David, 2002) identify the limitations of time, specifically in relation to developing participant-researcher relationships required for PAR. Adding to this limitation, the Autonomous Geographies Collective (2010: 253) identify pressures associated with the 'neoliberalisation of university research', including the pressure to obtain grants and publish academic outputs. From a practitioner perspective, Arieli et al's (2009) research suggests that in pushing for (our own understanding of) full participation, we risk imposing our own concept of participation on unwilling others⁶⁶. As I found through my own experience of instigating action this risk requires a move towards negotiated participation that reflects participants' own understandings and practices (for example, see sub-section 2.2.3). Further reflecting on this need I found that, while participants viewed the research as useful, it was always squeezed and contorted around more pressing day-to-day concerns. This 'squeezing' ran alongside an awareness that research is always carried out 'in the service of a specific [personal] interest' (Scherer, 2009: 38). Painfully bringing both my own interest in professional development, and the limited action-outcome of the research to fore Mark (Beanies, fieldnote, 19/05/16) commented: '*you will benefit*

⁶⁵ Reflecting on insights on the meaning and fluid nature of leadership (see sub-section 4.2.2 and 4.2.3), and following the post-structuralist approach to PAR, I have come to (re)understand myself as occupying a temporary position of power, based not on personal attributes, but on the ability to contribute task-specific skills, knowledge and experience (see sub-section 2.4.1).

⁶⁶ This is similarly highlighted by DeNormanville et al (2014) who identify the option of non-participation as an important element in cooperative democratic practice.

from publishing the research; we will just carry on as normal' (see also The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010). In addition to reinforcing a sense of failed PAR intent, this quote legitimised my recurrent worry that an unintentional focus on the R rather than the A of PAR (Chatterton et al., 2007), can result in participants and action being treated, not as 'important in themselves', but 'as a means to an end' (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 68; Murphy and Dingwall, 2001): the ultimate expression of researcher power. This awareness guided ethical practices that sought, first to recognise the 'hybrid sense of self' (Chatterton et al., 2007: 5), and subsequently to question the motives behind, and impact of, my actions (see section 2.4). More prominently it led me to seek out common agendas and areas of intersection between my own and participants' aims, and to create communicative spaces in which these mutual interests could be collaboratively investigated (Kidd and Karl, 2005; figure 2.2). Thus, the act of returning to and discussing (and in the case of Regather, revising) governing documents was reframed, not as the central purpose and focus of the research, but a means of fostering shared learning, curiosity and collective problem solving (Reason and Bradbury, 2008) of benefit to *both* myself and the organisations⁶⁷.

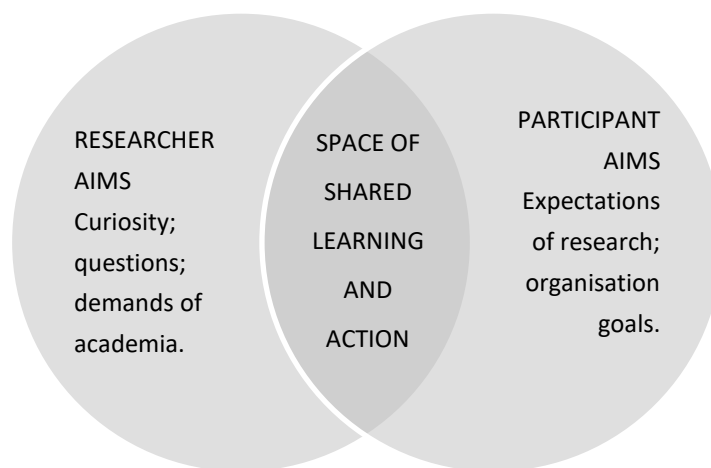


Figure 2.2: Creating spaces of shared learning and action in research.

Through my engagement with multiple participatory challenges I therefore came to (re)understand my research through Chatterton et al's (2007) concept of SAR. Like SAR, my research identified and explored a common problem: a problem that sparked

⁶⁷ This re-framing partially, but never fully, addressed my concern of being positioned as an expert, discussed above.

my interest as an activist-researcher and that myself and fellow cooperative practitioners had grappled with in practice (see section 1.1). In the creation of this mutual third space, and through the reframing of action as a space of shared learning, the aim was to 'produce critical interpretations and readings of the world which [were] accessible, understandable to all those involved, and actionable' (Chatterton et al., 2007: 3). In line with Cameron and Gibson's (2005) post-structuralist reading of PAR, this move to action did not constitute bringing to consciousness experiences of oppression and resentment as a basis to an organised macro-political response. Rather it was about using critical interpretations to 'free embodied practices from their usual sedimented patterns' (Cameron and Gibson, 2005: 320) and open opportunities for a micro-politics of individual and collective self-transformation. While in some cases this manifested in action (for example, the revision of Regather's governing documents), on the whole it was viewed as part of an ongoing process that extended beyond the bounds of my PhD⁶⁸.

Adopting this action and solidary orientated epistemology played an important role shaping my approach to ethnography, which is explored in the next section (Kesby, 2000). Specifically, by helping me to move beyond a concern over what participation is or should be, SAR situated ethnography as a means to investigate the role of participation in the co-production of identities, knowledge and action. As, through this process, I developed a more nuanced understanding of the organisations' democratic praxis I began to see that, if we understand 'democracy as a mode of associated living then research constitutes that mode of living as well as seek[ing] to make meaning of it' (Hendry, 2009: 79).

⁶⁸ Adding to the limits of time identified above, it was not possible to develop critical readings of, *and* implement meaningful changes to, the organisations' praxes within the time frame of my research (see also section 2.4). Moreover, to consider this research, and the processes of change arising from it, as a closed episode would have been to ignore the open and ever-becoming nature of democratic praxis presented in chapter 4.

2.2.2: Ethnography: participating, observing and becoming a spect-actor

At the start of my research I did not describe myself as an ethnographer. The word conjured up images of researching other worlds and mining the perspectives of participants through the researcher's own lived experience (Smith, 2001: 229). Rather, I understood (and still do understand) the act of being an observing participant as one method within the SAR framework (Sykes and Treleaven, 2009). It was a way of (re)experiencing democracy; bringing to consciousness tacit ways of knowing (Zahle, 2012); 'grappling with the complexity, intricacy and mundanity (commonplace activities) of organisational life' (Cunliffe, 2010: 229); and, through this, developing methods and forms of engagement that reflected the organisations' cooperative practice and helped bridge the theory-action divide. Contrary to claims that insider research lacks rigour because of researcher's overfamiliarity, assumptions and emotional investment (Richards and Morse, 2013), these aims encompass a belief that (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007: 60, emphasis added; see also Anderson, 2012):

*[...] through a process of **reflexive** awareness, [researchers] are able to articulate tacit knowledge that has become deeply segmented because of socialization in an organizational system and reframe it as theoretical knowledge.*

Reflecting on the participatory worldview, experiences outlined in sub-section 2.2.3 show this tacit knowledge to be felt through resonance and misalignment, expressed in fieldnotes, and consummated in the (ever incomplete) propositional and practical knowing of SAR and cooperative democratic practice. In the context of these experiences ethnography was seen also as a means of repositioning myself as a practitioner-researcher: of bringing my 'plurivocality' to the fore and becoming more familiar with the experience and assumptions that the 'I' of researcher, practitioner, friend, and activist brought to the research (Clandinin et al., 2007). As I experienced the anxieties and challenges of observing and taking fieldnotes (see appendix 17; section 2.3), and engaged with ethnographic literature, I began to re-understand the process I was involved in. Most significantly, I came to see myself as an instrument of knowing, bodily positioned in the research in such a way as to violate 'both physical ontological objectivity and emotional-epistemological objectivity' (Yanow, 2012: 33;

see also Finlay, 2005). It was at this point that I came to understand the emotion and aesthetics of research as ‘an intrinsically valuable part of the research process and its outcomes’ (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 229).

Re-understanding ethnography through the lens of a participatory worldview and an action orientated epistemology, I found it to share with SAR an imperative to ‘change people’s ideas about themselves and other’s and ultimately change our society’ (Lassiter and Campbell, 2010: 762). From this perspective, the ethnographer’s role is not to describe existing organisational practice but to collectively explore how meaning is intersubjectively formed through day-to-day action and interaction (Cunliffe, 2010). This exploration and meaning-making occurs through first-hand experience, observation, conversation and text work, understood here not as separate phases, but as iterative and interwoven elements of fieldwork (Humphrey and Watson, 2009). In this move towards a more collaborative and performative ethnography in which researchers and participants adopt the dual role of spect-actor (Castañeda, 2006) we are pushed to accept identities, and the field itself, as anti-essentialist and fluid, and to displace us-them, research-life dichotomies included those of researcher-researched and academic-activist. With no essence of self to become aware of and no field to be discovered the ethnographer necessarily moves beyond the self-reflexive work of being aware of one’s position to embrace the intersubjective emotional work of engaging reflexively *with* their position (Cuncliffe, 2003; Driver, 2016; Rhodes, 2009). As Gilmore and Kenny (2015: 56) found, adopting this reflexive position means exploring:

[the] emotional engagement of the ethnographer with the research experience [...] and the ways in which ethnographers are themselves influenced and changed by their interactions with the people they study.

From this exploration grew a deeper understanding of the processes involved in co-constructing ‘the field’. Most prominently, I became aware of the choices I was making about what to observe and count as ‘data-collecting events’ (Castañeda, 2006: 85). Through feelings of anxiety and regret I came to understand how these choices were determined by chance, by changing relationships with participants, and by their

choice to engage/disengage as they exercised agency and control over their involvement (for further detail see also Langmead (2017b)). Moreover, I began to see, though never fully to understand, how my responses, reactions, and presence shaped the field and the data I collected. Illustrating the in-situ and temporally bounded nature of participants' responses Mark explained (collective findings review, 19/05/16):

What you wrote isn't a snap shot of what we all think about Beanies. It's about how we felt at that time.

Responses were, in other words, made in relation to other participants, and to my own questions, attitudes, and the presentation of the self in the actual socio-historical situation of interactions and actions (Castañeda, 2006). By first accepting and then embracing these co-constructive processes, ethnography was framed as (Watson and Till, 2010: 121):

[an] intersubjective form of qualitative research through which the relationships of researcher and researched, insider and outsider, self and other, and field and home are negotiated. [It is a] process of articulating difference and sameness, an act of bounding 'here' and 'there'.

I developed and enacted this methodology by participating in and observing day-to-day practice and meetings. As summarised in table 2.3 and 2.4, I participated in and wrote fieldnotes on a total of 80 observation sessions between November 2014 and April 2016 (inclusive). In addition, I attended externally organised events and training courses that supported ongoing active engagement in the organisations and the wider cooperative movement⁶⁹ (see table 2.5). The next section explores the challenges and emotions arising from these observations. In doing so it reveals emotion as a potential site of learning about organisational praxis.

⁶⁹ While conversations and experiences of these events have not been included in this thesis, they did play an important role in helping me to make sense of the data I collected and situate it in the context of wider (and common) concerns. Through the latter I was pushed to continuously reassess the practical implication of my research, explored in chapter 6.

Date	Description	My role	Mode of recording
30/09/14	Initial invite letter delivered	Researcher	Saved letter
04/11/14	Consent signing	Participant	Fieldnotes
15/11/14 (4hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
16/11/14 (2hr)			
24/11/14 (2.5hr)			
26/11/14 (2hr)			
02/12/14 (4.5hr)			
09/12/14 (7hr)			
19/12/14 (3hr)			
24/12/14 (4.5hr)			
07/01/15 (4hr)			
16/01/15 (3.5hr)			
26/01/15 (2.5hr)			
04/02/15 (4.5hr)			
17/02/15 (2hr)			
19/02/15 (2hr 20min)			
04/03/15	Finalising arrangement for visit to Unicorn Grocery	Researcher	Fieldnotes
09/03/15	Visit to Unicorn Grocery Attended by Heather and Steve (ex-member)	Participant (organiser)	Fieldnotes/transcript
11/03/15 (4hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
14/03/15 (2.5hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
26/03/15 (2hr)	Members' meeting	Observer	Transcript
01/04/15 (3hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
09/04/15 (1hr 20min)	Members' meeting	Observer	Transcript
13/04/15 (8hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
14/04/15 (2hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
15/04/15 (2hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
16/04/15 (45min)	Meeting with part-time staff	Observer	Transcript
20/04/15 (1hr)	Marketing meeting (sub-committee)	Observer	Fieldnotes
22/04/15	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
23/04/15 (5.5hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
07/05/15 (2.5hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
13/05/15 (2hr)	Shop observation	Participant	Fieldnotes
19/05/15	Discussion about new member	Observer	Fieldnotes
19/05/15	Focus group	Researcher	Transcript
21/05/15 (1.5hr)	Members' meeting: shared information on revision to model articles	Participant	Fieldnotes (see also appendix 13)
26/05/15	Focus group	Researcher	Transcript
04/06/15	Focus group feedback	Researcher	Fieldnotes
18/06/15 (1hr)	Members' meeting	Observer	Fieldnotes
02/07/15	Members' meeting: discussion on reviewing articles	Participant	Fieldnotes
16/07/15 (1.5hr)	Members' meeting	Observer	Fieldnotes
30/07/15 (1.5hr)	Members' meeting	Observer	Fieldnotes
14/01/16 (1.5hr)	Members' meeting	Observer	Fieldnotes

Table 2.3: List of observations (Beansies)

Date	Description	My role	Mode of recording
30/09/14	Initial invite letter delivered	Researcher	Saved letter
07/11/15	Meeting with Gareth to discuss my role/his hope for research	Participant	Fieldnotes
25/11/14	First meeting and consent signing with Fran (café)	Researcher	Fieldnotes
27/11/14 (5hr)	Office Nicole signed consent form	Observer Researcher	Fieldnotes
04/12/14 (7hr)	Box packing Office	Participant Observer	Fieldnotes
11/12/14 (8hr)	Box packing Office/meeting (Gareth, Nicole)	Participant Observer	Fieldnotes Fieldnotes/transcript
12/12/14 (5.5hr)	Office	Observer	Fieldnotes
18/12/14 (8.5)	Office	Observer	Fieldnotes
23/12/14 (8.5hr)	Box packing	Participant	Fieldnotes
08/01/15 (3hr)	Box packing	Participant	Fieldnotes
15/01/15 (8.5)	Box packing Office	Participant Observer	Fieldnotes
22/01/15 (2.5hr)	Members' meeting	Observer	Transcript
29/01/15 (8hr)	Box packing Office	Participant Observer	Fieldnotes Fieldnotes/transcript
30/01/15	Office	Observer/participant	Fieldnotes
21/02/15 (7hr)	Meeting (Microbrewery/finance)	Observer	Fieldnotes
24/02/15 (1.5hr)	Members' meeting	Observer	Fieldnotes Photographs
05/03/15 (3hrs)	Meeting (YDV)	Observer	Fieldnotes
09/03/15	Visit to Unicorn Grocery Attended by Fran and Lisa	Participant (organiser)	Fieldnotes/transcript
12/03/15 (9hr)	Box packing and delivery	Participant	Fieldnotes
19/03/15	Office	Observer/participant	Fieldnotes/transcript
26/03/15	Office	Observer	Fieldnotes
27/03/15	Office/meeting (Gareth, Fran)	Observer	Transcript
02/04/15 (5hrs)	Box packing Office (meeting with external)	Participant Observer	Fieldnotes
10/04/15 (8hrs)	Office (meeting with external)	Observer	Fieldnotes
15/04/15 (1.5hr)	Office (meeting with local social enterprise)	Observer	Fieldnotes
16/04/15 (6hr)	Box packing Office	Participant Observer	Fieldnotes
20/04/15 (2hr)	Tour for School for Social Entrepreneurs	Observer	Transcript
21/04/15 (6.5hr)	Office	Observer	Fieldnotes
22/04/15 (1hr)	Office	Observer	Fieldnotes
23/04/15 (3hr)	Office	Observer	Fieldnotes
30/04/15 (11hr)	Office (meeting with external)	Observer/participant	Fieldnotes/transcript
12/05/15	Members' meeting	Participant	Fieldnotes/transcript
18/05/15	Office	Observer	Fieldnotes
10/06/15	Focus group	Researcher	Transcript
26/06/15	Post FG3 discussion	Researcher/Participant	Transcript
17/07/15 (2.5hr)	Members' meeting	Participant	Transcript
02/02/16 (2hr)	Annual General Meeting	Participant	Fieldnotes
01/03/16	General meeting	Participant	Fieldnotes
26/04/16	Governance meeting with cooperative consultant	Participant/observer	Fieldnotes

Table 2.4: List of observations (Regather)

Date	Event	Purpose
17/01/15	Ways forward for cooperatives (conference, Manchester)	Understanding of issues facing wider cooperative movement
9-10/05/15	Worker cooperative weekend	Understanding of issues facing worker cooperatives
21/05/15	Ways forward for cooperatives two (conference, Manchester)	Understanding of issues facing wider cooperative movement
22/07/15	Secretary Course (Cooperatives UK, Manchester)	Attended prior to taking role of secretary at Regather. Information from event shared with Beansies
19/11/15	Practitioner Forum (Cooperatives UK, Oxford)	Understanding of issues facing wider cooperative movement
21/01/16	Ways forward for cooperatives four (conference, Manchester)	Understanding of issues facing wider cooperative movement

Table 2.5: List of external events attended

2.2.3: Learning from emotion

Through her experience of researching and working for a not-for-profit organisation, Kenny (2008: 376) found that:

An awareness of the beauty of the experience of work enables us to explore the ties that bind people to their organisations.

Similarly, Finlay (2005) and Emerson et al. (2001: 361) explain that a researcher's emotional responses 'may mirror those that naturally occur in the setting' and offer an 'analytic lead' as well as bringing assumptions, and attitudes to the fore, and supporting a more transparent research process⁷⁰. These authors (see also Garthwaite, 2016; Warren, 2012; Gibson-Graham, 2009) recognise that emotion, and particularly embodied and intersubjective experiences of empathy – of "feeling into," or gently sensing another person or an object' (Finlay, 2005: 272) – harbours the

⁷⁰ Gilmore and Kenny (2015) acknowledge the difficulty inherent to reflexively engaging with emotions in academic research. For them, the difficulty arises from a 'fear that discussing emotions might appear immature, primitive or even pathological' (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 57). While recognising this fear I would add the challenge of simultaneously attending to your own and participants' emotions and their varying relation to and impact on the research. I was aware of the risk of 'navel-gazing' and becoming 'preoccupied by [my] own emotions and experiences [...], blocking out the participant's voice' (Finlay, 2002: 215; Cunliffe, 2003a; Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). I (partially) addressed this challenge by describing and reflecting on my experiences in fieldnotes. Writing these reflections helped me to make sense of, and as importantly, move beyond feelings of guilt, anxiety and uncertainty. It thus helped me to avoid becoming lost in an emotional quagmire.

potential to generate richer understandings of participants and organisations. Moreover, they argue that suppressing or ignoring our emotions limits our engagement with the process of knowledge construction and, as such, sits contrary to the extended epistemology of the participatory worldview. Adding to this argument Donnelly et al. (2013) contend that sanitised, systematic and objective accounts of research conceal the challenges and experiences that shape the direction of the research, and deny the imperfectness of the research process, the researcher, and their role in knowledge construction.

Despite the potential of learning from the embodied experiences of research, they have remained largely hidden and unspoken, particularly in organisational research (Turner and Norwood, 2013; Gilmore and Kenny, 2015). Recognising that this omission risks reinforcing the impression of the researcher as cognitively neutral expert, and limits opportunities for self-discovery through our own exposure to vulnerability (Wray-Bliss, 2003; Turner and Norwood, 2013), I responded throughout my research to Gilmore and Kenny's (2015: 57) call to break the 'silence surrounding ethnographers' emotional experiences'. I did so by utilising experiences of contradiction, anxiety and frustration as analytical starting points that pushed me to question my assumptions and gave insights into the changing relationship between myself, participants and the praxis of democracy (Koning and Ooi, 2013; Kenny, 2008; Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013). Experiences and new understandings arising from negotiating access to each organisation, deciding what to observe (see section 2.3), and navigating my insider-outsider role are rehearsed in Langmead (2017b). Following concerns over deconstructing the researcher/practitioner divide, the remainder of this section replays arguments made in relation to the latter experience.

Learning from being an insider

Adopting the role of both researcher and cooperative practitioner, I found myself constantly flitting between the field and non-field, theory and practice, researcher and researched (Rose, 1997: 313). Through this flitting, I came to know, not only the objective cosmos 'out there' or of myself within the world, but also of my interrelation and co-presence with the world and other subjects as a researcher, activist, friend, and colleague. I became acutely aware of the fractured, decentred, and plurivocal nature of the self as I temporarily and contextually engaged multiple identities in the research process (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). My experience aligns with that of Routledge (1996: 414), who explains:

In my own experience, it is not clear to me where one role or position begins and where the other ends. This blurring holds out the possibility that insider and outsider voices may coalesce into a new perspective, one which is not just counter-hegemonic or simply oppositional [...] but which opens a new arena of negotiation, meaning, representation.

I was made more conscious of the blurring of the insider-outsider dichotomy by participants' comments (Labaree, 2002). During one observation session at Beanies, Heather asked me how my observation was going. *'It's going really well'* I replied. Aware that my emic perspective may be making it difficult for me to 'see the beliefs, values practices and behaviours embedded in everyday life' (Richards and Morse, 2013: 56), I added: *'I'm not sure what I am missing, what I am taking for granted because to me [as a former employee] it's all just normal'*. Heather empathised and went on to explain that when I am at Beanies, *'we ask you to do things because we need the extra pair of hands and because you just get on with it and fall into your role as worker'*⁷¹. While, in my role as researcher I tried to see the organisation with fresh

⁷¹ What Heather is explaining here was experienced throughout my research as illustrated in the following observation:

After we unloaded the vegetable delivery Gemma asked me for advice on some low quality produce she had received in a delivery earlier that day. Gemma: We got loads of rubbish aubergines delivered today. What do you think I should do with them? Researcher: Half price them? Gemma: I have half priced some because it is all we have but there are still loads. I don't know if I should just put them outside. Researcher: Does the company want them back? Gemma: No. We only get a delivery from them once a week and if they are rubbish now they won't want the back in a week. I have told them and we are getting a credit. Researcher: Yes, I guess just throw them out then. Gemma: Mark will just throw them outside in the morning anyway (Fieldnote, 26/11/14).

eyes, Heather's description of me falling into the role of worker captured my recurrent experience of uncontrollably descending into the blind spots of an insider. As such, the re-adoption of a familiar role could be seen to support scepticism over the potential to learn from ethnographic study in one's own community (Richard and Morse, 2013). However, as Brannick and Coghlan (2007) argue, aside from the benefits of trust and historical knowledge that accompanied my embeddedness, the process of 'falling into' my former worker role helped me to re-experience and re-imagine past feelings of belonging and created a sense of mutuality.

Paying attention to the latter, I became aware that my desire for mutuality arose, not only from feelings of guilt over the demands my research was placing on the organisations, but also from its deep embedding in both the organisations' democratic praxis, and in myself as a practitioner. I did not see the time that I spent volunteering as an observant participant in terms of reciprocity (Restakis, 2010): I was not giving time and receiving data in return. Rather I understood my labour as commons. As I felt my own labour as a collective resource, I became sensitive to similar framings in each organisation. Like Cornwell (2012) and Bryne and Healy (2006), I came to see members of both Beanies and Regather as communal subjects, and their inputs of time, knowledge, money, and skills as a source of collective potentiality (see section 5.1). These understandings express members' commitment to mutuality and concomitant embrace of their individual-collective interdependence which, as will be explored in chapter 4, emerged as central to their democratic praxis.

Turning my attention to the former, alongside recognition of my skills and knowledge highlighted above, a sense of belonging emerged through experiences of friendship, and more specifically, the development of comfortable, trusting, and respectful relationships founded in shared values⁷². The significance of these relationships lay in

⁷² In Beanies, a sense of belonging came with the increasing ease of conversation and invites to contribute to members meetings. This marked a change in relationship from employee to fellow co-operator and volunteer. While I always felt, as an employee that my opinion mattered, there remained a sense of hierarchy inevitable to an employer-employee relationship. In my new role, this hierarchical relationship faded and, although I was not a member, I felt that my feedback and ideas were respected and welcomed. This sense of belonging was reinforced when Jake invited me to be in the group photo during a 30-mile bike ride organised in celebration of Beanies 30th year. Conversely, standing with members in this photograph gave rise to a feeling of being other; that distant family member that, years from now, no-one will be able to identify.

what they revealed about the requirements of organisational membership. Most significantly, reflecting on the source of my own sense of belonging drew my attention to the importance of finding the ‘right mix of people’, and of processes of individual–collective alignment, to the success of a democratically run organisations (section 4.1; Langmead, 2017a). In relation to the former, experiencing the joy of friendship helped me to understand the value of long processes of member recruitment and periods of probation that ensured the cooperatives’ found a ‘nice person’ with whom existing members could develop meaningful relationships (see section 4.1.5). In relation to the latter, the alignment and dis-alignment of my observations and preconceived notions of what constitutes democracy in research and organisational practice made me more aware of members’ shared orientation to cooperative working, and the gradual processes through which this orientation coalesces into common democratic subjectivities (see section 4.1.4).

Learning from being an outsider

The sense of belonging discussed above sat in sharp, and at times uncomfortable, contrast to a sense of otherness. The latter arose most strongly when members focused on my researcher role. The jovial nature of the following exchange (Beanies, fieldnote, 07/01/15) and observation (Regather, fieldnote, 23/12/14) generated both feelings of acceptance and friendship, and discomfort and otherness. They made me acutely aware of my plurality, and the tensions and uncertainties that arise from occupying multiple positions.

Jake, who was on his way out of Beanies for his break, asked me how long I was planning on staying.

In Regather, a sense of belong arose through members recognition of my past involvement and consequent historical knowledge of the organisation; and through wider acknowledgement of experience and knowledge relevant to Regather’s activities. For example, during one observation session packing vegetable boxes I noted (fieldnote, 11/12/14, researcher reflections in grey): *Fran came across a shortfall in the milk order and asked my advice about what to do. One customer wanted 6lt and one wanted 1lt but all they had had delivered was 2lt. Fran: Who should this go to? Researcher: To the customer who wants 6lt, that way the customer who clearly needs a lot of milk won’t be left high and dry and, either way, the customer wanting 1lt isn’t going to get what she ordered. Fran and Lisa agreed.* [Seems Fran sees me as having some level of knowledge about such issues from previous work at Regather and Beanies and trusts/respects my view. I felt a little uncomfortable being the one who Fran asked as Lisa was in the room and knows the customers]. This sense of belonging was reinforced by easy conversations that revealed shared interests, and invites to join members for lunch and post-work drinks.

Researcher: Until 5ish.

Jake: Long enough to get your data?!

I laughed nervously.

Jake: When are you going to get us in a chair and start attaching electrodes to our heads?

I laughed, again nervously.

Jake: Are you going to put us in a maze and have us find cheese?

Researcher (smiling): Maybe some out of date cheese.

Participants' anxiety over my researcher presence was similarly expressed in Regather:

Before starting to pack the vegetable boxes there was some chat about the Christmas party (that I had attended). Fran and Lisa commented (jokingly) that they couldn't believe that they were discussing it in front of me, saying it might go in the little book (referring to my fieldnote book). Lisa joked that it was like having a journalist here and that I might write things down and then claim that 'it must be true; the little book told me'. She apologised for this comment and explained it was just because her and Fran are jealous of my important work.

Comparing the two experiences outlined here I noted that, as a member and cooperative secretary of Regather, feelings of otherness were felt more acutely. In response to Jake's comments, I felt nervous, and highly aware of my researcher role and position as an outsider. In contrast, the experience with Fran and Lisa brought additional feelings of exclusion. As Lisa and Fran's jokey comments suggest, at Regather, my researcher role meant that I could only be party to certain conversations, even though I was also a friend and colleague.

A similar sense of exclusion was felt later in the research when meeting schedules and reporting systems (see appendix 14) that I had spent time developing were rejected⁷³,

⁷³ Although proposals were initially accepted (see appendix 15) the systems and meeting schedule I proposed were not put into practice. Systems and meeting schedule that work for current members have now (April 2017) been developed and implemented.

and when members expressed frustration that ongoing discussions on governance were getting in the way of more pressing day-to-day actions. Although not intended as such, members' expressions of frustration challenged the importance, not only of my research, but also of my work as secretary. Looking more objectively at these experiences I came to better understand members' pragmatic approach to meetings, their concomitant focus on learning-through-action, and the importance of physical presence to decision-making processes: approaches and ways of being that my proposals had not fully taken into account. In both my researcher and secretary role, I was pushed to relinquish my natural tendency towards planning and embrace instead the creative potential of uncertainty and an openness to change, both of which emerged as essential in enabling meaningful member engagement (see chapter 4).

My natural tendencies towards, and assumed necessity of, structured decision-making processes were also challenged as my researcher and practitioner role met in conflicting demands. The following exchange, taken from an early meeting with Gareth (Regather, 07/11/14) illustrates conflicts arising from dis-aligned expectations, and tensions between knowing and doing.

Gareth: I would be keen to get a feel for, you know how, if and how much time you are able to spend doing some governance and membership stuff⁷⁴. Because you are doing the research, and if you are able to do something I'd be keen to get a sense of what that is.

Researcher: Yes, I'm not sure what that is yet. I mean, I already knew this, but Regather is incredibly complicated! There is a lot of stuff going on at once and, at the moment, I am trying to work out in my head what you do. I'm still trying to order everything that is going on. Because it has [both] not changed and changed a lot since I left.

Gareth: Yes. That's going to continue in some respects as well.

⁷⁴ At this point in the research, Gareth was referring specifically to me taking on the job of revising the members register. Over the course of my research this role expanded to include more secretarial work, including the revision of the governing documents (see section 1.8).

Researcher: I think that when I have kind of started to sort that stuff out a bit, quite a lot of stuff will kind of come out of that in terms of governance and membership.

My reluctance to accept the role suggested by Gareth was, itself, grounded in a persistent feeling of being an outsider. As a relatively absent member no longer involved in Regather's trades, I felt detached from the immediate struggle and unqualified to make autonomous decisions about governance or membership (The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010). Furthermore, following the PAR intent discussed in sub-section 2.2.1, I believed that such decisions should involve all members in order to instil a sense of democratic ownership. At the meeting point of Gareth's action-focused approach and my own participatory aims and views of democracy, I formed new understandings of the organisation and the tensions inherent to my methodology. In relation to the latter, I became aware of a conflicting desire to *collectively* explore the form and function of membership and to foreground the A of SAR. This conflict is explored further in sub-section 2.4.1. In relation to the former, notions of individual-collective autonomy and a "do-it-yourself" mentality were positioned at the forefront of democratic praxis (see chapter 4).

This section has shown that as both a researcher and a cooperative practitioner I faced the challenge of exploring and sensitively managing plurivocality. Reflexive engagement in these blurred spaces enabled me to delve 'deep into the site and into [my]self' (Humphrey, 2007: 23), and explore both the 'lived reality' of organisational research, and the lived reality of the organisation itself (Kenny, 2008). It did so by pushing me to reconnect thinking, feeling and acting, bringing to mind past experiences, and making me more empathetic to events and interrelations as I observed them. With this in mind, I would challenge Smith's (2001: 229) depiction of ethnographic research as a process of mining the 'perspectives of workers through [the researcher's] own lived experience'. I would challenge also her view that, through participant observation researchers engage in the 'same social process' and are 'implicated in the same relations of power and control' (ibid.). I take instead an intersubjective stance that recognises our connectedness/disconnectedness, and our capacity for 'feeling into' a person or object, as sites of (partial and tentative) learning

(Finlay, 2005; see also Jackson, 1983). This intersubjective stance is founded in a view that we come to know the world when we meet with the 'other'; when we 'listen to understand, not to judge or triumph'; hear others' experiences as valid and from here 'question [our] assumptions' (Takacs, 2003: 32). Illustrating Takacs claim, the experiences outlined in this section opened my mind to new perspectives on democracy. As my assumptions were challenged I came to see that democracy constitutes more than participation in formal structures alone. As will be explored further in chapter 4, while important in maintaining communication, these formal structures serve to support more fundamental democratic practices of learning-through-action and interacting, processes of individual-collective alignment, and underlying commitments to individual-collective interdependence and mutuality.

2.2.4: Writing and sharing narratives

Early analysis of observation data helped me to make connections between observations, identify common problems, and propose actions that supported my own and the organisations' aspirations. This gave rise to a research process that brought together narrative inquiry and focus groups, with the explicit aim of drawing attention to the role of social relations in the negotiation, reconstruction, and confirmation of values, identities, and ways of knowing. In line with the SAR framework, it was designed to identify and explore processes of (re)subjectification and individual-collective transformation (Cameron and Gibson, 2005); and to allow my research to be 'shaped by the *exchanges* between [my] knowledge and the knowledge of the participants' (Bosco and Herman, 2010: 203, my emphasis). As Cameron (2005: 159) explains:

The interactive aspect of focus groups provides an opportunity for people to explore different points of view, and formulate and reconsider their own ideas and understandings. [...] For researchers who are interested in the socially constructed nature of knowledge this aspect of focus groups makes them an ideal research method; the multiple meanings that people attribute to places, relationships, processes and events are

expressed and negotiated, thereby providing important insights into the practice of knowledge production.

Similarly, narrative inquiry considers narratives to be formed through reflection on individuals' experiences in relation to others, situated within a specific societal, temporal and physical context. Following Connelly and Clandinin (2006) and Clandinin et al. (2007: 4) I understand narratives as expressions of peoples' engagement in 'living, telling, retelling and reliving' experiences as they move from past to imagined future. Narrative inquiry thus adopts a certain temporal epistemology that situates events, participants and the researcher themselves in a 'multidimensioned, ever changing life space' (Clandinin et al., 2007: 27). This ever-changing space is located within and embodies certain social conditions and relationships which are themselves in constant dialogue with organisational and individual narratives.

From this perspective, in an organisational context, narratives are understood to simultaneously 'enable the creation, transformation and maintenance of culture', structures and systems (Rhodes and Brown, 2005: 172; Rhodes, 1996). They are, in other words, both a tool for organising and a means through which to instigate, manage, enable, and explore change. In relation to the former, narratives are viewed as subjective/intersubjective accounts used by organisations to highlight 'the narrative unities of our lives' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 4), engender a mutual sense of purpose, and give order to tacit ways of knowing. In relation to the latter, the sharing of narratives creates an avenue through which members can, in the present, look backwards to the past and project forwards to the future, forming connections and "as if' realit[ies]' that help organisations to collectively create and legitimise new meanings and structural conditions (Rhodes and Brown, 2005: 173). This understanding reflects my own experience of organising as a conversation and form of learning-through-action: a process of individual and collective becoming that necessitates an acceptance of organisational and individual identity as fluid and contestable (Amba, 2000; Wenger, 2000; Rhodes and Brown, 2005; see section 4.1). Combining narrative inquiry with focus groups enabled myself and participants to explore this process of learning and becoming, described by Hendry (2009: 79) as 'the difficult work of democratic engagement'.

Following this understanding of the role of narratives in research and organising, the method constituted two stages: (1) producing written narratives, and (2) sharing and analysing these narratives in focus groups. The call for narratives was purposefully open, inviting reflections on experiences, relationships, values and aspirations that have informed members' journeys to cooperative working (see appendix 18). Following the submission of narratives, focus groups were organised in consultation with participants. In Beanies, this was a relatively straightforward process that resulted in the organisation of two focus groups with three participants in each⁷⁵. Participants from Regather expressed preference for having a single focus group. This gave rise to a lengthy negotiation over its day and time, the majority of which was carried out via e-mail. The focus group was conducted in Regather's office on a Tuesday evening so as not to interrupt daily activity and to ensure members with other jobs could attend. A summary of participants' involvement in this two-part process, and the length of each focus group, can be found in table 2.1 and 2.2.

Drawing on methods used by Pedella et al. (2014), Labonte et al. (1999) and Amba (2000) and following a desire to bring an element of participation to data analysis, the focus groups proceeded as follows. First, participants shared written narratives verbally. For most, the written narratives acted as a prompt on which participants could elaborate. As narratives were shared, those listening wrote down on post-it notes experiences that were brought to mind by the stories; elements that they related to; and any similarities or differences with their own experiences/stories. Following this, participants stuck their post-it notes on the wall grouping them in common themes (see figure 2.3 and 2.4).

⁷⁵ Focus groups were conducted in Beanies office during work hours. The timing and location of the focus groups was indicative of participants' view of the research as an extension to day-to-day practices of action-reflection-learning. The division of participants into two groups was necessitated by the hours and shift patterns of cooperative members' work.

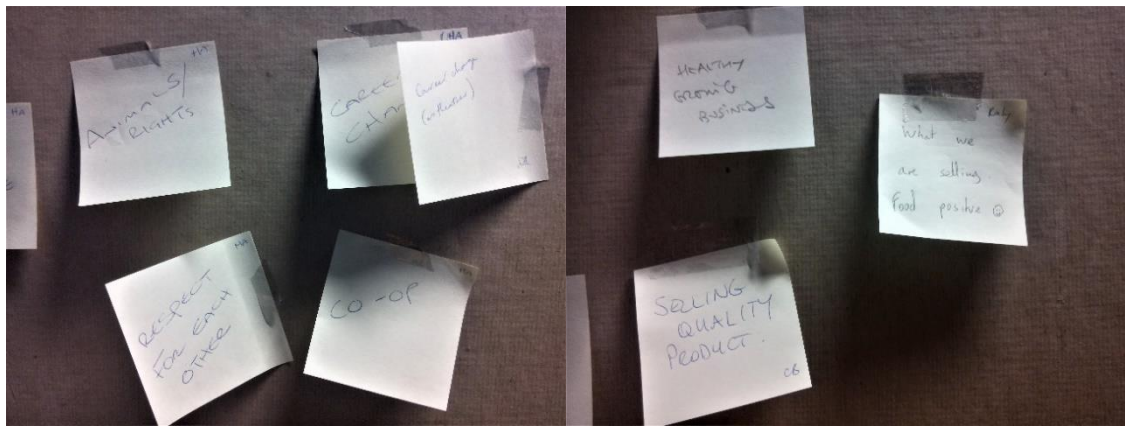


Figure 2.3: Grouped post-it notes (Beanies, FG1/FG2)

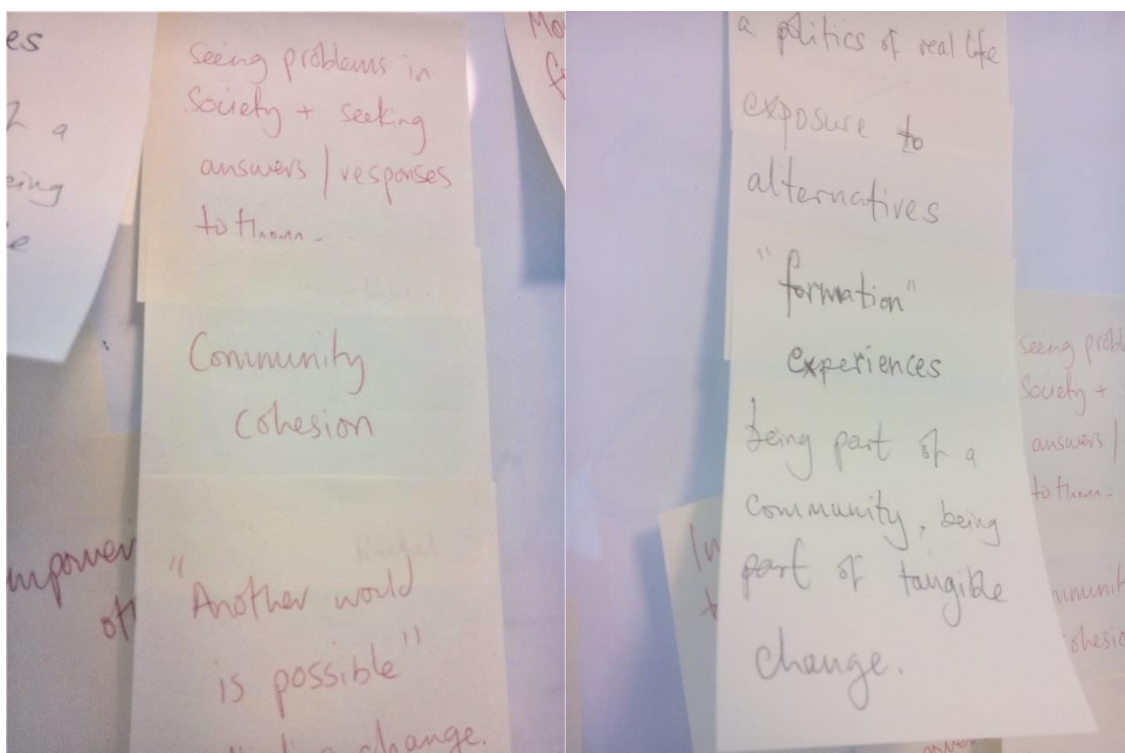


Figure 2.4: Grouped post-it notes (Regather, FG3)

These themes formed the focus of a group discussion, led largely by participants, that lasted between one hour and one hour and forty minutes. In these discussions participants reflected on experiences of organising and work, within and outside of their cooperatives, to reveal motivations, aspirations and disillusionments that have shaped their understandings and practices of democracy. In line with the participatory worldview, the discussions saw participants cycling between experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing (see sub-section 3.4.2). In addition to revealing processes of consummation and grounding, focus groups highlighted

members' roles as 'co-creator(s) of the [emergent organisational] story' (Hawkins and Saleem, 2012: 211), shaping and framing collective narratives through engagement with multiple selves. As participants and myself 'actively and critically reflect[ed] on the world and our place within it' (Maxey, 1999: 201), focus groups were framed as 'active third spaces' (Routledge, 1996): spaces that embodied the 'dynamic movements of knowing and doing' (Chiu, 2003: 180), blurred the dichotomy and spatial separation of data collection and analysis, and brought together theory and practice, thought and action (Bosco and Herman, 2010). Combined with the fluidity of discussion arising from the degree of control afforded to participants, the focus groups became an 'active practice of simultaneously *doing* research and *being* in the research' (Bosco and Herman, 2010: 195, original emphasis).

Focus group discussions were transcribed and analysed alongside written narratives. Initial reflections were shared with all participants at members' meetings (see table 2.1 and 2.2 for details). This process informed subsequent actions, including the revisions to governing documents and the development of more structured communication channels, and my role in relation to these actions. The presentation of tentative reflections in these meetings was followed by a second, slower phase of analysis, described in the next section.

2.3: Analysis

A recurrent anxiety throughout my research was deciding what to observe and what to record in fieldnotes. This anxiety was founded in an expectation that 'things, acts [and] events *might* be meaningful, depending on circumstances' (Ybema et al., 2009: 15, my emphasis). Furthermore, I was aware that each decision to include some voices and experiences at the expense of others shaped the direction of the research, often in unknowable ways (see appendix 19). As Emerson et al. (2001: 353) recognise, and the extract below (fieldnote, Beanies, 17/01/15) shows, fieldnotes are selective representations that reflect what the ethnographer views as significant at a given point in time. The extract shows also that, in addition to conscious choice, recorded observations were also determined by the demands of participation. Specifically, it

reveals tensions between a desire to respond to requests for help as an act of mutuality, and a desire to be in control of observations and note taking.

Keen to make notes on a recent observation, I left Beanies shop floor and went downstairs as soon as I finished serving customers. I picked up empty cups and offered people tea on the way down. [Notes made on the conversation I had just observed were disjointed and out of order. I wanted to capture what I perceived at the time to be the most important points as accurately as possible and made notes to reflect this (i.e. notes were made according to perceived relevance rather than chronologically – this is the case with most of my jot notes)]. As I was making the note about the Mark and Heather’s discussion regarding putting up an organic certification sign (the conversation recently observed) I decided that it would be worth following up on this. At this point Jake came into the kitchen and asked me to take some lettuces upstairs. I got the lettuce out of the chiller and carried them up to the shop and ended up serving customers. By the time this had happened, Mark had left and I could no longer ask him. Instead, I asked Heather ‘Do you think you will take the decision about the sign to a meeting?’ Heather: ‘No. It is a good idea.’

An early observation at Regather (fieldnote, 04/12/15), included below, heightened my awareness of this selective process and the plural aims, commitments and ethical considerations that informed it. Here, fieldnotes are framed as overdetermined, ‘active processes of interpretation and sense-making’ (Emerson et al., 2001: 353).

When Gareth arrived to meet a visitor I was making notes. He commented on my note taking, asking if I was here observing. Lisa said ‘Yes, I was just talking and suddenly she went off to write things down. I’m not sure what I said.’ Gareth replied ‘Lots of things we don’t think are significant. We will get used to it.’ [I am wondering how much my note taking is impacting on conversations. As I wrote this up I am also, once again questioning the ethics of observation. [...]. This reflection made me return to an earlier conversation between Lisa and Fran about

their weekend and reconsider whether such personal conversations should be recorded. This conversation does however reveal information about Lisa and Fran's mixture of work practice, the need to work multiple jobs, and their social focus in their chosen work.]

Both of these extracts unveil ongoing tensions between participating, observing and writing fieldnotes that were heightened by ethical concerns and desires for mutuality. Struggling with these tensions I followed Luttrell's (2000: 500) guidance on 'good enough' methods. In this guidance Luttrell advocates 'thinking about [and accounting for] research decisions in terms of what is lost and what is gained, rather than what might be ideal'. For me, this meant challenging notions that it is possible, or even desirable, to divide ethnography up into distinct stages of entry (and ethical approval), acquaintance, acceptance and data analysis (Richards and Morse, 2013: 56-7), and to embrace instead opportunities to learn through engagement with their blurred boundaries. This engagement constituted an iterative and integrated cycle of generating, transcribing and analysing data (Seale, 2004; Schiellerup, 2008), the latter of which is summarised in table 2.6. Fieldnotes that I had become familiar with through their writing and reading were used more loosely, acting as a reflexive tool with which to frame and explore findings from transcribed data.

Process	Outcomes	Benefit
Eyeballing, highlighting and line-by-line coding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple codes closely related to participants words. - Understanding of the multiple meanings embedded in single words and phrases. - Insights into the <i>processes</i> of knowledge construction. - Tentative links within and across narratives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drew me into the data, preventing 'theoretical flights of fancy' (Ryan and Bernard, 2003: 91) - Created space for me to think 'critically and analytically' (Charmaz, 2004: 508) about the data.
Rationalisation of original codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rationalised codes that I considered to make most '<i>analytic sense</i>' and categorise my data most '<i>accurately and completely</i>' (Charmaz, 2004: 508). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helped to create a path from original codes to a more abstract level of analysis.
'Focused coding' Charmaz (2000; 2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Worked more intensively with each code. - Conceptual categories. - Understanding of how codes related to the explicit and implicit meaning of words and phrases and how it connected to one another. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pushed me deeper into an exploration of conditions, contexts, actions and interactions surrounding each code (Strauss and Corbin, 1990 cited in Seale, 2004). - Conceptual categories, although by no means fixed or conclusive, assisted in the development of an analytic framework.
'Cut and sort' (Ryan and Bernard, 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arranged words and phrases according to these categories. - Identification of patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helped me to find similarities, differences and contradictions between and within different participant's narratives, and narratives, observations and focus group data. - Helped me to 'move beyond individual cases and to define patterns' (Charmaz, 2004: 512), and to identify specific leads to pursue.

Table 2.6: Analysis of transcribed data

Analysis was followed by a collective data review. Summaries of initial findings chapters including data relevant only to the recipient organisation were e-mailed to participants. Meetings were then held in which participants had the opportunity to express concerns, challenge interpretations and make a decision on the level of anonymity (see tables 2.1 and 2.2). As illustrated in section 2.4, far from 'watering down' the insights of the research, this process enabled assumptions to be challenged, and foregrounded the multiplicity of interpretations leading to a richer account (Finlay, 2002: 219).

Beyond this 'formal' analysis process I recognise writing itself as a process of meaning-making (Humphrey and Watson, 2009). I found that, through writing, I engaged with data in the same way as people engage with experience through stories: through temporally continuous processes that are always in flux (Craig, 2009a; 2009b), and in which we simultaneously engage in 'living, telling, retelling and reliving' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 4). In practice, this meant paying attention to the ways in which stories changed during the reflexive processes of meaning-making; situating experiences-as-lived alongside experiences-as-told; and shifting between detail and whole in order to support sense-making processes that bridged storied and lived time (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:7). Further learning from Connelly and Clandinin (1990: 11) I engaged in processes of 'burrowing' and 'restorying'. The former involved focusing, as I have done in much of this chapter, on the 'emotional, moral and aesthetic qualities' of events. The latter involved questioning the stories meaning, significance, and impact on present and future understandings of democratic praxis and the economy, and how they are situated within a broader narrative of self, organisation and change. We see here that, while the research text becomes static, the narrative continues to unfold. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990: 9) explain (and Mark's reflection in sections 2.2.3 insightfully shows), 'the insights of today are the chronological events of tomorrow'. Following a critical discussion on researcher power, the next section explores this fluidity and its ethical implications.

2.4: Beyond procedural ethics

Like Murphy and Dingwall (2001: 339) I understand ethics to be inseparable from the epistemological and ontological foundations of research and from 'questions about the values which should prevail in society'. From this perspective, research ethics cannot be reduced to procedures and codes of conduct. Rather, it must be understood as a way of being: a reflexive praxis of '*continually choosing* to feel, think and act in particular ways' that brings principles into action (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 620, emphasis added; Jeanes, 2016). Illustrating this position, previous sections have shown that a weak theoretical stance, anti-essentialist epistemology, and participatory worldview have shaped my approach to research. They have shown also that these stances embed within them certain values: namely that participation is a fundamental

human right; that the researcher (expert)/participant (doer) divide is a false dichotomy; and that research, understood as a form of activism in and of itself, has an imperative to 'change people's ideas about themselves and other's and ultimately change our society' (Lassiter and Campbell, 2010: 762; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). As such, the choice of methodology and methods, and the decision to reflexively explore rather than describe these in the preceding sections, are understood as elements of ethical research practice that spanned from the project's conception to publication (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Bell and Wray-Bliss, 2009; Brewis and Wray-Bliss, 2008). From this perspective, reflexivity overflows the realm of epistemology and legitimacy (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010), and becomes itself 'the basis for ethical action[s]' of scrutinising research practice and relations as they are co-constructed (Jeanes, 2016: 4).

Through the lens of 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) this section explores situated ethical practices and their connection to the stance described. It starts by considering the issue of researcher/participant power and how this is played out at different stages of the research process.

2.4.1: On researcher/researched power and relational ethics

I am a female, white, 'middle class' academic. What does this mean in terms of power? Does the former element render me power-less and the latter three powerful? To suggest this 'overstates the linear, unidirectional exercise of power', and understates our own (researcher and participant) role in both reproducing and resisting power/powerlessness (Wray-Bliss, 2003: 308). Furthermore, it ignores the 'decentredness of women's [/white's/middle class'/academic's] 'collective identity' and the overdetermined nature of subjectivity' (Gibson-Graham, 1994: 217). It fails to recognise, in other words, my experiences of being in and out of control, and assumes simplistically that power is a 'commodity' held in the hands of the researcher (Kesby, 2007: 2815; Gilmore and Kelly, 2015). Contrary to this portrayal, sub-section 2.2.3 illustrated that my power as a researcher rose and fell in relation to participants through my positioning as an insider/outsider. It was not a product of my own or participants' gender, class or academic status, but of the research process and our

relationships. Recognising this I focus, not on 'fixed and knowable subject positions', but on 'diverse and shifting positions mutually adopted' (Finlay, 2002: 226; see also Fine, 1994).

This relational understanding of power was illustrated in focus groups as myself and participants took and relinquished control over the discussion. Reflecting on this process I follow Wray-Bliss (2003) in focusing not only on how power relations affect the researched but also on how such power relations can turn back and affect the researcher. For example, when participants in focus groups foregrounded my position of power by seeking clarification over the task and their contributions I was left feeling power-less: I had failed to relinquish control over the process and was therefore power-less *as* a researcher with a PAR intent. As focus groups progressed my role reduced. This was particularly the case in FG3 where participants took control of clustering of post-it notes into themes and leading the subsequent discussion⁷⁶. Again, this experience made me feel at once powerful and power-less: powerful as a 'participatory' researcher and power-less as a silent (but knowing) cooperative member and outsider.

In and amongst this ebb and flow of power I was reminded that 'collaboration and egalitarianism' in research can 'disguise the inequalities actually present' (Finlay, 2002: 226; Kesby, 2007). While I was treated as an insider with equally valid knowledge, participants adopted a position of power by virtue of their access to information and role as gatekeepers. Conversely, as I sought to relinquish control and emphasise the value of participants' experiential knowing, I adopted a position of power through my role as observer and writer. Further reflecting on the latter, I found that tensions emerged between two conflicting, but interdependent aims. On the one hand was my desire to be 'absent' and develop, through observation, a deep understanding of each organisation as a basis to future action. As illustrated in sub-section 2.2.3, this process was understood as a central means through which to prevent the imposition of a 'superior perspective' at the expense of participants' knowledge and experience and

⁷⁶ In FG3, Gareth and Rachel reflected on a previous focus group experience to suggest that members explained and passed their post-it notes to one person who could then stick them up.

without challenge to my own assumptions (Kesby, 2000). On the other was a SAR orientated epistemological stance that positions the researcher as an activist and agent in the construction knowledge, and understands research as a provocation⁷⁷. As illustrated in relation to a move from PAR to SAR (sub-section 2.2.1) this tension was amplified when my own and participants status as ‘expert-by-body’ and ‘expert-by-proxy’ met (Turner and Norwood, 2013). At this meeting point I became, at once, worried that I might make ‘participants unsure of the right to their own truths’, and ‘hesitant to present as an expert of any sort for fear I would be perceived as presumptuous, insensitive, or oppressive’ (Turner and Norwood, 2013: 709). This tension emerged most prominently in Regather where my commitment to certain actions and role as cooperative secretary made absence impossible to achieve. I could not withhold my opinion in members’ meetings or refuse to answer questions about governance. As such, while my role as participant observer had the effect of reducing the visibility of myself-as-researcher⁷⁸ and thus potentially opened space for participants to speak for themselves, it also had the effect of foregrounding my own knowledge-power that consequently shaped both organisational practice and the research process.

Further reflecting on this tension during the process of writing-up made me realise that, in my reluctance to challenge the organisations’ knowledge and actions, I was failing to recognise that local knowledge ‘may replicate existing social and economic conditions’ (Cameron and Gibson, 2005: 218). In some cases (see for example page 106-7 and 240-1) my attempts to blur the researcher/researched, academic/activist divide, and my desire to develop a deep understanding of the organisation through uninterrupted observation, thus resulted in the reproduction of disempowering (or even derogatory) narratives and actions. In these moments I sought to express and maintain a commitment to ‘the philosophy of participation’, understood to constitute abandoning ‘assumptions about our ‘expert’ status [and recognising] the expertise and contribution of participants’ as a means to enabling local solutions (Kesby, 2007:

⁷⁷ While understanding ethnography as one methods within the SAR framework, the tension between ethnography and SAR deserves further investigation. This is an endeavour I look forward to undertaking through future research.

⁷⁸ An ‘invisibility’ that, as indicated in section 2.3, I recognise as ethically problematic.

2814). In doing so I failed to recognise the interconnected nature of power and empowerment, and specifically, the ways in which expressions of my own knowledge-power might have given rise to new forms of collective action or common will (Cameron and Gibson, 2005; see Kesby, 2007 for further discussion). The 'solidaristic ethic' (Harnecker, 2012: 119) that positions *collective* acts of self-transformation as a central aim of action orientated research was (momentarily) lost.

While never fully resolving these issues, as research progressed I learnt to not try to eliminate power relations. Rather I engaged in a 'relational ethics' that emphasised the co-created nature of data and strived to be sensitive to the reality and consequences of our changing relationships (Ellis, 2007). We see these changing relationships at play in the exchange below (Regather, 29/01/15). As Lisa's pen hovered over the consent form, both her and Fran expressed concern that, as I shifted from colleague to researcher, I would make judgements about their performance.

Lisa: (laughing) I'm a bit scared about this. Is it going to be like 'Lisa didn't know how to do this'?

Researcher: No, not at all.

Lisa: (laughing) oh ok...

I emphasised that it wouldn't be like that at all and that I would discuss with Lisa points and quote that I want to include, and that she could ask me not to include them if she wasn't happy with it.

[...]

Researcher: I'm not doing it to judge whether you are good at stuff or...

Lisa: Yes, it's not about that

Fran: What will it be like afterwards? I just image reading it and being like 'oh my god I hate myself, oh no I'm awful'. I'm sure it won't be like that.

Researcher: I don't think any of it will be like that at all.

This exchange emphasises the importance of an ongoing awareness of how we attain and use our power. It shows also that this awareness, and the possibility of sensitively responding to unpredictable 'ethically important moments', lies in researcher-

participant interactions. It is in these interactions, not the process of signing a consent form, that informed consent is really negotiated (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Bell and Wray-Bliss, 2009; Bell and Bryman, 2007).

This is not to say that consent forms are a waste of time but rather is to stress their limits (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). In the case of organisational research, these limits are confounded by procedures that offer little acknowledgement of collective interests and concerns, and their interconnection with individual participants (Murphy and Dungwall, 2001: 340); that are 'insensitive to more flexible, emergent research strategies' (Bell and Wray-Bliss, 2009: 86; Bell and Bryman, 2007); and that tend to assume 'research is being done on strangers with whom we have no prior relationship and plan no future interaction' (Ellis, 2007: 5). Adding to these limits, the following fieldnote extracts show that formal consent processes can sit uncomfortably alongside existing organisational praxis; in this case participants' anti-bureaucratic views and the organisations' informal and trust-based approach to relational agreements⁷⁹. Situated as an unwelcome formality, I was left questioning whether informed consent had really been achieved (Brewis and Wray-Bliss, 2008).

I talked to Gareth about ethics. He said 'just show me where I need to sign, unless there is anything in particular'. (Fieldnote, Regather, 30/01/15)

I called Mark over to the counter to ask him a question. He came over and lent on the other side of the counter. I asked him if he would be willing to do a part of the research activity (the narrative) that I was planning on bringing up to the shop next week. I said that I understood that he had not signed up as a full participant but asked if it was ok for me to let him know about different bits and he could decide if he wanted to get involved if he had the time. Mark: 'Yes, I just didn't sign it because I figured that I would see you and I don't really do signing stuff'. (Fieldnote, Beanies, 07/01/15)

⁷⁹ As expressed in the absence of formal contracts and job descriptions.

Despite its limits, consent forms played two crucial roles in my research (see appendix 11 and 12). First, they pushed me to think through some of the ethical issues that may arise, specifically around individual and organisational anonymity. Second, they reminded both myself and participants of the nature and plurality of our relationship (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001). As the friend-researcher-colleague boundary became increasingly blurred, and participants expressed concern over what *'might go in the little book'* (Lisa), the need to remain aware of my plurivocality increased. In practice, this meant repeatedly questioning 'who' was present in conversations and actions, 'who' was assumed to be present, and what motives were at play.

2.4.2: On anonymity and the plurality of interpretation

'Anonymity is not enough' I realised as I read Ellis' (1986) heartfelt account of ethnographic research into a small fishing community. Changing participants' names did not mean that they couldn't identify themselves. Nor did it mean that they were unidentifiable to other members of their community. Calling 'Adam' 'Tom' does not prevent Adam from experiencing shame or protect him from the consequences of exposure (for further reflection see section 6.10). From the anger and disillusionment expressed by Ellis' (1986) participants I learnt that simply following ethics procedures – getting consent forms signed, using pseudonyms, saving data on a password protected computer – can, in fact, 'increase the risk of harm by blunting [a researcher's] sensitivities' (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001: 340; Ellis, 2007). As Bell and Wray-Bliss (2009, 84; Jeanes, 2016) similarly warn, the 'rule-following' of procedural ethics risks the 'abduction of individual ethical agency and its replacement with conformity' that is disconnected from the messy reality of research.

I knew from the start of my research that, because of my own involvement in the case study organisations, I could not guarantee anonymity (Wiles et al., 2006). Care was taken to make sure that participants were aware of this. I knew also that simply following the convention of anonymity would deny participants' capacity to decide for themselves what is in their own, their organisations', and the wider (cooperative) community's best interest (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Etherington, 2007). Furthermore, as

the following quotes from the collective findings review show, it would have ignored participants' wish to make 'identity explicit [as] an important way of retaining ownership of their stories' (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 69; Grinyer, 2002).

Heather (Beanies): I think I have felt the whole way along, the people that are going to be interested in reading about it are people that are interested in coops and business and how that sort of thing works. And to some extent, us telling our side of the story is actually really important. Whether they know us individually or personally is neither here nor there to me. That's how I have always felt from when you started doing it really.

Rachel (Regather): Anonymising us would go against our 10-year vision of allowing people to learn from our mistakes.

Following a conversation, held during the collective findings review, about who would have access to publications; and assurance that interpretations would be framed to reflect the fluid nature of participants' views, it was agreed that participants' and organisations' names, and all data - '*warts and all*' (Chris, Beanies, 19/05/16) - should be included⁸⁰. For participants, the research was a chance to give hope to others by showing that '*everything isn't perfect but we are ok anyway*' (Fran, Regather, 07/06/16). As such, the decision not to anonymise was an ethical decision founded on the participatory and emancipatory aims of both the research and the cooperatives (see Brewis and Wray-Bliss, 2008; Bell and Bryman, 2007).

The assurance offered in relation to exposing the plurality and unfixed nature of interpretations arose from an understanding of research texts as central locations of power (Wray-Bliss, 2003). Researchers perform this power when they decide what to

⁸⁰ During the collective findings review I highlighted some potentially sensitive information I planned to include in my thesis. This led to the following exchange (fieldnote, 19/05/16): *Mark: But without those things it is like giving the highlights of the football match (laughs). Chris: (nodded) [Include everything] warts and all... Mark: I don't really understand what a thesis is but surely you need all that? Jake: To some extent those are the most interesting bits. Evan: (Agreed) What I am saying is that as long as that is written as our opinion and not necessarily as fact, you know.*

include and exclude, how to frame interpretations, and where the writing will be published (Kenny (2008; Finlay, 2002)). Here we recognise first, that the process of writing is unavoidably reductive (Kenny, 2008), and second, that words ‘can never contain a whole person’ (Josselson, 1996: 62), organisation or situation, not least because that person, organisation and situation are themselves irreducible to a core essence. The narrative shared in this thesis is one of many that could have emerged, constructed in the process of its telling, and inseparable from my own experiences of significance, value and intention (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). As Luttrell (2000: 499) reminds us:

Consciously or not, we listen and make sense of what we hear according to particular theoretical, ontological, personal and cultural frameworks in the context of unequal power relations. The worry always exists that the voices and perspectives of those we study will be lost or subsumed to our own views.

This worry, and an awareness that ‘participants may be wounded not only by what is contained in the report, but also by what has been left out’ (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001: 341; see also section 6.10), was a key motivator behind the collective findings review. While responding to this concern and working within an ethical commitment to participation, the process created its own concerns. Most significantly, I worried that I was placing too great a burden and expectation on participants (Ellis, 2007), and pursuing a process driven more by my ‘own needs for affirmation than from any need or desire among participants’ (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001: 344). The former issue was partially addressed through suggestions of priority reading (see appendix 20) and a belief that participants are best placed to decide their own level of engagement. In relation to the latter, my desire for affirmation, which cannot and must not be denied, was not a desire for confirmation over factual correctness or truth, but a desire for a sense of legitimacy and emotional support. As such, the purpose of the collective findings review was to create opportunities for assumptions and dis-alignments in understandings to come to the fore (Etherington, 2007), to highlight the multiple versions of reality that always co-exist, and to mitigate the risk of unintentional harm. This desire and purpose was recognised by Dave (Beanies) who wrote:

Dave: Here are the notes I made as I went through your documents. Feel free to ignore them/use them as you see fit! [...] Some are observations after the fact, so may not be what you were after, but if nothing else it's helped clarify some of my own thinking and motivations! (E-mail, 03/06/16)

Aside from a few nervous and jokey comments made by Rachel and Fran over the inclusion of swear words, the organisations' acceptance of 'slowness', and expressions of personal emotion, Dave was the only participant who commented on my interpretations and offered alternative viewpoints. For most, concern centred on how their views were framed, as the following quotes illustrate.

Mark (Beanies): How I feel about the organisation today will be different tomorrow. What is in that [my thesis] isn't actually what people think. Does that make sense? Because that's people's quotes. I don't think people...if that's any of mine that doesn't matter to me because that's [one time] and then your mind changes.

Similarly, discussing my findings summaries at Regather Tim commented (from fieldnotes):

The only problem I can see is that my position has changed a lot since research started. I feel more positive and more assured than I did then; in a more certain position.

Reflecting my overdeterminist position (Graham, 1992; sub-section 1.6.2), the main point to emerge from the collective findings review was, therefore, the need to express the plurality and fluidity of the organisations, and thus break from 'a 'fixed-stage', univocal account that holds out the promise of mirroring organisational reality' (Ybema et al., 2009: 8). I was comforted by Fran's view that '[the summary] doesn't show us to be stuck in bad situation. It shows that we are always changing'. I will leave you with this thought as I move towards discussions on my findings.

3: The construction and deconstruction of the (post)capitalist economy through a diverse economies lens

The previous chapter explored how my experience as a cooperative practitioner and practitioner-researcher blurred the theory-action-research divide and gave rise to a weak theoretical stance and participatory worldview. From this perspective, theories are not understood as structures that categorise or describe reality-as-is. Rather they are expressions of our epistemological and ontological stance that shape our reactions, interactions, and interconnections with others (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005); inform *how and why* data is generated, interpreted, and presented; and offer frameworks that help us to both understand and create our circumstances, and imagine our futures (Gibson-Graham et al., 2001: 19). Theory is, in other words, one player in the performance of an ever-becoming reality. Encompassed within this position is an understanding of meaning-making as an everyday, embodied and intersubjective praxis, and reality and identity as plural and irreducible to a core essence. Reflecting these understandings, the proceeding sections develop, connect, and make sense of theory through participants' words, experiences and actions. This approach reconfigures the researcher's role, away from the critique of dominant theories of capitalism and neoliberalism, and towards the exploration of the economy-as-lived and the use of this exploration as a mean to opening spaces of economic possibility (Springer, 2016).

3.1: Neoliberal-capitalist economy

I was struck in the Preface to Jamie Peck's (2010) book 'Constructions of Neoliberal Reason' that bringing our own experiences of neoliberal-capitalism into economic debate, in his case experiences of 'Tangling with Maggie', pulls neoliberalism and capitalism back down to earth, giving otherwise abstract concepts a human scale. Adopting the researcher role outlined above, this section seeks to perform a similar act, drawing on participants' experiences to illustrate the challenges, contradictions, and performative dominance of the neoliberal-capitalist economy. Recognising the vast literature that exists on the topic (Venugopal, 2015; Springer, 2012) the section focuses on theoretical work that reveals economic diversity. As such, it lays the

foundations for sections 3.2 and 3.3 that explore approaches to challenging capitalist dominance and expanding spaces of economic possibility. Section 3.4 focuses on ‘the [everyday] revolutionary art of self-cultivation’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006a xvii) that sees the emergence of thinking, theorising economic subjects. Together, sections 3.2-3.5 take us through the four stages that Gibson-Graham (2006b) identify as necessary to enacting post-capitalist economies: deconstructing the hegemony of capitalism, fostering a language of economic difference, cultivating post-capitalist subjectivities, and building community economies. Running throughout these stages is the epistemological and ontological work needed to break away from capitalist hegemony and move towards a more diverse and interconnected understanding of the economy. The role of democracy in relation to this work and the first three stages of post-capitalist transformation, will be empirically explored in chapter 5.

3.1.1: Inducing, managing and morphing in response to crisis

Contrary to the unity portrayed through 'popular representations [and] the journalistic mania for attributing coherent thought systems to politicians' (Mirowski, 2009: 421), Mirowski and Plehwe (2009) reveal neoliberalism as a project of becoming (see also Birch and Mykhnenko, 2010; Larner, 2003; Springer, 2012). Neoliberalism and the establishment of 'market⁸¹-rule' is not, and never has been, about rolling out a coherent and 'institutionally polycentric' regime. Rather (Peck et al., 2010: 107):

It has been about learning by doing (and by failing) within an evolving framework of market-orientated reform parameters and strategic objectives.

Starting with its development in response to Fordist-Keynsian capitalism, ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ has evolved through progressive crises and contradictions, often of its own making (Peck et al., 2009; Peck, 2004). Drawing attention to this 'crisis-induced, crisis-managing and crisis-inducing' cycle, Brenner et al. (2010: 207)

⁸¹ While recognising, like Miller (2011: 10) that there is a need to decouple ‘markets’ and ‘capitalism’ – to recognise that ‘capitalism requires markets, but *markets do not require capitalism* – in this chapter the term ‘market’ is used to denote the ‘neoliberal market’ through which capitalist modes of production are organised.

highlight the variegated nature of neoliberalisation, and specifically the 'cumulatively transformative' shift from the uneven development of neoliberalisation toward the neoliberalisation of uneven regulatory development. This shift encompasses a growing recognition⁸² that neoliberalism will materialise in varying hybrid and mutated forms 'contingent upon existing historical contexts [including previous crises], geographical landscapes, institutional legacies, and embodied subjectivities' (Springer, 2012: 135; see also Peck & Tickell, 2002; for examples see Birch and Tickle, 2010; Swain et al., 2010). In light of this shift it follows that, through contextually embedded 'neoliberal programmes of capitalist restructuring', capitalism too will adopt a path dependent form (Peck et al., 2009b: 54; Peck and Theodore, 2007). Recognising also the rooting of neoliberal programmes in 'a fixed set of attributes' (Ong, 2006: 3⁸³), and idealised visions of market rule and competitive individualism, Gough (2014: 200) explains:

Different territorial capitalisms evolve through uneven and combined development: 'uneven' in that each territory develops specific social relations and durable solutions; 'combined' in that the development of territories is subject to flows of commodity, money and productive capital between them, and reciprocally creates the pressure for these flows.

The 'uneven' and 'combined' territorial development described by Gough (2014) is captured by Regather participants in the following FG3 exchange:

Nicole: When I first moved to Sheffield I felt like I had gone back in time. It was like there wasn't hummus anywhere and there was just hot roast pork sandwiches everywhere. And it's just starting to catch up now but it's like 10, 15 years behind Leeds and Manchester even.

Tim: What with the food thing?

⁸² This is reflected in literature through a propensity to replace discussion of neoliberalism with a language of neoliberalisms and neoliberalisation. These languages (particularly the latter) (re)frame neoliberalism as a process rather than an end state (Springer, 2012; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Larner, 2003).

⁸³ Including privatisation of state run assets, liberalisation of trade, deregulation of labour and product markets, and the marketisation of society (Birch and Mykhnenko, 2010: 5).

Nicole: The food thing is so behind here, like bread even. There are now some proper bakers in Sheffield but that's in the last 5 years.

Tim: Yes, that's true. One thing I really like though when coming to Sheffield, was the like Mum run, I know it's not always that, but these shops that sell just like huge baps and they are like so local vibe. There's not a bit of branding or any stuff on them, and although they don't do the good food stuff, it's probably terrible, unethical (Nicole: No nutrition) but they're actually like well local, and they are run by the people and they own it, you know.

[...]

Gareth: The non-hipster independent businesses.

Nicole: The problem is they are all shopping in the same wholesale, that's the issue with these places.

Gareth: They are all going to the parkway market.

Nicole: So they all have the same stuff.

Gareth: Yes, yes because that's the infrastructure for supplying food to the city, but on the small business level they are owner managers that employ themselves and other people, and they produce... the sandwich is a good example, [they produce] the classic Sheffield sandwich that has got like sliced boiled egg in it and salad cream.

Laughing

Nicole: Yes, when did a boiled egg become a piece of salad? Definitely a Sheffield thing!

Gareth: Yes, exactly, that is a definitive product. And then Greggs came along⁸⁴.

Through comparison of Sheffield to neighbouring cities and the foregrounding of a product unique to Sheffield, Nicole, Tim and Gareth bring to the fore the culturally and relationally situated, and temporally uneven, nature of the neoliberal-capitalist economy. Delving beyond this surface image, they reveal the flows that connect and

⁸⁴ While I have focused here on the issue of combined and territorial development, the discussion also reveals a desire to promote and develop an economy focused on artisanal, organic and high-quality production and a concomitant negative depiction of some elements of working class culture.

disrupt the uniqueness of place, from the more subtle common use of certain forms of commodity exchange, to the more obvious spread of the chain store. Here we see glimpses of neoliberal-capitalism as discourse (explored further in below) that deepens, not through the simple transference of a hegemonic ideological project from one location to another, but through the implementation of context specific 'socio-political institutional mechanisms' that simultaneously destroy and create (Peck et al., 2009: 58). In the case above, the spread of the chain stores illustrates a 'retreat from community-oriented planning' and the erosion of home-grown solutions in favour of projects designed to attract corporate investment and implement a generic approach to urban development (ibid.: 63)⁸⁵. Such processes of destruction and creation are supported by the *everyday* reproduction of neoliberalising modes of exchange and socio-capital relations, through which they become accepted as inevitable and 'common sense' (Springer, 2012).

A similar argument can be made in relation to the marketisation of Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) discussed in chapter 1. We see here the crisis and austerity driven development of market-mediated and capital-centric modes of organising, implemented in and through certain neoliberalising policy frameworks. Lisa's narrative of working in charitable organisations highlights how changes in policy and investment programmes (see section 1.1) push organisations to 'adapt or die' (McMillan, 2015).

*The 2012 Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (Laspo) took away legal aid for all immigration cases, including those relying on Article 8. The Law Centre had to show it was financially viable in order to be a part of the merging of advice services in Sheffield; Sheffield council had made it clear that only centres willing to merge would receive funding. A decision was made to axe the immigration department and I was made redundant again!*⁸⁶

⁸⁵ This can be seen clearly in the recent development of 'The Moore' in Sheffield (see appendix 21). The development (and particularly the relocation of Castle Market to The Moore), and its impact on the cost of market stall hire, particularly on independent businesses, was discussed by Regather members during the research.

⁸⁶ Taylor (2004: 44) similarly highlights the impact of policy, not only on the organisations, but on the lives of workers and their 'work trajectory'.

Contextualised in the destruction of ‘a mixed [and collaborative] provision of welfare’ and the creation of models based on competition and ‘responsibilised autonomy’ (Hustinx et al., 2015, 115-6; Dees, 2007) the Law Centre was exhorted to find ‘market-based solutions to social problems’ (Eikenberry, 2009: 585), adopt ‘mainstream business practices’ (Cameron, 2010: 1), and engage with the market on its own neoliberal terms (Arvidson et al., 2013; Dayson, 2012; Arthur et al., 2010). My purpose in drawing attention to this process of “hybridisation” (problematised in appendix 1) is to highlight not only the extension of neoliberal logics and attributes to the non-capitalist economy, but also the adaptability and mutability of capitalism itself (Thrift, 2005).

Focusing his attention on the impact of the 2008 financial crisis, Farrell (2015: 256) reveals this adaptability in the form of ‘conscience capitalisms’. These re-formations seek to bring conscience to capitalism *or* capitalism to conscience through four interconnected processes: the alignment of profit-seeking and social/environmental goals; the foregrounding of business-society interdependencies, and the concomitant re-framing of poverty/environment as a ‘lucrative but as yet untapped market’ (Farrell, 2015: 262), and the market as an effective moral mechanism for the alleviation of poverty and environmental degradation (Peters, 2016; Shamir, 2008). We see in this example evidence of Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2005; 2007; see also Du Gay and Morgan, 2013) claim that the robustness of the capitalist system is attributable, in part, to its ability to respond to and displace social and environmental criticisms. This ability is captured in the ‘spirit of capitalism’ that emerges from, and evolves in response to, the ‘interaction between capitalism on the one side and criticism of capitalism on the other’ (Chipello, 2014:62) so as to ‘justify people’s commitment to capitalism [and render] this commitment attractive’ (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 162). Du Gay and Morgan (2013: 20) add that ‘in this way, even the most radical of critiques can be put to the service of capitalism, while modifications of capitalism can be traced back to the travail of its critique’. The Public Service (Social Value) Act, Social Impact Bonds, the Big Society and new opportunities to develop public sector mutual can, like conscious capitalism, be understood as a product of this capitalism-criticism interaction, and therefore as a means to prove capitalism’s continued worth and

legitimacy. Throughout these re-formations markets maintain and (re)justify their status as the linchpin of freedom, individual agency, and social and economic progress (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). Thus, the 'teleology of capital accumulation' persists: the complex reality of crisis is reduced to an expression of the contradictions inherent in, or as necessary to, the maintenance of accumulation processes⁸⁷; and growth remains the 'preordained trajectory' with competition and exploitation at its essence (Graham, 1990: 56).

It has been argued in this section that shifting our focus from neoliberalism as a 'coherent ideological project' (Barnett, 2005: 4) to actually existing neoliberal-capitalisms reveals that neither neoliberalism nor capitalism can be understood as identifiable or knowable wholes. Releasing us from the hold of a preexisting economy we are met with an alternative form of dominance: namely the performative (neoliberalising) processes that seek to support a given ideological position by bringing certain realities into being and creating the conditions for their maintenance. These processes see what Ong (2007) refers to as small 'n'⁸⁸ and big 'N'⁸⁹ neoliberalism engaged in a 'circular discourse' (see figure 3.1): 'a process of becoming through which one simultaneously obtains the constitution of a subject(ivity) and undergoes subjection' (Springer, 2012: 139). From this perspective, neoliberal ideology is not a determining force, but a no less powerful constraining and constituting force (ibid.).

⁸⁷ A similar argument can be made in relation to shifts from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic management. While framed as a project of worker empowerment, and the enhancement of flexibility and creativity, when situated in a search for ongoing accumulation, this shift is more accurately viewed as a means to co-opt workers' 'hearts and minds for the purpose of profit' (Williams, 2007a: 166; see also Thrift, 2005).

⁸⁸ A 'technology of governing 'free subjects' that co-exists with other political rationalities' (Ong, 2007: 4)

⁸⁹ A modality that collapses multiple socio-political values into a single measure or structure' (Ong, 2007: 4) and frames neoliberalism as a 'fixed set of attributes' (Ong, 2007: 3).

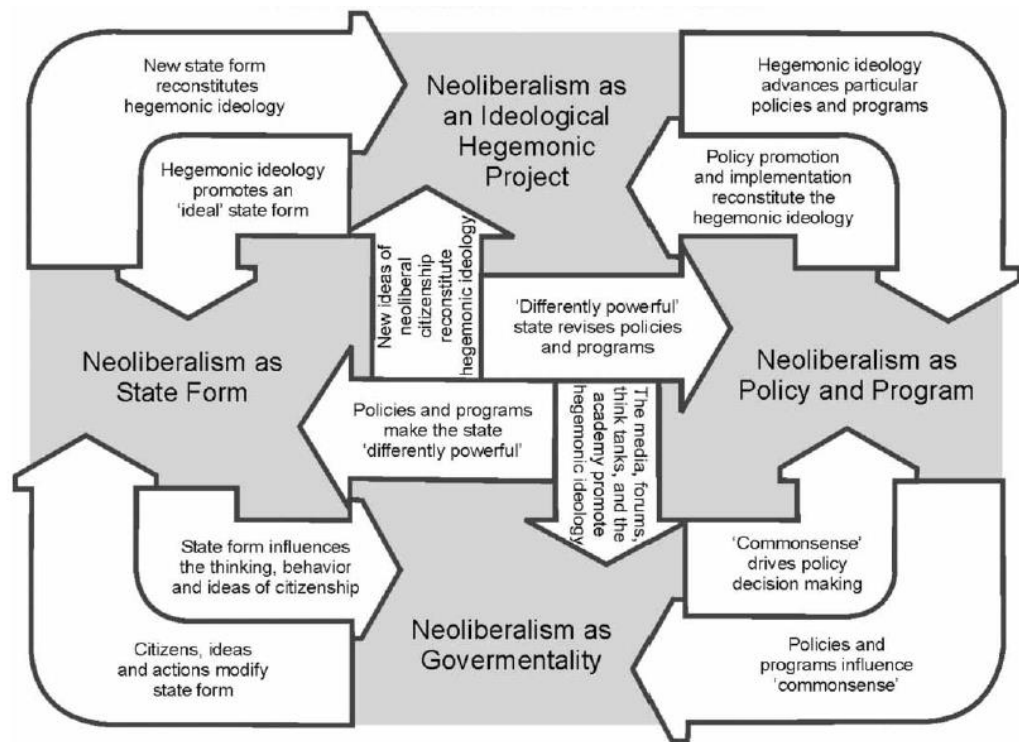


Figure 3.1: Neoliberalism as discourse: a circuitous understanding of neoliberalism (Springer, 2012: 136).

Complicating Springer's image this circuitous discourse does not, as we have seen above, result in the reproduction of a single form of neoliberal-capitalism. In response to crises, criticism and a desire for expansion we see neoliberal-capitalism reproducing its dominance, and maintaining the commitment of workers essential to ongoing accumulation, by morphing, mutating and infecting non-capitalist spaces, and in the process subtly changing its form (Jessop, 2010; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). From this perspective the economy (Butler, 2010: 1; see also Callon, 2006):

[...] becomes singular and monolithic by virtue of the convergence [and re-convergence] of certain kinds of processes and practices that produce the 'effect' of [a temporally] unified economy.

This performative understanding has three affects. On the one hand it serves to foreground the adaptability and robustness of capitalism, and reinforce capitalocentrism by positioning crisis and critique within, and in the service of, capitalist frameworks (Du Gay and Morgan, 2013: 22). On the other, as we shall see in

the sub-section 3.2.1, this theoretical stance maintains a constant state of imbalance that prevents capitalism's domination and can be used to challenge its perceived inevitability (ibid.).

3.1.2: *Becoming homo economicus*

Re-framing neoliberalism as a performative and circuitous process rather than an end state (Peck and Tickle, 2002) brought to the fore a 'double truth doctrine' (Mirowski, 2009: 426) that can be understood to underlie and maintain the neoliberal-capitalist project (Aalbers, 2013a). On one side, we see the elevation of spontaneous over rationally constructed orders and expertise, and concomitant 'tales of "rolling back the nanny state" and being "free to choose" (Mirowski, 2009: 444). On the other we see a recognised need to construct the conditions of neoliberal existence through the redefinition, rather than destruction of the state; the constraint of democracy to a 'source of popular legitimacy'⁹⁰ (Mirowski, 2009: 436); and the restriction of freedom to the realm of the consumer and self-governing individual, "free" to express themselves through the market (see also Parker et al., 2014a; Aalber, 2013a; 2013b). Thus, as Peck (2004: 395) explains:

While neoliberal rhetoric derives some of its power from the image of the absentee state - and its idealized companion, the liberated, independent and competitive subject - the practical content of neoliberal reform strategies is often quite 'interventionist'.

From this perspective, the notion of the market as an 'invisible hand' and natural independent force is not a reality but a way of thinking that shapes narratives and action, and provides the necessary conditions for competition, individualism and the profit motive (Parker et al., 2014a).

In highlighting the necessity of certain ways of thinking we recognise, as Peck does in the quote above, that neoliberal-capitalism is (re)produced, not only through state

⁹⁰ As recognised and resisted by the Occupy Movement (Razsa and Kurnik, 2012).

intervention, modes of production and forms of social-economic relations, but also in an individual's subjectivity. Emphasising this point Parker et al. (2014a: 9; emphasis added) state:

*Capitalism requires and **produces** certain types of human beings: 'free' autonomous agents maximising their own utility through both work and consumption [...]. Indeed the two figures of the freely choosing consumer and the self-investing flexible worker are central motifs of modern capitalism.*

In this quote, Parker et al. emphasise that the 'performance of self-interested agency' (Callon, 2006: 46), understood as characteristic of neoliberal-capitalist subjectivities, is itself *produced* through the modes of production and forms of relations referred to above. As Callon (2006) illustrates through the example of Norwegian fishermen and the development of fishing quotas⁹¹, neoliberal-capitalism's 'idealized companion' is enabled by the 'disentanglement' and 're-entanglement' of agents and objective things, in and through (state supported) processes of commodification and labour abstraction. Thus, it is in the production of 'homo economicus', together with the interconnected development and re-development of 'the spirit of capitalism', that the neoliberal belief in the invisible hand of the free market and capitalist production as the only route to human flourishing become embodied (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007; Peters, 2016). This embodiment sees the 'self becom[ing] an enterprise' taking 'investment decisions', engaging in self-promotion and branding and 'managing employment prospects' (Parker et al., 2014a: 9; see also Williams, 2007a; Bloom, 2013), not based on values or social interest, but on market-based principles of cost (risk)-benefit (returns) analysis (Peters, 2016; Jessop, 2002; Restakis, 2010). In his narrative (shared in FG1) Dave captures the competitive consequences of this capitalist subjectification. Reflecting on his experience of working for a large corporate company he describes his desire to escape:

⁹¹ Callon illustrates in this example how the quantification and commodification of the fishing stock transformed fishermen's relationship with fish, fishing and the environment.

[...] all the back biting and all the people wanting to climb over people wanting to get on. It was just horrible. And it is getting worse and worse because things like pay rises, they are only giving to the top 10% these days; just singling people out. It doesn't feel right to me. You can work your arse off and feel that you have got very little reward.

This 'economic individualism that promotes the right to want and get more and that sees this unchecked desire as a crucial motivating force behind [economic growth]' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 90) is produced and reproduced in education, family, work and housing: everyday activities contextualised in a 'welfare system that preaches freedom, responsibility and self-provisioning' (Lowe and Meers, 2015: 55), and pits (deserving) strivers against (underserving) skivers (Kelly, 2015). Reflecting on their employment journeys participants captured a sense of this (re)production:

I got into working in financial services as had no idea what I wanted to do when I left school and 'an office job' was the straightforward choice – my dad had an office job and Norwich Union was recruiting a lot of school leavers. And then it became a career with a bit of hard work and taking the opportunities that cropped up. (Dave, Beanies, narrative)

I did an art foundation course, and in between doing various rubbish jobs, I eventually found myself at Sheffield Hallam University doing a degree in "Fine Art" as a mature student [described in FG1 as the 'natural progression']. I left university with a useless degree, a student loan I have no hope of ever paying off and disillusionment with the "art world" in general. (Evan, Beanies, narrative)

In his quote Evan portrays an image of personal investment in education first as a (perceived) necessary step towards the transformation of the self into an employable person (Bloom, 2013), and later as the 'mortgaging of an uncertain future' (Kelly, 2015: 2). These points highlight that, in the context outlined above, success constitutes not career progression as experienced by Dave, but the ability to seek out and pursue opportunities, accept risk, and utilise social networks for personal employment gains (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). This 'new spirit of capitalism' (ibid.) was further

illustrated by Lisa, Rachel, Nicole and Fran (Regather), all of whom graduated amidst the '*strange and uncertain times*' (Rachel) of the financial crisis, and similarly expressed the burden of 're-imagining [their] lives as enterprise' (Kelly, 2015: 2). This sense of burden was encased in participants' '*outrage at the bailing out of [...] 'casino' banks at the expense of the general public*' (Nicole), a sense of 'intergenerational theft' (Kelly, 2015: 3), and the fantasy that the 'barren expanses' left by (uneven) austerity will 'sprout new centres of entrepreneurial zeal' (Kelly, 2015: 3). As experienced by many Regather members⁹², this fantasy is reflected in the rise in self-employment and precarious working, specifically amongst those in creative and cultural industries (Sandoval, 2016; Conaty, 2016; Reimer, 2009; Williams, 2007a).

We see from these final points, as we did from the discussion on the marketisation of TSOs, that (Peters, 2016: 2⁹³):

[...] responsabilisation is one of the major strategies and practices of a neoliberal moralisation of markets that shifts responsibility from the state to the citizen - the user of social services, the citizen-consumer, the client such as students, pensioner and beneficiaries - and to professionals who are 'responsible' for providing the service.

This plays out the double doctrine, as the state creates conditions for its own (rhetorical) rolling back, though a dual strategy of economisation of the state and the moralisation of the market (Peters, 2016).

⁹² Gareth, Tim, Rachel and Fran all came to Regather with experience of setting up and running businesses and meeting their need through self-employment.

⁹³ For a more nuanced discussion on responsabilisation see McLeod (2015).

3.1.3: I felt quite removed from the work

Following participants' journeys away from post-2008 'uncertain futures' and the competitive 'back-biting' of corporate life reveals that, whilst enticing us with thoughts of 'fairness' and freedom over the disposal of our labour-power (Harvey, 2014: 63; Jessop, 2002: 12), the enterprise-self hides realities of hierarchy and labour abstraction (Atzeni, 2012; Luhman, 2007; Brown et al., 2010; Williams, 2007b). Gemma and Tim reveal these realities when reflecting on their experiences of working for a small Health and Safety company and large government department:

[...] whilst [my bosses] claimed that I was a valuable member and my opinion was important, most of the time my opinion did appear, and other people's, did appear to be ignored, over and over and that became a bit too much at times. (Gemma, Beanies, FG2)

I didn't have much autonomy regarding my daily work and I felt quite removed from the work and the ramifications of my daily tasks. This was a key aspect that I wanted to amend when leaving the Environment Agency and moving more into the Regather sphere. (Tim, Regather, narrative)

We see from these quotes that operating as (abstracted) wage labourers within the rules of capitalism, Gemma and Tim possessed and controlled neither the product nor the process of their labour (Heinrich, 2012: 21). Following Holloway (2010a: 111), Tim's detachment from his work and Gemma's experience of opinions being disregarded arise from 'the breaking of cooperation into a system of commodity exchange' that separates us from the means of production, and partitions doing into bounded definable actions that can exist without recognition of our interdependence or acts of reciprocity. Nicole's story of the Briganti links these separations to historical and ongoing processes of 'primitive accumulation' that see the private appropriation, and subsequent capital exploitation, of common resources⁹⁴ (Tyfield, 2010; De Angelis and Harvie, 2014; Cleaver, 2000; Marx, 2000). These processes were met by struggles

⁹⁴ For further discussion on the commons and its relevance to cooperative working, see section 6.5.

that sought to resist the appropriation of labour-power and the concomitant break in the 'social flow of doing' (Holloway, 2010a: 111; Harvey, 2014).

[...] notions about the importance of community and the power of the people stem from my Southern Italian family. They are mainly self-sufficient farmers [in] Calabria. This part of Italy was the last to conform to the 'Unification' which was forced on the land in the second half of 1800s. I was raised on stories of the 'Briganti' and their struggle to resist the rich people who came and made claims on their lands. (Nicole, Regather, narrative).

In the FG3 Nicole added:

I think that is part of my motivation because they [the Briganti] were struggling but with a righteous cause. They were just farmers that were self-sufficient and these royals and nobles were coming in and just forcing [them to give up their land and become labourers] and it's just a bit more obvious in the Italian story because it is only 160 years old where as our story is 1000 years over here, and it kind of made me realise it's just the same thing happening all over again in different parts of the world.

Situated in its historical context the separation of labour from the means of production is conceived as a precondition of capitalism (Parker et al., 2014a; Farrell, 2015; Fenderici, 1990; Holloway, 2010a). It is through this separation and the concomitant transformation of social to alienated labour, that value becomes embedded in social relations and determined, not by the attributes of the product or the characteristics of the labour, but by globally exchanged socially necessary labour time, materially and symbolically represented in money (Harvey, 2014: 26; Cleaver, 2000; Marx, 2000). The determination of labour value within this homogenising framework constitutes a process of abstraction in which concrete-conscious work is dissolved into 'general types of work motions' (Braverman, 1974: 181); and the 'qualitative aspect of the work is subordinated to [but never fully eliminated by] the quantitative' (Holloway, 2010a:

175; see also Jessop, 2010; Arthur, 2001). As captured in Jake's (Beanies, narrative) reflection on factory work, this process means also the expending of human labour power without 'regard to' the pain, suffering, human brutalisation, boredom [and in Gemma's case above, sense of disempowerment] that work may imply' (De Angelis, 1994: 110).

[Age] 16/17 or thereabouts, [I had a job] putting handles on buckets [...] (everyone in Runcorn has worked in the bucket factory at some point). That involves sitting on your own for about 8 hours next to an injection moulding machine as the buckets pop out. You have to put the handles on and stack them up. The buckets are pretty hot and so your thumbs get pretty blistered and it's fairly stressful when you can't keep up with the machine! Other than that, extremely boring... quite liked the shift pattern though, except the nasty night shift. Also got some massive zaps from the static that built up on the bucket stacks. A few years later the place burnt down (wonder why?).

It is through these processes that labour-power acquires its (fictitious) commodity form, and money is reified as 'an unavoidable fact of life': a 'timeless thing that holds our minds in captivity', channels our doing along certain (economised) trajectories, and creates permanence in our social relations (Holloway, 2010a: 110). As Parker et al. (2014a: 23; see also Holloway, 2010b) explain, it creates a situation where by we are:

[...] free to enter into a waged-labour contract, and free from any alternative other than to sell [our] labour power for a wage⁹⁵.

Linking these processes of abstraction to the teleology of accumulation and predetermined trajectories of capital growth, we see also that they make possible the commensurability of commodities, and therefore the exchange of goods across space/time and the valorisation of capital (De Angelis, 1995). As experienced by

⁹⁵ Boltanski and Chipello (2007: 7) similarly explain that 'while the relation is unequal in the sense that the worker cannot survive for long without working, it is nevertheless markedly different from forced labour or slavery, and thus always involves a certain amount of voluntary subjection.'

participants through redundancy, stagnating wages, and increased inter-employee rivalry, this in turn 'shapes the competition among capital to secure the most effective valorisation of labour-power and the appropriation of the resulting surplus value' (Jessop, 2002: 16). It leads, in other words, to the driving down of necessary labour time and the establishment of 'superfluous labour as a condition of necessary labour', while concomitantly maintaining labour time as 'the sole measurement and source of wealth' (Marx, 2000: 415; Bonefeld, 2010; Holloway, 2010). Adding to the disempowerment felt by Tim and Gemma, these experiences brought to the fore '*the "disposable" nature of loyal, hardworking employees*' (Dave, narrative).

In her description of working in a large corporate music venue, Nicole (Regather, narrative) connects her experience of labour abstraction to primitive accumulation and the profit motive. Supporting arguments made above, we see in this narrative that Nicole's labour-power creates the conditions for valorisation, and therefore capitalism's reproduction (Harvey, 2014; Parker et al., 2014a; Jessop, 2002). Focusing on her limited influence illustrates also that capitalisms' reproduction 'depends on capital's continued ability to control the terms, conditions and performance of wage labour' (Jessop, 2002: 24): on the subordination of conscious, concrete doing.

I was in this role [working for a large corporate music venue] for almost 4 years and it eventually became clear to me the company I was working for had very little interest in Sheffield as a city nor in its people or local economy, and that my role offered me little or no opportunity to influence this. I felt more and more of my energy was being spent simply helping to make some already wealthy people become even wealthier.

We see in this quote, as we have throughout this sub-section, that the process of abstraction occludes our sensual relation to nature and community, and obscures the social value and meaning of labouring. Reinforcing arguments made in sub-section 3.1.2, this process is, Holloway (2010a) argues, the source of the individual (and individualised) self. Understood as essential to the maintenance of capitalist subjectification, it creates an essentialised view of the person as a distinct fragment of society with a single identity. In this view, the person is reduced to a mere

personification of their labouring in a capitalist structure (Williams, 2007a)⁹⁶. This reduction is supported, in turn, by our reliance on waged work and the related transformation of non-work time into an 'appendage of capital' (Cleaver, 2000: 121): time to recover, consume, and participate in non-capitalist activities that enable our own and others' continued engagement in wage-labour (Parker et al., 2014a: 24). Taking this process of subjectification into account, one wonders how (or indeed if) Nicole, Gemma and Tim have been able to construct post-capitalist identities. This is the focus of the next sub-section.

3.2: Starting from where we are: challenging neoliberal-capitalist dominance from within

I have painted here a somewhat bleak view: an image of neoliberal-capitalism as a powerful crisis-ridden force that adapts and mutates, 'extend[ing] its tentacles to more and more of the globe and more and more of our lives', and colonising not only processes of production but our imagination (Parker et al., 2014a: 14; Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Miller, 2013a). This section re-introduces a sense of hope by deconstructing the three sources of dominance discussed above: the performative circular discourse of neoliberalisation, and interconnected processes of capitalist subjectification and labour abstraction. In doing so it brings to the fore a new understanding of the economy as overdetermined, and reframes performativity as a site of economic creativity (Callon, 2006), and abstraction as 'constantly active and constantly an issue' (Holloway, 2010a: 168; Jessop, 2010).

3.2.1: Economic performativity towards many no's and many yes's

As illustrated through the examples presented in sub-section 3.1.1, Butler (2010: 152) acknowledges that economic performativity entails, not only discourse, but the 'reiteration of a set of social relations'. Similarly extending performativity beyond the dimension of language, Callon (2006; 2010) and Springer (2012) position citizens,

⁹⁶ This connection between one's identity and one's work is captured in the following comment, made by Fran (Regather) during our first meeting (25/11/14): 'I think it is quite a bit of your identity your job.' She went on to explain that she describes herself, and is described by others, as 'the [vegetable] box lady'. Over the course of the research this comment was reframed, not to illustrate a reduction of the self to a single work identity, but a re-understanding of work as part of life (see sub-section 3.4.1 and section 5.4).

policy-makers, academics, and the material world as co-performers of the economy. The previous section argued that, while challenging understandings of neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project, co-performance nonetheless sees norms, associated practices and interactions co-evolve to produce perceived shared ideologies, aspirations and 'rules of expected behaviour' (Emejulu, 2011: 380; see also Arnsperger, 2005; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). As illustrated in the marketisation of TSOs, this understanding can create a sense of inevitability that neoliberal-capitalist social relations will be maintained and spread through their ongoing reiteration. Reflecting on observations at Regather, members' experiences of 'winging it' offer a different perspective (FG3).

Nicole: We wing it quite a lot.

Gareth: Yes, yes, we do. I know I do. But that's kind of a necessity. And so it's a difficult thing.

Nicole: Can I just say that that's not just to do with being a coop and not having much money because in my experience in the biggest companies, they are still just winging it most of the time. It's just perceptions maybe paint a different picture a lot of the time.

As will be explored further in chapter 4, for Regather, 'winging it' constituted bringing theoretical statements, that expressed their organisational and economic intentions, into being through ongoing processes of trial and error which create and maintain the conditions for their existence. As Nicole's closing comment suggests, and Callon (2006) supports, this process is not unique to cooperatives but can be applied to corporations and the economy more broadly. By situating corporate and cooperative processes of 'winging it' side by side, and foregrounding the role of actors and circumstances in determining how a given theoretical statement is played out, this observation poses two challenges: first to the inevitable *neoliberalising* co-evolution of norms, practices and interactions, and second to their convergence in a monolithic, unified economy. In relation to the former, delving deeper into Regather's experiences of 'winging it' revealed that the norms and rules of expected behaviour

arising from a given theoretical statement⁹⁷ can be 'adapted for new purposes' (Butler, 2010: 154; see chapter 5). While it is important to recognise that this adaptation can have the effect of reinforcing or reinstating the status quo (as can be seen in the development of 'conscience capitalisms' and 'the new spirit of capitalism') the potential for re-appropriation contests notions that there is one best form of organising the economy that 'imposes itself naturally or compellingly' (Callon, 2010: 163). This in turn offers hope for economic practices of bricolage that look beyond neoliberalisation. Turning to the second challenge, we see that 'the performativity approach makes it possible to exhibit the struggle between worlds that are trying to prevail' (Callon, 2006: 28). By exposing these multiple and co-existing struggles, the economy is reframed as an already heterogeneous site of experimentation and collective innovation (*ibid.*; section 3.3).

Expanding on these claims, adopting a performative framing of the economy has two further interconnected effects. First, accepting a socialised and fluid understanding of the economy suggests that capitalism can, and perhaps should, be challenged on relational terms: through 'political reflection on the [...] construction of social norms' and non-capitalist marginalisation (Arnsperger, 2005: 435; Amin et al., 2003a; Healy, 2008) rather than the 'denunciation of moral invectives' (*ibid.*: 434). We see here an initial glimpse into the role of democratic praxis in deconstructing capitalist hegemony. Second, it pushes us beyond the hope that neoliberal-capitalism is likely to 'fail in a totalising moment of collapse' (Peck et al., 2010: 101; Springer, 2015). While the 2008 financial crisis has undermined the ideological foundations of neoliberal-capitalism, and specifically the narrative that 'a rising [market] tide lifts all boats' (Springer, 2016: 289), I would contest Mykhnenko and Birch's (2010: 255; see also Altvater, 2009; Brand and Sekler, 2009; Ceceña, 2009) claim that 'neoliberalism has self-destructed'. As argued by Aalbers (2013a: 1084; see also Aalber, 2013b; Labonte, 2012; French and Leyshon, 2010), 'most of the "solutions" to the [2008 financial] crisis are in the spirit of neoliberalism': they express an ongoing process of rolling out (bailing out private companies; transferring private to public debt) and rolling back (austerity measures; deepening commodification of labour) the state, and reinforce 'the adaptive capacity

⁹⁷ For example, that hierarchical organising is more efficient.

inherent in neoliberalism' (ibid.: 1089). Moving from a hegemonic ideological understanding of neoliberalism to embrace instead actually existing, performative processes of neoliberalisation thus prevents claims that we are seeing a crisis of neoliberalism or that it has met its 'definitive end' (Ceceña, 2009: 33; Springer, 2015). While this initially seems to offer a dismal view, Springer (2016: 7) argues that 'highlighting practices and procedures as they unfold in everyday contexts [enables them to] be pointed to, named, challenged, examined from different angles, and be shown to contain inconsistencies'. This in turn opens up multiple points of challenge.

Reflecting this plural perspective I have found, like Sekler (2009) and Meira (2014) that postneoliberal-capitalist projects respond, not to neoliberal-capitalism as a whole, but to context specific and experientially determined elements of neoliberal-capitalism: the '*back-biting*', competitive and individualised nature of work (Dave, Beanies); the foregrounding of market-logic experienced through redundancy and service closure; the persistent focus on profit over social and environmental concerns; and the push towards the responsabilisation, marketisation, and entrepreneurialisation of individuals, associations and communities (Brenner et al., 2010). Postneoliberal-capitalism enacts, in other words, 'many no's and many yeses' (Sekler, 2009: 68; Kingsnorth, 2003; Roelvink, 2010). Thus, the move from 'ideological project' to 'circuitous discourse' moves neoliberalism and postneoliberalism from noun to verb, rendering both 'an emergent politics of becoming' (Chatterton, 2010a: 901).

3.2.2: Unmaking the prison labour abstraction

Building on the performative understanding of capitalism, and specifically its reproduction through norms, everyday actions and interactions, we come to the second source of dominance: capitalist subjectification. As Thrift (2005: 1-2; see also Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007) explains, social and economic relations are rolled out:

[...] via the kind of stance to the world adopted at each moment by actors of all kinds which assumes that that is how the world is. This stance is mainly pre-reflexive, written into the body and other spatial layouts through repetition.

It follows that freeing ourselves from the 'logic of the cohesion of capitalism' (Holloway, 2010a: 165) and interrelated narratives that tell us 'there is no alternative' requires us to become radically reflexive. That is, to recognise first, the interconnected nature of thinking and being, and our place within the intersubjective production of economic 'reality' (Cuncliffe, 2003; Rhodes, 2009); and second, the ways in which our own predicaments and contradictions link to those experienced by others, and the wider crises of neoliberal-capitalism (Razsa and Kurnik, 2012). Looking back on Nicole's reflections on working in a large corporate music venue, and specifically her experiences of abstraction that (like other members) inspired her move into '*the Regather sphere*' (Tim), we begin to see evidence of Holloway's (2010a: 165) argument that:

The fact that we build our own prisons is a source of hope and of profound depression. The fact that we make the world that holds us entrapped means that we can unmake it.

In answering what constitutes this 'unmaking' we turn to the third source of neoliberal-capitalist dominance: the abstraction of labour. As outlined in sub-section 3.1.3, the creation of labour-power as a necessary means of capitalist valorisation makes commodified abstract labour *appear* to be the 'only possible type of activity' (Holloway, 2010: 195; Jessop, 2010). However, we have seen also that neoliberal-capitalism, and therefore primitive accumulation and abstract labour, are not closed historic episodes (Bonefeld, 2010; De Angelis and Harvie, 2014; Caffentzis and Federici, 2014). If we see social relations as an ongoing 'form-process' fetishised only in thought, capital, commodities, abstract labour and clock-time necessarily relinquish their independent existence and are accepted instead as performative reiterations, 'constantly active and constantly at issue' (Holloway, 2010: 168; Holloway, 2010b). We see this struggle played out in Gemma's experience of work (FG2):

[...] the business was struggling, as a number of small businesses have been, and you just ended up doing more and more things not feeling that you could give full commitment to any one aspect. You did not feel that

you were doing your job properly. Then there was also risk of redundancy.

Gemma describes here her everyday experience of the *living* antagonism between the drive of abstraction towards money and the drive of concrete labour towards self-determination (Holloway, 2010a; 2010b; Atzeni, 2012). As capital searches for valorisation, the former pushes more and more productive activity into less and less time while the latter pushes back, refusing to be shaped by this ever-tightening constraint (Holloway, 2010). In Gemma's desire to do her job properly, in Nicole's desire to do work for the benefit of the community in a profit motivated corporation (see sub-section 3.1.3), and in Jake's desire to find work that aligns with his values (see sub-section 3.4.1), we see abstraction as a present process and that which is abstracted - our concrete, conscious doing - as an ever-present force (Jessop, 2010). We are reminded that, as exchange-value and abstract labour rely on the existence of use-value and concrete doing the latter can never be fully subordinated to the former. As De Angelis (1995: 128) similarly concludes, by exposing the *process* of objectification and the non-unity of abstract and concrete doing we find, 'within the basic category which describes the nature of capitalism, the seed of revolt' (which, as I will argue in sub-section 3.2.3, constitutes the struggle of doing against labour).

We see also in Gemma's quotes, that while necessary to the reproduction of neoliberal-capitalisms, the constant intensification of abstraction through reductions in necessary labour time leads to voluntary⁹⁸ and involuntary⁹⁹ flights from labour that, as Gareth, Nicole and Lisa allude to in the exchange below (FG3), constitute (one of) capitalism's contradictions (Harvey, 2014; sub-section 3.1.3). The following exchange begins to reveal that this flight brings at once, a struggle to survive, hopeful 'structures of mutual support [...] and the growth of self-determined doing' (Holloway, 2010: 180; see also Miller, 2011).

⁹⁸ In response to increasing pressures of work or increased precarity as was the case with Gemma and Gareth.

⁹⁹ Due to redundancy and unemployment as was the case with Dave and Lisa.

Lisa: [I've really really started to notice that] even people, ordin... people who have OK jobs, they can't afford to go out every weekend. That's why we don't have like the music scenes.

Nicole [speaking passionately]: The music scene in Sheffield came when Sheffield was on its arse. The Lead Mill came from unemployment. You had to have a UB40 card¹⁰⁰ to get in the Lead Mill at the beginning. It came from that. And music and culture should rise out of that sort of difficulty...But yes, maybe we have just had a bit of a down time. It's going to come now that it's hard times again.

Gareth: There's a lot of politics in that.

Tim: Yes.

Nicole: But Sheffield music scene has come out of a lot of bad difficult times financially hasn't it?

Gareth: Yes.

Nicole: The electronica scene and the Drum and Bass, all of those waves. Gate crusher...

Gareth: Yes, there's just a lot...if you ask people that have been made redundant from generations of working in coal or steel and you ask them to come up with some positives they are not going to turn round and say, 'oh the music scene was great'!

Laughing

Gareth: They are going to see that essentially as a by-product of them being deprived; a disadvantage community. Like the ethos is self-organising definitely, but more out of deprivation.

Nicole: [Out of] necessity.

Gareth: Yes, yes, [rather] than abundance. (Nicole: Yes). So I think that when people like that don't have...it would be better if people 'had' than didn't have.

On the one hand, it could be claimed that through the commodification of various 'music scenes' conscious doings, and the emotional and creative response to its

¹⁰⁰ A registration card issued by the Department of Employment to a person registering as unemployed.

struggle with abstraction, have been coopted by capital. Conversely it could be argued that the struggle for conscious doing has, in the case of electronica and drum and bass, appropriated spaces of capital for their own ends, thus acting both within and against it (Holloway, 2010b). As Cleaver (1971: 2, emphasis added) similarly explains:

*[...] people have often invented new kinds of music, e.g., folk, or more recently punk or hip-hop, that have been designed to escape and indeed have escaped, at least temporarily, capitalist commodification and have **contributed to the elaboration of new kinds of social relationships** that have escaped, at least temporarily, the capitalist reduction of life to the work of commodity production (including the production and reproduction of life as labor power).*

As Cleaver's quote illustrates, in this second argument, the 'freedom to dispose of our labour-power' is to a degree reclaimed for the expansion of concrete, self-determined doing. In recognising the drive of conscious doing to self-organising a third hand emerges that situates conscious doing beyond capitalism and therefore always available for non-capital ends. My purpose in highlighting the simultaneous existence of conscious doing within, against and beyond abstract labour is to identify voluntary and involuntary departures from labour as potential 'lines of flight' (Dahlman et al., 2017) away from a fundamental organisational principle of capitalism: the abstraction of labour. Understood as such we see that, while capitalism's mutability, and its ability to address its own contradictions mean it does not dig its own grave, in the process of its reproduction it does 'produce its own gravediggers' (Parker et al., 2014a: 26) and the cracks for these 'diggers' to exploit.

3.2.3: From economic determinism to overdetermination

We have seen in the previous section that conscious doing can never be fully determined by the demands of capital. We have seen also in sub-section 3.1.2 that 'capitalism cannot be reproduced solely through the value form' (Jessop, 2002: 26). Further emphasising this point Peck et al. (2009: 104) explain that neoliberal-capitalism exists in 'parasitical relationship with those extant social formations with which it has

an antagonistic relationship'. These opening points challenge notions that neoliberal-capitalism has an inside and an outside, revealing instead the interdependence of the economic and extra-economic. This interdependence rules out any possibility of a purely capitalist or fully commodified economy. As Jessop (2002: 11; see also Williams, 2014) explains:

[...] it is precisely because capitalism cannot secure through market forces alone all the conditions needed for its reproduction that it cannot exercise any sort of economic determination in the last instance over the rest of social formation.

Building on the hybridised, ever becoming and parasitic nature of the capitalist economy we necessarily move from the singularity of economic determination to adopt instead an overdeterminist dialectical position. Adopting this position is an act of ontological and epistemological reframing that destabilises essentialism. While accepting that capitalism is well equipped to subvert the 'logic of other systems through their colonisation by the commodity form' (Jessop, 2002: 27) it recognises that dominance never constitutes a 'one-sided relation [...] where one system unilaterally imposes its will on others' (ibid.: 26; Jessop, 2010). In refusing to assign precedence to any socio-economic relation (Gibson-Graham et al., 2001: 4) and understanding all processes to be 'constituted at the intersection of all others [...] without an enduring core or essence' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxx) we re-read the economy (and ourselves) as irreducible, incomplete and contingent on cultural, political and natural as well as economic forces. As Holloway (2010a: 170) narrates:

Behind money, state, man, woman, and so on, there is something hidden, a dark side, an invisible, a something that is being processed, something that is being formed, something that is not (yet) entirely absorbed into the capitalist forms, not entirely monetised, statified, commodified, sexually dimorphised. There is something that does not fit in: ourselves. The very fact that we criticise these forms means that there is something that exists beyond them.

As abstract labour necessarily co-exists with concrete doing, hegemonic articulations can only ever exist alongside their other, 'complexly constituted by what [they are] not' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxx). Viewing social processes and knowledge as overdetermined thus opens space for already existing alternative essences and sources of our misfitting to be identified and expanded to further destabilise and disrupt capitalist hegemony (Graham, 1990: 60).

Following the argument laid out in this section, Holloway (2010a; 2010b; see also Springer, 2016) urges us not to look for power (or powerlessness) and challenge hegemony itself, but to expose and make use of its fragility. More specifically, he calls for us to break through the appearance of inevitability by seeking out the cracks that emerge as conscious doing jars with logics of accumulation and the temporal rhythms and financial ends of disciplined, abstract labour. Here struggle takes on a new form. Rather than engaging in a struggle of labour against capital – a struggle that accepts labour's entrapment and thus limits itself to the improvement of labour conditions – we engage in a struggle of doing against labour (Holloway, 2010a; 2010b; see also see Cleaver, 2000; Atzeni, 2012). In the former, struggle exists external to capitalist-valorisation necessitating revolution. In the latter, processes of self-valorisation¹⁰¹ and

¹⁰¹ My use of self-valorisation is, I realise, somewhat problematic, because of Holloway's critique of it and its capitalocentric nature (see also Gibson-Graham et al. 2016), and because this thesis is not situated within Autonomous Marxist literature. Space does not allow for me to unpack the concept or its relation to the expansion of doing against abstraction. Engaging with self-valorisation more intensively may however prove fruitful ground in future analysis of my data. In the context of this chapter I find the concept helpful in three regards. First, self-valorisation stresses self-determination as a collective and relational project. This reflects many of the experiences discussed by participants that helped them to see beyond the bounds of capitalism. Second, I include concept because it emphasises that 'value, creativity and innovation in production are always created by workers themselves rather than by capital' (Bohm et al, 2009: 11). From this perspective, self-valorisation starts from, and then moves beyond the 'inventive power of workers within the factories' (Cleaver, 1971: 3): it does not negate or ignore the living antagonism of doing against labour but adds to it. This takes me to my final point. I use self-valorisation here precisely because it is a 'positive project of self-constitution' (Cleaver, 1992: 129). As Holloway (2010b: 921) recognises in his problematisation of self-valorisation, it doesn't 'lead us into a critique of abstract labour'. Rather it foregrounds those moment, however fleeting and unstable, that we forget about work, competition, money and profit: moments that are not reactive to capital or capitalist exploitation in a direct or conscious sense but that carry within them and enlarge 'the basic positive, creative and imaginative re-invention of the world that characteris[es] "living labour"' (Cleaver, 1971: 1). In line with Lisa's experience of squats, Nicole's experience of Rototom, and Jake's recognition of the paradoxical application of values inside/outside of work, Cleaver (1971) recognises that living labour and moments of self-valorisation are limited by the stains of capitalist society, but also that the energy contained within them can be harnessed for the purpose of struggle against capitalism. This is precisely the point I am making here: moments of self-determination situated outside of paid-work were used to inform members struggle against the drive towards profit and competition. Thus, while self-valorisation is a problematic concept if it viewed as autonomous from capital-valorisation, when using Cleaver's (1971; 1992) framing of it (i.e. a framing that recognises that self-valorisation will always concomitantly reproduce and break away from capital-valorisation), it does play a role (a) in helping us to critically determine the extent to which a specific action break from (or reinforce) capitalism (Cleaver, 1971) and (b) in supporting a hopeful move away from the hegemonic force of capitalism in a way that Holloway's Crack Capitalism does not. I achieved the latter by bringing to the fore the potential of using and expanding moments of self-valorisation.

the act of activism are seen to occur within and beyond processes of capital-valorisation; constrained but never fully determined by them (for further discussion on these two approaches see Coe, 2013; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2010; Mitchell, 2011). In the spirit of anarchism, revolution becomes an everyday act and struggle: a project of cultivating ourselves as thinkers, makers and subjects of a plural post-capitalist economy rather than people concerned with defining what is bad and dominant (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Davies, 2013).

3.3: Expanding the space of possibility

Section 3.2 embarked on the first stage of enacting post-capitalist economies: deconstructing the hegemony of capitalism. It did so by identifying ‘economics as something that we *do*, and the economy as that which *we make*’ (Miller, 2011: 14, original emphasis), and revealing conscious doing as never fully abstracted. Using this as a point of departure, the following two sub-sections explore the second stage, drawing on diverse economies theory and the total social organisation of labour to highlight the existing diversity and interdependence of the economy.

3.3.1: Rereading for difference

While starting from a recognition of the ‘deeply naturalised way’ (Tonkiss, 2008: 306) in which dominant capitalist framing is received and circulated, diverse economies theory takes instead an ontological position that economies are already heterogeneous, interdependent, and irreducible to purely ‘capitalist social and economic relations’ (Tonkiss, 2008: 307; Healy, 2008). It builds on overdeterminist (re)framings to offer (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xi):

[...] an economic language that cannot be subsumed to existing ways of thinking [capitalist] economy and instead signals the ever present possibility of remaking economy in alternative terms.

Contrary to the image portrayed by the ‘commodification thesis’ (Williams, 2002), diverse economies theory demonstrates, not only that non-capitalist practices persist and remain more numerous than capitalist practices, but that we spend more of our

time (by choice as well as necessity) participating in the former than the latter (Fickey, 2011; Williams, 2009; 2014; Williams and Nadin, 2010, White, 2009; White and Williams, 2012; 2013; 2016; Smith et al., 2008; see figure 3.2 and 3.3). By making visible these ‘hidden’ non-capitalist transactions, enterprise, and forms of labour, diverse economies theory calls into question the reducibility of growth, work, accumulation, and markets to a single capitalist essence, centred on the profit motive and relations of exploitation (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; White and Williams, 2016). From this perspective, the persistent dominance of capitalism becomes ‘less a failure of imagination than of observation’ (Tonkiss, 2008: 306).



Figure 3.2: Diverse Economies iceberg (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 70)

Transactions	Labor	Enterprise
MARKET	WAGE	CAPITALIST
<i>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</i> <i>Sale of public goods</i> <i>Ethical 'fair-trade' markets</i> <i>Local trading systems</i> <i>Alternative currencies</i> <i>Underground market</i> <i>Co-op exchange</i> <i>Barter</i> <i>Informal market</i>	<i>ALTERNATIVE PAID</i> <i>Self-employed</i> <i>Cooperative</i> <i>Indentured</i> <i>Reciprocal labor</i> <i>In kind</i> <i>Work for welfare</i>	<i>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</i> <i>State enterprise</i> <i>Green capitalist</i> <i>Socially responsible firm</i> <i>Non-profit</i>
<i>NON-MARKET</i> <i>Household flows</i> <i>Gift giving</i> <i>Indigenous exchange</i> <i>State allocations</i> <i>State appropriations</i> <i>Gleaning</i> <i>Hunting, fishing, gathering</i> <i>Theft, poaching</i>	<i>UNPAID</i> <i>Housework</i> <i>Family care</i> <i>Neighborhood work</i> <i>Volunteer</i> <i>Self-provisioning labor</i> <i>Slave labor</i>	<i>NON-CAPITALIST</i> <i>Communal</i> <i>Independent</i> <i>Feudal</i> <i>Slave</i>

Figure 3.3: Diverse Economy (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 616)

This pluralist reframing of the economy is necessarily an emancipatory project that simultaneously 'deconstruct(s) the hegemony of capitalism' (see section 3.2) and 'elaborate(s) multiple axes of economic diversity' (Gibson-Graham, 2003: 126). In elaboration it begins to reveal, not only that another world is possible but that it already exists and is open to being formed and (re)formed by performative economic subjects (Tonkiss, 2008; Miller 2011). In line with weak theory discussed in chapter 2, the aim of this project is not to produce a coherent map of an "alternative" economy as it does or might exist. As indicated in sub-section 3.2.1, such a map would imply the existence of a homogenous neoliberalism that can be met only with revolution (Springer, 2015). Moreover, proposing an alternative 'blueprint' would be an act of fantasy that, in response to anxiety, 'projects meaning onto the Other and offers promise of a return to an imaginary wholeness' (Byrne and Healy, 2006: 243). As this wholeness - the unified utopian ideal - fails in its search for purity it concurrently identifies and recreates that which prevents it. As such, the promise of a revolution-to-come offers a narrative of limitation alongside a narrative of hope, with the latter promising success if only the constraints of the former are removed. Byrne and Healy (2006) and Glynos (2011: 72) recognise therefore that, while offering a 'means to access the structure [and maintain the presence] of desire', and *implying* that

obstacles are surmountable, our (individual and collective) fantasies risk constraining our imagination and restricting alternative interpretations.

In contrast, following in the footsteps of Laclau and Mouffe's (1996) radical democracy project, diverse economies theory is a project of non-closure and dislocation. It confronts the essentialist and depoliticising fantasy of the capitalocentric economy with a counterhegemonic, post-fantasmatic discourse focused on re-establishing the negativity that makes change, and re-politicisation possible (Byrne and Healy, 2006; Glynos, 2011). It creates, in other words, a 'space for new economic becomings' by removing imagination-limiting boundaries and promises of a fullness-to-come, and 'widening the identity of the economy to include all of those practices excluded or marginalised by a strong theory of capitalism' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xii; Chatterton, 2010a). Diverse economies theory is, therefore, about putting theory to work: not only describing the diversity that already exists but (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2011: 29):

mak[ing] real the possibility that the economy can be a space of ethical action, not a place of submission to "the bottom line" or the "imperatives of capital" as it is so often portrayed.

As I discovered during a conversation with Tim (Regather, 02/04/15), in line with the post-fantasmatic and weak theoretical position outlined above, this 'making' does not occur through revolution, or through deciding what is good/bad, dominant/subordinate. Rather it occurs through the articulation, expansion and connection of everyday acts (Chatterton, 2006: 275; Miller, 2011) and the 'proliferation of small-scale rebellions' that simultaneously refuse-and-create (Young and Schwartz, 2012: 221; Holloway, 2005; 2010). Following Holloway's call (sub-section 3.2.3), these acts seek out and gradually prise open cracks in capitalism through ongoing processes of meaning-making, struggle and experimentation that transform local economies in the here and now (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; 2006b). In doing so they create 'new forms of living [...] that simultaneously [respond to the challenges we face,] meet our immediate needs and open up possibilities for other forms of livelihood' (Miller, 2011: 4).

*Tim: Yes, imagine this in a few years and there's events out here and the bar and things open up....one of these in every little neighbourhood in Sheffield...That's a good thought isn't it? You went down you know, to one of the other districts and there was another one of these. That's quite nice; a nice prospect. And it takes one to be successful before...Obviously other ones are going on as we speak but like the more of them that are successful the more chance there are of another one happening and more chance of people being like, here's a model we can use or... I don't know how other people want to work it I suppose, but...
Researcher: Yes...*

Tim: That's why I like the idea of that...that is a vision that I would really like to see happening, and the only way I suppose is to try and help out isn't it? Does doing the research make you, you know, feel more optimistic about coops or pessimistic?

Researcher: Oh no, I'm definitely optimistic.

[We talk more about all the things going on that are not capitalist and the need to build a ground swell].

Tim: There's no one...it all like many 'yeses' isn't it. To quote Paul Kingsnorth or whatever. It's good to have lots of different solutions isn't it. Rather than like 'this is the way'.

We begin to see in this exchange that participants neither sought, nor understood their own cooperatives, or cooperatives more broadly, as a bounded or ideal “alternative” (White and Williams, 2016; Novkovic and Webb, 2014; Zamagni, 2014). In the words of The Community Collective (2001: 30) they approached economic possibility with ‘passionate tentativeness’:

Not tentativeness in the sense of equivocating [...] but in the sense of really not knowing and allowing things to happen—being open, not fixating. It's like beginner's mind, Zen mind. Must there be only one way? Must we wrench sameness and singleness out of multiplicity?

While seeing themselves as operating in ways other to the ‘capitalist machine’ (Langmead, 2017a) neither Beanies nor Regather spent time fantasising about a definable or yet-to-come post-capitalism, or concerning themselves with the interconnected fear of degeneration. Rather, as will be explored further in chapter 5, they embraced the formative impact of *both* plural capitalist and plural non-capitalist practice, seeing themselves as ‘embedded and aligned with community¹⁰² interests and other practices’ (Byrne and Healy, 2006: 256). They rejected, in other words, the mainstream/alternative binary in preference for a diverse and interconnected economy free from the ‘presumption of necessary relations of dominance and subordination’ (Healy, 2008: 5).

3.3.2: Fostering a language of economic interdependence

Reflecting on the challenges posed by the creation of alternative/mainstream¹⁰³ dichotomies, White and Williams (2016: 1) explain:

[...] positioning non-capitalist economic practices as ‘alternative’ fails to recognise not only the omnipresence of such practices in everyday life, but also perhaps suggest that capitalist practices are the first choice and non-capitalist practices are the second choice and/or less desirable option.

Moreover, Healy and Graham (2008: 10) recognise that relationships of ‘impudent resistance, resentful renunciation (or) slavish obedience’ emerging from this hierarchical positioning (a positioning problematically reflected in figure 3.2), and the

¹⁰² Both spatial and ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 2000).

¹⁰³ While the authors cited in this section share a commitment to deconstructing these bounded spaces they maintain a language of capitalism/non-capitalism, recognising this as a necessary component in the understanding and positioning our own practice. Reconciliation of the seemingly paradoxical deconstruction of mainstream/alternative dichotomies and maintenance of capitalism/non-capitalism dichotomy comes in decoupling of the two binaries. As White and Williams (2016) research shows, there is no empirical logic behind the assumption that capitalism is mainstream/dominant and non-capitalism is alternative/subordinate. Diverse economies theorists achieve this decoupling by: unveiling the heterogeneous, incomplete and shifting nature of the economy; highlighting the expanse and predominance of non-capitalist practices in our daily lives (White and Williams, 2016) and; reframing capitalism itself as a ‘set of practices scattered over a landscape—in families, neighborhoods, households, organizations, states, and private, public and social enterprises’ (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 5).

consequent definition of ourselves 'in terms of being outside' (Wenger 1998: 168), situate power and resistance, ourselves and the other, in bounded and negatively constituted spaces, such that the relations between them cannot be examined or challenged. In line with Byrne and Healy's (2006) and Glynos's (2011) discussions on fantasy, Gibson-Graham (2006a) thus warn that defining ourselves by our opposition and using moralism as 'an emotional shoring up' of the 'lowly' over the 'high and mighty' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: 5) can give rise to a restrictive concern with separating ourselves from those in power and 'demonstrating our purity' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: 6). This quest for purity risks 'overshadow[ing] curiosity and experimentation [and making] fears of cooptation [...] more powerful than desires for connection' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xxxi).

Breaking from this dichotomy, Gibson-Graham (2006b: 74) explain that in any enterprise 'different class processes¹⁰⁴ of production, appropriation and distribution coexist'. A similar coexistence is present in our daily lives where we engage simultaneously in capitalist, communal and independent class processes on equal terms. Further emphasising this economic interdependence Carlone (2013: 532) highlights, like Holloway (2010a), that (abstract) labour always contains and relies upon concrete doing and the 'knowledge, attitudes and skills acquired by workers outside of work, through their participation in society'. The total social organisation of labour (TSOL) developed by Glucksmann (2005), Williams (2009) and White and Williams (2014), theoretically explores these interconnections highlighting not only the plurality of economic practices, but also the interdependence of different class processes. It does so by problematising the positioning of 'work' *within* the domain of classical (capitalist) economics, and its consequent reduction to 'questions of [...] monetarization and quantification' (Parry et al., 2005: 9): a reduction that conceptualises work as *either* paid or unpaid, public or private, and positions these distinct forms of work in dichotic and hostile opposition (Taylor, 2004; Williams and Nadin, 2012). Williams (2009: 402) explains:

¹⁰⁴ Understood as 'the social process of producing and appropriating surplus labour (more commonly known as exploitation) and associated processes of surplus labour distribution' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: 52).

Moving beyond this dichotic and reductive theorising, TSOL starts from an understanding that activities cannot always be neatly separated into market and non-market endeavours; that there are diverse practices on both the market and non-market sides; and that market and non-market activities are not always composed of entirely different or unified economic relations, values and motives.

Included in this re-theorising is a refusal of the ‘distinction between work and employment’ (Glucksmann, 2005: 21) and a concomitant expansion of the concept of work to include unpaid and relationally embedded labour (Taylor, 2005).

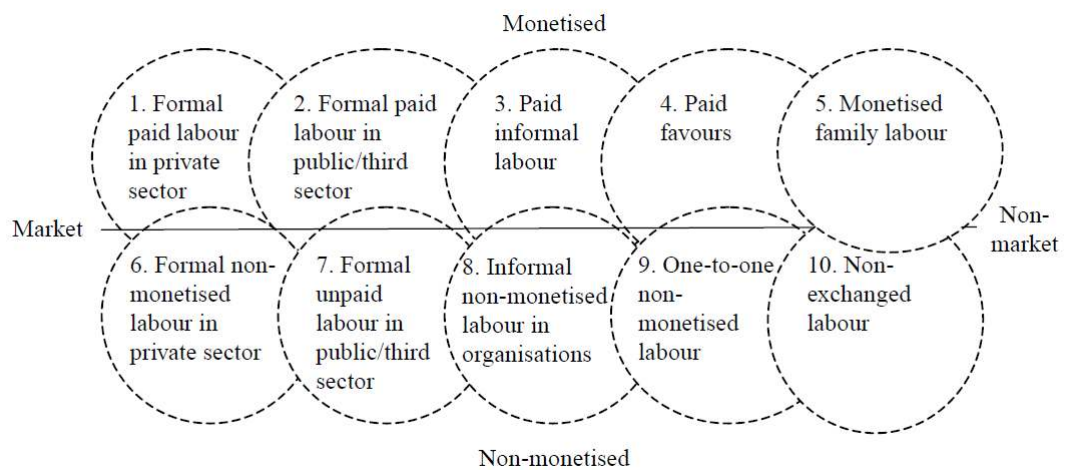


Figure 3.4: Total social organisation of labour (TSOL) continuum (Williams, 2009: 405)

In order to capture the undefinable, plural and interconnected nature of work, TSOL proposes a borderless continuum (see figure 3.4) of labour situated along a two-dimensional spectrum of market to non-market orientated and monetised to non-monetised activities. While maintaining the top-left (formal paid) to bottom-right (non-exchanged and self-provisioning) reading of the economy, through the deconstruction of bounded and negatively constituted realms this continuum depicts different forms of work as ‘equivalent rather than hierarchically arranged’ (Healy, 2008: 9).

I observed the interaction, interdependency and equivalence of class process as participants described balancing paid work with the work of caring for family and animals¹⁰⁵, self-employment and volunteering, and self-care and personal growth. In his narrative Tim highlighted interdependencies between his paid labour at Regather and the informal paid and unpaid labour of being a musician (see also Taylor, 2004):

Another key aspect of working at Regather was the ambition to find something flexible. My lifestyle, mainly in relation to my music profession, affords me with quite a bit of flexibility that I'm able to provide employers. In return, I too require that from my employer and Regather being okay with this is a key part of the decision to keep on with the work here.

Expressing his desire to expand the realm of conscious doing, in the focus group he added:

[...] well, my life's always been about music and trying to wade through the things that get in the way of me doing more music really.

Evan (Beanies) described how changes in his family responsibility, specifically 'having two kids', have constrained his flexibility in relation to paid work. In the following FG1 exchange we see multiple interdependencies, not only between Evan's paid and 'home' work but also between his own, his wife's¹⁰⁶ and his colleagues' work. Evan's closing comments reveal how the bounded and hierarchical positioning of paid work characteristic of the capitalist economy (Williams, 2007a), limits space for experimentation and the development of new ways of working with, rather than against, our own and others' plurality.

¹⁰⁵ The latter came across particularly strongly in Mark's (Beanies) case. Mark worked predominantly early morning shifts (sometime starting work at 4am) packing vegetable boxes to ensure that he could meet the needs of his dogs. Such levels of flexibility, and the positioning of animal care as equivalent to paid work (and other forms of care work) is rare in the capitalist economy.

¹⁰⁶ Prior to the research Evan's wife was a member of Beanies.

Evan: I feel a bit bad in that respect because previously I was totally flexible, I could do whatever, and now I can't so much. And I feel a bit like, I do what I can, but sometimes you just can't do it.

Heather: But the thing is, it's not that you don't want to (Evan: Yes, yes) if you know what I mean. Which is a different attitude isn't it really. That is the difference really. And without being funny, [your wife] has offered to stand in your place (Laughs). So you know what I mean? It's like between the pair of you we have got the flexibility. And it's not like you are saying, 'I'm not doing it'. You are just saying 'I can't do it'. Which is a big difference. It is a totally different attitude.

Evan: That's another reason why being part of a coop is great, having this kind of discussion and people being so helpful in that kind of way (Heather: Yes). And considerate. In a normal job I would be really struggling to fit my hours, what my ideal hours would be, into it.

The overlapping fields depicted in figure 3.4 and these examples speak of Glucksmann's (2005) assertion that labour, and the networks that sustain it, cannot be fully understood if examined *within* a single sphere or class process ('formal paid labour', 'self-provisioning', 'informal un-paid labour' etc.), or distinct set of socio-economic relations. Rather, labour must be examined from a higher level to include how it is organised and connected across and between spheres, and therefore how "sectors" impact upon and shape one another¹⁰⁷.

Such acceptance of economic practices as co-constituted draws attention to the contingent nature of any enterprise and the ways in which this contingency shapes organisational identities along non-capitalist as well as capitalist lines (Gibson-Graham,

¹⁰⁷ As suggested by Gibson-Graham's diverse economies iceberg (figure 3.2), and discussed in sub-section 3.2.3, the multiple forms of exchange that we engage in on a daily basis are not only more expansive than, but also support and create the conditions for, capitalist social relations. My initial realisation of this brought feelings of despair: if my own practices of volunteering and cooperative working that sought to offer an "alternative" to capitalism were inadvertently supporting it, what was I (or any of us) to do? In asking this question I missed a more fundamental point (a point that TSOL makes clear): namely that different work activities must be understood in the context of wider changing systems and in relation to multiple other activities, within and between individuals and organisations. Bringing to light the plurality and interdependence of capitalist and non-capitalist practice, rather than denoting a one-way process through which the former dominant (and necessarily 'bad') feeds off the latter subordinate (and always 'good'), disrupts the image of the negatively and hierarchically constituted other and notions of clear inside/outside boundaries.

2006b: 60). This opens opportunities for ‘considering how non-capitalist practices may infect capitalism’ (Carlone, 2013: 529) and how risks of degeneration may be re-appropriated as starting points for lines of flight. As will be explored in chapter 5, this re-appropriation transforms degeneration from a risk to a creative moment of vigilant self-scrutiny, self-cultivation and economic self-determination (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xxvi; 2006a: xxvi; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). Reflecting this vigilant process, a fellow co-operator once reminded me (see Langmead, 2017a):

You are constrained a certain amount by the preconceptions that you have got from the outside world; women still get talked over in coops. But having the agreement [of equality] there means that you reflect on what you do and how you act towards others.

From this perspective modes of exchange and economic relations formerly understood to constitute a homogenous capitalism, can be re-understood as elements of ‘a tool kit of possible actions supported by institutional logics [of] family and democracy [as well as] capitalism (Chen et al., 2013: 858; Langer, 2008). Learning from the empirical research of Varman and Chakrabarti (2004), Ng and Ng (2009), Kokkinidis (2014), and Chatterton and Pickerill (2010), drawing upon and responding to multiple possible economic practices transforms cooperatives into spaces of economic bricolage. This transformation opens opportunities for cooperatives to respond to their context in strategic, more inclusive and holistic ways (Burkett, 2011: 121; Chatterton, 2010b).

Focusing on this claim, Chatterton (2008; 2006) and Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) extend concern over the creation of mainstream/alternative dichotomies to the construction of activist/non-activist identities. Their exploration into practices of ‘everyday activism’ revealed a rejection of the ‘simple [and potentially alienating] divides between activists and their other’ and the ‘transcendental search for a good subject’ (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 479) in favour of a messy and experimental process of identity formation. In the following exchange (FG3), Gareth (Regather) challenges perceptions that the instinctive ability to work cooperatively is limited to those involved in the activist or ‘protest scene’.

Nicole: [...] a lot of people who don't kind of go into these circles of life, are kind of like, 'who's going to organise it?' [...] I think it's just the ability to be able to see that those things can happen, where if you just come from totally mainstream and have not seen that sort of community spirit then you don't know it's possible even.

Gareth: I think it's always important though...I don't disagree with any of that...but for me, I learnt how to work effectively together with people in the Scouts (Laughs). Genuinely, and in rugby, like playing a team sport.

[...]

Gareth: And I think it's important not to alienate a significant proportion of the population who actually share a whole bunch of values and the ability to work together and make things happen.

This quote speaks to my own experience of becoming a cooperative practitioner. It speaks also to the experience of Dave, Gemma, Heather and Jake who, like me, had no former experience of activism or protest. I observed in myself and others an ongoing process of 'identification' in which 'a sense of who we are [was] formed through solidarity and allegiance with another' (Dowling and McKinnon, 2014: 629). As I will explore further in chapter 4, members were accepted into Beanies and Regather, not on the basis of an existing 'cooperative identity', but on their 'orientation' towards certain ways of acting and being together: an orientation that was fostered through collective processes of becoming (Dowling and McKinnon, 2014; Luhman, 2007). Turning back to participants' post-fantasmatic position, this understanding rejects the idea of 'the perfect collective' (Parker et al., 2014b: 631). As Gareth implies, seeking to create such a perfect collective 'requires that people and things that don't fit are weeded out'¹⁰⁸ (Parker et al., 2014b: 631). Embracing instead the multiple experiences that intertwined to influence and inform democratic, cooperative subjectivities, the organisations 'reach[ed] out to other groups' and pulled collective organising away from the inaccessible 'political fringe' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 480). In doing so they acknowledged that (Ward, 1982: 5):

¹⁰⁸ See sub-section 4.1.5 for a critical exploration of the 'perfect collective'.

[...] we win over our fellow citizen to anarchist ideas, precisely through drawing upon the common experience of the informal, transient, self-organising networks of relationships that in fact make human community possible, rather than through the rejection of existing society as a whole in favour of some future society where some different kind of humanity will live in perfect harmony.

Bringing together arguments presented in this section, Ward's quote highlights that it is through concomitant processes of moving beyond mainstream/alternative dichotomies, foregrounding economic interdependence and moving towards a post-fantasmatic position, that we create opportunities to recognise an already existing and 'inherent tendency in human society [...] for individuals to cooperate [...] and help each other rather than compete' (Cleaver, 1993: 5). As discussed in chapter 1 this tendency was sought out by Beanies and Regather in local history, specifically in the collective working practices of steel workers in an industrial capitalist society, as well as in members' past and present experiences (see appendix 9). Thus, rather than adopting the role of a detached militant figure who meets oppression with resistance activated by idealism, everyday activists build upon stories of cooperation from within and beyond the non-capitalist economy to 'demonstrate the possibility for communal production, appropriation and distribution' (Carlone, 2012: 550; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). In doing so they embrace the productive and inspiring possibilities of the 'unknown', and move away from an existential, essentialist politics that desires certainty and defines agency and autonomy in terms of the individual freedom, and the responsibility to act and determine one's own destiny (Chatterton, 2005; Massey, 2005; Note from Nowhere, 2003; Holloway, 2010a). This move from an essentialist to anti-essentialist position is explored further in the next section.

3.4: Living differently

I am standing in a classroom with 18 undergraduate students reading and discussing an article on a successful local cooperative. Reflecting on the cooperative's work, the author explains that despite challenges of unemployment, social isolation, and poor housing (Roberts, 2015: 3):

[...] there is compelling evidence of a sense of place, strong local identity and a willingness to engage in community enterprise, cultural celebration and social action – all of which present opportunities for sustainable community economic development.

Despite the sense of hope and success portrayed in the article, students expressed doubt over cooperatives' potential to offer an alternative to global capitalism. They viewed the cooperative as a contained local experiment, un-scalable and always subordinate to a global market economy (see Healy, 2008; Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xxvi; Gibson-Graham, 2009). Their scepticism deepened with expressed doubts over the potential of the cooperatives' flat wage structure, with wage differentials, and the sense of competition they engender, understood as an essential incentive and prerequisite to (and indication of) both individual and economic success.

Having spent the morning enthusiastically discussing diverse economies theory, these views left me feeling downhearted. They reminded me that those seeking to open and enliven non-capitalist spaces are not only up against the discursive dominance of capitalism, but a culture of thinking that tells us:

[...] this kind of thing [hasn't] worked in the past, that it [is] naïve and utopian, already coopted, off-target, too small and weak in the face of manifest challenges (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 3)

The students' views reminded me also that a significant barrier to processes of economic re-visioning 'resides in ourselves' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2011: 29). While a 'crucial prerequisite to the project of cultivating *different subjects of economy*', observing and theorising economic diversity is not, in and of itself, a

sufficient condition for new economic becomings (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 56). As the students' scepticism and the following FG3 exchange show, the struggle of shifting from a performativity of capitalism to performative *praxes* of economic diversity and interdependence is a struggle against existing norms, deeply embedded assumptions and expectations, embodied dispositions, and feelings of hopelessness. It is, in other words, a radically reflexive 'struggle against ourselves and the old ways of thinking' and doing (Chatterton, 2005: 13; sub-section 3.1.2; 3.2.2).

Tim: I really think that it's important for everyone to find a job that allows them to achieve the perfect work-life balance. I think, like most people have to suffer, with doing something that skews that and...

Nicole: I think most people think that's the deal with work.

Tim: I do think that people think that's the deal, and [I] think that's a shame, maybe I feel quite privileged right now to feel like I am in the position where that's not the case for me.

Focusing on the process of labour abstraction, Holloway (2010a; sub-section 3.2.2) revealed that unmaking the worlds that entrap us requires us to adopt a radically reflexive position through which we reconnect thinking and being. Such reconnection enables us to recognise our misfittings, engage positively (rather than anxiously) with the contradictions we face, and create relational pathways between the actions and elements of our being not subsumed in capitalism. Sub-sections 3.2.3 and 3.3.1 similarly identified the anti-essentialist reframing of the self and the economy, and the adoption of a weak theoretical and post-fantasmatic stance, as necessary to moving towards an overdetermined understanding of the economy and the subsequent opening of 'space for new economic becomings' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xii). In this section, focus turns to the relationship between this ontological and epistemological work and the cultivation of post-capitalist subjectivities: a process that sees us move beyond established ways of thinking and being and (re)establish a role as performative agents of an ever-emerging economy. It does so by using data to explore two constituent processes of 'the [everyday] revolutionary art of self-cultivation' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a xvii). Sub-section 3.4.1 focuses on the formation of the self as a thinking, theorising economic subject and the concomitant re-appropriation of

thinking as an act of resubjectification¹⁰⁹. Sub-section 3.4.2 turns to members' engagement in processes of 'learning to be affected' through which they reconnected thinking and action, mind and world.

3.4.1: Engaging in the ethical practice of re-thinking economy

I argued in sub-section 2.1.1 that escaping the performative (re)constitution of capitalism requires a shift from the reductive practice of strong theorising to performative acts of weak theorising. The former understands thinking as an emotionally neutral, dispassionate act through which we 'see and represent a social object (the capitalist economy) [as historically] structured by concentrations of power and qualified by deficiencies of morality' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xxvii). In the latter, thinking is re-appropriated as an act of resubjectification: a performative praxis of being open to 'what is novel', working to challenge perceived barriers and inevitabilities and cultivating new relations and ways of being in the world (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xxvii; Gibson-Graham, 2009). It is in and through this radically reflexive process that we are able to re-understand ourselves, not as objects shaped by the economy, but as 'theorising authorising subjects of the economy' capable of constituting our own economic lives (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xxvii; 152).

I observed this act of re-appropriation in participants' journeys to cooperative working. In their narratives participants described moving away, and learning from, negative experiences of work, battling to overcome barriers to change, and seeking out and cultivating new and desired ways of living. The extract below is taken from FG3 where Gareth read out key points of his story. We see in this quote the rejection of self-sacrifice and the exploitation of workers' mobility in the name of employability, and a concomitant willingness to overcome the 'challenges of starting a coop' in order to re-establish a connection to community (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; 2007).

¹⁰⁹ Space does not allow for exploration of the concept of subjectification. For the purpose of this thesis, resubjectification is understood as a concomitant process of repositioning oneself in relation to the economy, re-identifying as a more-than-capitalist subject, and ultimately re-imagining the self as a theorising, authorising subject of the economy.

Balancing part-time paid work with the demands of starting a coop, having a family. Doing and then wanting to avoid a long regular commute. That was important. I commuted to London for 6 months on a coach and then sofa surfed. That was enough to put me off (L: Wow!) that rat race. Creating various resources, assets in the community that I live in and work in.

For Jake, the decision to reconstitute his economic life was, in part, founded in a sense of lost values. Writing about his previous job he explained:

The HSE (government) funded work was in decline, so we were doing more of the commercial work, which was mostly for oil companies and their suppliers. Who are all evil!! [...] I thought I knew a few things and had a half-decent education, so why not work for the 'good guys'.

We see in these narratives participants identifying and responding to their misfittings and reclaiming the fragments of the self excluded from their former working lives (Holloway, 2010). Following Holloway (2010), these acts of identifying, responding and reclaiming constitute the seeking out and expansion of cracks emerging from tensions between labour and doing. As Gareth's narrative shows, this process did not come without friction. All participants experienced contradictions between '*being free [and] making enough money, having an impact [now] and worry[ing] about the future*' (Gareth). They all had to negotiate multiple, conflicting commitments to family, work, friends, passions, self-care, enjoyment and necessity that, as the previous section showed, are an inherent part of an interdependent (as well as a capitalist) economy. Their decision to continue on this journey in spite of struggle was '*reflective of [their] desire to see work as a part of life*' (Fran, FG3) and their belief that '*if you want to see change you have to make change in your own life*' (Gareth, FG3).

Accepting this interconnected process of '*changing ourselves/changing our thinking/changing the world*' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 618) reinforces the need to release first ourselves and then the economy from the discursive closure of essence. As suggested by Fran's comment above, a defining and shared feature across

participants' journeys was a move away from understanding 'work as the basis of their identity' (Graham, 1992: 110). Reflecting an overdeterminist framing of the economy, this move constituted, not a refusal of work (see Frayne, 2015; Williams, 2007a), but the active reconstitution of '*work as part of life*'. As will be explored in depth in chapter 5, individual and collective work was determined, not just by logics of accumulation, but by participants' values, passions, local cultures, and concern for family, community and the environment. This expanded space of determination is, I will argue, enabled by the organisations' democratic praxis. Reflecting on the quotes above, I contend here that through their struggles with personally experienced barriers and challenges to change, the way participants thought about their lives became an ethical practice of re-thinking the economy: a point of departure for the building of new economic practices and relationships that allowed for a greater sense of personal coherence.

Developing this reflexive thinking praxis required members to adopt an anti-essentialist stance, that embraced the presence of multiple subjectivities and accepted individual (and collective) identity as decentred, unbounded and always in transition (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: 28; Graham, 1992: 142). Participants saw neither themselves nor their cooperatives as having 'a pre-existing, necessary or transhistorical shape' (Byrne and Healy, 2006: 250). Rather they framed both members and the collective as spaces of negativity to be formed through interactions and encounters with difference and contradiction (Parker et al., 2014b; Land and King, 2014; section 4.1). Again, reinforcing the post-fantasmatic position, participants avoided expressions of resistance and the language of 'if only' (Glynos, 2011). In their place I found a hopeful, curious and reparative stance that embraced the inspiring possibilities of conflicts and contingencies, and cultivated creativity (Byrne and Healy, 2006; Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009a; Gibson-Graham, 2009). Adopting this stance, members asked not 'how can I make work more tolerable?', or even 'how can I eliminate work?' but 'how can I use the intolerability of work - the experiences of long commutes, precarity and lost values - and my interdependence with others to build a better world?'

This is not to say that anti-capitalist sentiment and feelings of resentment and opposition did not exist. These were acknowledged in participant's scepticism towards the aims and motives of large corporations, feelings of disillusionment following redundancy, and anger at the impact of the financial crisis. Nor did it mean that there were no 'visions of a better form of social order' (Parker et al., 2014a: 36)¹¹⁰. In both organisations, I saw a commitment to mutuality; a recognition of our interdependencies, our 'responsibility to the future', and the interconnected nature of mean and ends; and an embrace of distinctiveness as a precondition of solidarity (Parker et al., 2014a: 38; Parker et al., 2014b; Chatterton, 2010a). Thus, as Miller (2015: 3) acknowledges, and Jake and Gareth's narratives show, 'struggles against the lives we are given' and engagement in a 'politics of possibility' are not mutually exclusive: 'critique and experiment, rage and hope, opposition and possibility' are co-constituting (Miller, 2015: 3). This became increasingly evident as I observed feelings of opposition, and the energy they contained, being *interwoven* with future visions, and finding expression in creative acts of 'constitutive antagonism' and economic re-imagining (Byrne and Healy, 2006; Glynos, 2011).

Following this stance, and a performative understanding of the economy that pushes towards relational rather than moral challenges to capitalism, attention was less on the 'structural dynamic of a capitalist system' and more on the 'ethical dynamics of decision-making' that constitute cooperative practice (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009a: 19). Turbulent periods and challenges experienced by each organisation, such as the closure of the Bakery in Beanies and the Small School in Regather (see subsection 4.1.1), were not framed as consequences of the economic crisis or reductions in state support. Rather they were understood as experiments that didn't work, risks that didn't pay off and, most importantly, opportunities for collective reflexivity, learning, and the re-imagining of future visions and current organisational form (Land and King, 2014). As will become evident in the next chapter, and in line with Gibson-

¹¹⁰ Here I partially agree with Glynos (2011: 73) that fantasy 'is a necessary condition for mobilisation [and essential to action] as much as a function of social passivity and maintaining the status quo'. This is however only the case if fantasy is taken beyond rhetoric and used instead as the grounds of experimentation. As Glynos recognises, turning fantasy into action requires a different relation to fantasy (see also, Glynos, 2011: 79): an ontological rather than epistemological relation.

Graham's (2003: 151) study of Mondragon Cooperative, I observed that the strength of each organisation:

[...] has been its willingness to openly and democratically discuss these issues, to reflect on past mistakes and to constantly change [...] Openness to change is a freedom to be exercised in itself.

Through reflection on members' experiences of work, and specifically the re-imagining and re-performance of work on their own terms, and on their collective experience of (re)building cooperative practice, I have gained a deeper understanding of what it means to re-appropriate thinking as an ethical act of resubjectification. Specifically, I have found this act to start with engagement in struggle and the adoption of an anti-essentialist and post-fantasmatic position, and move towards an ever emergent re-making of future visions and socio-economic relations that gave direction to members' antagonisms (Chatterton, 2010b). Situated in the context of a plural economy, these 're-makings' constituted participants bringing 'things together from different domains to spawn something new' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 625). Such acts of bricolage, and their connection to the anti-essentialist position and weak theoretical stance, are the focus of the next section.

3.4.2: Learning to be affected

The previous section argued that our reorientation away from critique and resistance towards a hopeful stance of (re)reading for, and cultivating, possibility requires the re-appropriation of thinking as an ethical act of resubjectification. This re-appropriation includes challenging depictions of the mind as a mirror and knowledge as a reflection that touches the world through intermediary language (Latour, 2004: 208), and only at the point of truth. In this depiction, the 'primary qualities' of the world are separate from the 'secondary qualities' of the mind: qualities that exist in imagination, interpretation, desire, stories and worries (Graham, 1990; 1992). By adopting a weak theoretical stance and an anti-essentialist, overdetermined position we re-frame knowledge as a conversation and '*process of social interaction*' (Graham, 1992: 148). In doing so we circumvent both mind-world and knowledge-action distinctions in two

ways. First by presuming integration, interdependence and co-constitution of all social processes; and second, by recognising thinking-theorising as an action, interconnected with our experience and emotions, and constitutive of our curiosities, resignations and apprehension of the possible.

This understanding is supported by the 'extended epistemology' of the participatory worldview (Heron and Reason, 1997; sub-section 2.1.1). In line with this worldview, I experienced, in both research and cooperative practice, that our understanding of the world is shaped by experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing *and* by their association and dissociation with one another (see figure 3.5). As illustrated in figure 3.6, in cooperative practice this constituted members adopting the role of active bricoleur, drawing on multiple ideas, experiences and theories to co-construct and interrogate the meaning of their economic practice (Cunliffe, 2003b).



 Consummating: celebration of being-values.	Practical knowing: Knowing how to do something demonstrated through skills or competencies.	 Grounding: validation of truth-values.
	Propositional knowing: Knowing in conceptual terms, expressed in descriptive statements and theories.	
	Presentational knowing: Expression/symbolisation of intuitively felt resonance with the world and the meaning embedded in its enactment.	
	Experiential knowing: Direct encounter, feeling and imagining; knowing through participative, empathetic resonance.	

Figure 3.5: The extended epistemology of the participatory worldview (adapted from Heron and Reason, 1997: 281-2)



 Consummating: celebration of being-values.	Practical knowing: Ability to collectively organise; self-awareness; individual-collective interdependence.	 Grounding: validation of truth-values.
	Propositional knowing: 'Everyday revolution'; 'be the change you want to see in the world'; DIY mentality; recognition of economic diversity and interdependence.	
	Presentational knowing: Expressed resonance with self-help, mutual support and grassroots action.	
	Experiential knowing: Encounters of community spirit and collective organising e.g. free party scene; varying experiences of work; negative experience of hierarchy and disempowerment.	

Figure 3.6: Experiences of the extended epistemology (adapted from Heron and Reason, 1997: 281-2)

From this process emerged not statements of how the world is or should be, but propositions that made the 'progressive composition of a common world' (Latour, 2004: 212) thinkable and actionable. This is captured in the following exchanges taken from FG3. The exchange occurred as participants grouped post-it note responses to shared narratives.

Rachel: I have put 'diverse working life and relationships' as one; 'feeling against top down management'; 'importance of autonomy and flexibility' which is quite similar to that one. 'Inspiring others to do-it-yourself'; 'Moving away from the corporate world'. [...]

Gareth: Put that one next to 'moving away from the corporate world'. It says 'making positive decisions to reject the system - quitting and turning down jobs'.

Nicole: 'Ethics and values' is sort of a lead on from that. It's kind of the flip side of it.

Researcher: Is that like working in an organisation that aligns with your...

Nicole: Yes as oppose to the corporate world...

Fran: Yes, and this that Nicole said: 'struggling but with a righteous cause'.

Tim: Yes... 'Believe in your job and moral focus'; 'think global, act local'.

Nicole: That comes in with 'horizontal management' (Laughs)

Researcher: It's interesting that you have put those together.

Nicole: Well it was the way that someone described it. They were talking about their local area and instead of top down, that horizontal...

[...]

Tim: [handing over another post-it note] It says 'act don't wait, or just talk'.

Gareth: [This one] goes with 'inspiring other to do-it-yourself'

Fran: I've got empowering others.

Lisa: I've got DIY [do-it-yourself].

In this animated discussion members shared “do-it-yourself” mentality and commitment to self-help, and local horizontal change (presentational knowing) start to emerge as strong common themes. These commitments are rooted in members’ past experiences of community organising, work, activism and play: experiences that have challenged their assumptions about the benefits of top-down change and made them believe that *‘real positive change only comes about through grassroots movements [...] through the local community and through people, individuals’* (Fran, FG3). Bringing these experiences together highlights what Chatterton and Pickerill (2010: 476) describe as:

[...] the dirty, real work of activism that expresses a pragmatic ‘get on with it’, an antagonistic ‘no’, and a hopeful ‘yes’.

For Gareth, central to this work is everyday action and, as we saw in the previous section, personal transformation. Moving from presentational to propositional and practical knowing Gareth explains (FG3):

Gareth: We went on a few talks a while ago about anarchism and there was something about the everyday revolutions, about people...everyone talks about the importance of making incremental change at an individual level, as opposed to heading off on a big camp, and you know, it's not that it discounts things like the camps, but it is about something

that is fit for purpose. You know, if you want to see change you have to make change in your own life. [...] What resonated with me is everybody, in various ways, have had certain formation experiences. You know, at various points in their lives have done something, met someone, been somewhere, acted upon something and it's like, you know, how that actually is a formation experience in terms of doing stuff. And then, linked to that, is about being part of a community of people who are like minded, have had that experience of alternatives, and genuinely wanting to see tangible change. Like I think you [Tim] said that precisely. You said tangible change and I thought that was, really resonated, because yes...too much rhetoric.

Nicole: [...] what you are saying there is this thing that does come from the rave culture or from the kind of protest scene, is that kind of working together as a group that we just sort of do instinctively.

Constant moves between experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing expressed in this exchange reveal understanding, knowledge and their narratives to be performative, grounded in experience and consummated in action. This consummation – the alignment of actions and experiences (Benford and Snow, 2000) – ‘is accompanied by a *feeling* of a change in capacity’ which in turn gives the ‘body’s movements a kind of depth that stays with it across [and accumulates in] all its transitions’ (Roelvink, 2010: 112, original emphasis). The weaving together of the secondary qualities of the mind, our experiences and our bodies’ movements, actions and interaction creates, in other words, a sense of temporal coherence that first increases our capacity for re-imagining ourselves and our actions, second gives our (cooperative) practices greater salience and credibility (Della Porta and Mario, 2006), and third counters (and challenges the inevitability of) labour abstraction.

Underlying these acts of consummation and validation are processes of ‘learning to be affected’: empathetic acts of resonating with and being moved ‘put into motion by other entities whose differences [and sameness] are registered in new and unexpected ways’ (Latour, 2004: 210; Roelvink, 2010). As the above exchanges show, this is an act of being open to the ‘other as a communicative being’ (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink,

2009c: 324), allowing ourselves to be ‘animated by care for the world and its inhabitants’ (ibid.: 324), and engaging in ‘constitutive processes of living and learning’ which Gareth described as formative experiences (ibid.: 325). Reflecting on this concomitant process of body-world becoming, I follow Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2009c) in arguing that emergent understandings of the economy as plural are supported by our engagement with the economy through multiple intermediaries that connect mind and world, subject and object in diverse ways. Consonant with claims made in sub-section 2.2.3, these intermediaries constitute our relations with others, our assumptions, our emotions, and our embodied experiences of empathy. When participants shared their narratives, they talked about being connected to (and disconnected from) the economy through feelings of disillusionment following redundancy and anger after the financial crisis; through theories of ‘everyday revolutionaries’ and anarchism; and through experiences of community organising, self-employment, volunteering and cooperation. While expressed in language, these intermediaries could not be reduced to words with distinct meanings and essence. To do so would deny their aesthetic qualities and embodied energies. Dave (Beanies) was not connected to (or disconnected from) the corporate world by ‘redundancy’ – by ‘no longer being needed or useful’ – but by the emotions and embodied experience of being disposable that the language of ‘redundancy’ came to carry. As I will go on to explore in chapter 5, when Dave’s embodied experience of redundancy met with the experiences of others, and with different ways of being and relating, the inevitability of redundancy as a consequence of reductions in profits was thrown into question. This opened space for new understandings of work and ‘*different ways of doing business*’ (Gareth).

In line with Latour’s (2004: 207) research, we see here that both a wider understanding of the world and the [collective] body come into being ‘at the same time as ‘world counter-parts’ are being registered in new ways’. From this perspective, ‘learning to be affected’ is an ethical practice through which we use our coexistence as the basis for transformation (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 325; Roelvink, 2010), and the reconstitution of ‘autonomy as a collective project’ that ‘simultaneously refuses and proposes, destroys and creates’ (Chatterton, 2005: 547).

3.5: Conclusions on moving towards community economies

Drawing on participants' experiences of work and economy this chapter began by identifying three sources of neoliberal-capitalist dominance: its ability to morph and mutate in response to crisis; its re-production in capitalist subjectivities of the 'self-as-enterprise'; and processes of labour abstraction. Using these as points of departure, and again focusing on the experiences of participants, it went on to explore the three stages leading up to building community economies: deconstructing the hegemony of capitalism, fostering a language of economic difference, and cultivating post-capitalist subjectivities. In doing so it has performed two tasks. First, it has served to reinforce the theory-action connection explored in chapter 2, specifically adding weight to White et al's (2016: 2) contention that 'every theorisation always implies practices [...] and every action potentially affects the space-time where social imaginary significations are constituted'. Second, it has introduced Holloway's (2010) "crack capitalism", Gibson-Graham's (2006a; 2006b; 2008) diverse economies theory and Glucksmann (2005) and William's (2009; 2010) total social organisation of labour as epistemological and ontological starting points for understanding the role of democracy in relation to performances of economic diversity.

These theories share an understanding that 'how we represent something like an economy influences how we think about what is possible' (Gibson-Graham, 2009: 5; White and Williams, 2013). This is not to say that simply identifying and describing economic diversity will, in itself, constitute new realities (McKinnon, 2010). As this chapter has shown, the adoption of a language of economic diversity and interdependence must come hand in hand with a recognition that a significant barrier to re-imagining and re-performing the economy resides in ourselves. From this perspective, bringing a diverse post-capitalist economy into being is an act of epistemological and ontological reframing that requires the adoption of a weak theoretical stance, a 'learning to be affected vision of the world' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 325) and an anti-essentialist overdeterminism. These positions embrace the presence of multiple, interacting subjectivities, accept individual and collective identity as decentred, unbounded and always in transition, and challenge mind-world, theory-action dichotomies. The role of democracy in relation to this epistemological and ontological work will be explored chapter 5, where my second and

third contributions to knowledge are developed. Here, attention is turned briefly to the fourth stage of enacting post-capitalist economies: the process of building community economies (Graham and Cornwell, 2009; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c; Cameron and Gibson, 2005; Phelan et al., 2012; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

Space has not allowed for full investigation of this stage. However, given their impact on my understanding of the role of democracy, I feel it is worth outlining what Miller (2013a: 520) describes as the ‘three [interconnected] moments of community economy’: the ontological moment; the moment of ethical exposure; and the moment of politics. We have seen glimmers of each moment over the course of this chapter that, post-PhD, may be elaborated on in more depth¹¹¹. The ‘ontological moment’ was seen in the traversal of fantasy and strong theory, and the rejection of community as the bringing together of ‘already constituted subjects’ into a ‘constructed oneness’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 85)¹¹². Understood to preclude encounters with possibility and therefore points of creative becoming, this was replaced with a ‘being-in-common’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; 2006b) that foregrounds relations and interdependencies rather than the ‘abstract singularity’ of the ‘I’ (chapter 4). It is through these relations and interdependencies that the economy and our economic subjectivities emerge as made rather than found. In the ‘moment of ethical exposure’ our interdependences are ‘exposed for negotiation and contestation’ (Miller, 2013a: 525). Based on a view of the economy as a cultural, and therefore inherently social system and as already a site of ‘ethical praxis’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 87), this moment opens opportunities for us to question what is necessary for individual and collective survival, how surplus is distributed, appropriated and consumed, and how commons are shared and sustained (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Miller, 2013a; chapter 5). The ‘moment of politics’ constitutes acts of making visible and (re)performing ‘economic co-implication, interdependence and social connection’ obscured, but not eradicated, by capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 83). This moment sees not the formation of fixed principles

¹¹¹ An initial step would be to frame my findings through these three moments. I explored this possibility when structuring my conclusion but, as my focus is on moves towards performances of economic diversity in general rather than community economies more specifically, I decided against. It is nonetheless a potentially fruitful avenue to explore.

¹¹² A conception supported by the language of community cohesion and inclusion (Gibson-Graham, 2009).

but an ongoing struggle to, at once, 'stabilize particular regimes of meaning, value and collective action' (Miller, 2013a: 529) and maintain negativity. It is through these struggles that we explicate a certain vision and define/redefine with whom we connect (and therefore who we exclude) while refusing to know too much or close our doors too tightly. In these three interconnected moments we understand 'community economies' as a 'politics of collective action' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a): a politics of the here and now, of experimentation, creativity and interdependence. Community economies are, in other words, about creating the conditions for possibility and re-understanding 'limits' as 'positively charged [...] catalysts for economic self-determination' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xxvi; Gibson-Graham, 2009). It was from this understanding that I began to research the practice and purpose of cooperative democracy that forms the focus of the next two chapters.

4: An exploration into the everyday praxis of democracy

Section 1.7 revealed that Beanies and Regather are vastly different, both in terms of their business activity and their formal¹¹³/as-lived¹¹⁴ organisational structures. In addition to highlighting the formative impact of these differences on understandings and practices of democracy¹¹⁵, constant comparison of the two organisations brought to the fore common challenges and ways of thinking and being that shed light on what constitutes democratic praxis in worker cooperatives. The next two sections investigate these constituent elements, focusing specifically on the day-to-day praxes that support everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy that will be explored in chapter 5. As such, the chapter does not engage with the rich theoretical debates around the bringing together of consensus and plurality that have emerged alongside radical and deliberative democracy (see for example Barnett, 2004; Knops, 2007; Erman, 2009; Dryzek, 2005). Rather these debates, together with Mouffe's (1999; 2009; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) theory of agonistic pluralism, have been used only in so far as they have helped me to concomitantly establish my own position, and understand both the lived experience of democracy, and its role in moving towards diverse economies thinking. In line with my methodological approach (see sub-section 2.1.1), the use of theory as a tool for thinking-of rather than representing the world, thus helped to avoid 'alienat[ion] from the lived moment' (Routledge, 1996: 401) and consequently remain focused on collective processes of reflexivity and learning-through-action.

For similar reasons, and again following my methodological approach, I refer to democracy in its most holistic sense as praxis. The term brings to the fore the interconnected nature of thinking, being and acting that enlarge democracy beyond formal structures and practices of decision-making. This is not to say that these

¹¹³ Constituting the organisations' legal form and governing documents outlining who can and cannot be a member, and the formal processes of member recruitment and engagement.

¹¹⁴ The actually practiced structures which, as discussed in sub-section 4.1.2, may be different from those expressed in governing documents.

¹¹⁵ For example, Regather's desire to engage members beyond regular workers and their formal structure necessitates annual general meetings that are not held at Beanies.

structures and practices of democracy are inconsequential but rather that they cannot be understood in isolation from individual and collective democratic subjectivities. Framing democracy as praxis thus acknowledges that when it comes to understanding the purpose and meaning of democracy in worker cooperatives the 'process is as important as the outcome [...] the journey is an end in itself' (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 738).

4.1: Framing democracy as a praxis

After highlighting key contextual differences in Beanies' and Regather's stage of development, section 4.1 conceptualises each organisation as a conversation and product of ongoing individual-collective alignment. Working within the framework of democracy as praxis, section 4.2 connects these ways of thinking and being to action, exploring how they shape, and are expressed in, democratic practices of decision-making and role-sharing. Reinforcing the importance of both these practices, the final sub-section explores the ever-present risk of emergent informal hierarchies. Coming full circle, the section reinforces the importance of ways of thinking expressed in section 4.1 by illuminating the space these shared understandings create for hierarchies to be challenged.

The ever-evolving nature of each organisation has made this chapter particularly challenging to write. As sub-section 4.1.1 will show, at the start of my research both organisations were emerging from turbulent periods that pushed them close to breaking point. As an employee of Beanies and member of Regather I witnessed these challenging times, seeing and feeling the tensions, stresses and fractures that emerged within and between members. As a researcher, I had the privilege of observing the organisations recover and rebuild their democratic praxis. This process was such that every observation I wrote down, every recording I transcribed, and every chapter I drafted were read again and again through different eyes. As Mark (19/05/16) succinctly captured '*what you wrote isn't a snap shot of what we all think about Beanies it's about how we felt at that time*'. The narrative presented here is not therefore a 'true' and representative account of Beanies' and Regather's democratic praxis at a particular point in time. Rather, it is one of many possible accounts

constructed around the experiences, emotions and reactions of participants (myself included) shared over the course of the research. Capturing the extent of, and challenges posed by, the organisations' fluid and organic nature, the following exchange¹¹⁶ (09/03/15) offers an apt point of departure.

Fran: [...] The problem is it's all a bit confused. Do you think it's always been a bit confused Kiri?

Researcher: Yes

Lisa laughed

Fran: Do you know anything that is consistent?

Researcher: No. The fact that it has always been a bit confused. That's really consistent!

Laughs

Heather: Good answer

4.1.1: Context: differences in Beanies and Regather's stage of development

The proceeding discussion sets the context for this, and the following chapter. It starts with an outline of the turbulent times from which each cooperative was emerging at the start of my research. The narrative presented was developed through reflection on personal experience of my time as a worker and member, analysis of meeting minutes taken during the turbulent period, and discussions with participants carried out over the course of the research.

Turbulent times

Presented below are two figures summarising challenging events referred to throughout this chapter, and outlining changes in my own involvement. Figure 4.1 highlights two major changes affecting Beanies between 2012 and 2013: the closure of their organic Bakery opened in 2009 and major changes to the organisations' membership.

¹¹⁶ The extract is taken from a conversation with Fran, held in the car on the way home from a visit to Unicorn Grocery, about the changing focus of Regather.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Dave								
Gemma								
Jake								
Chris	Worked at Bakery				Working in Shop			
Heather								
Evan								
Rocky								
Departure of long-standing members								
Bakery								
Personal involvement	Non-member worker					Researcher		

Figure 4.1: Summary of challenging events and researcher involvement (Beanies)

Following a number of years of success, positive feedback and growth, the closure of the Bakery unfolded as a consequence of the ongoing challenge of finding suitable staff, and concerns over its financial feasibility, including the financial pressure it was placing on the wider cooperative. The former resulted in tensions emerging between workers, and Chris¹¹⁷ working very long and unsociable hours. During one early observation session, he explained (fieldnote, 15/11/14):

I wanted to leave for my health. Eventually I gave Beanies an ultimatum – either they gave me the support I needed or I would leave. Coop members agreed that I should return to the shop and that the Bakery should be sold¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁷ Chris was the only cooperative member to have been relocated from the shop to work full-time in the Bakery.

¹¹⁸ The complex process of finding a new group of people to run the Bakery, and the eventual decision to give up the Bakery premise lease and sell the equipment, played out over the course of the research. While reflecting on the events and conversations related to this process I did not include them in the thesis, largely due to the sensitive nature of the issue and the number of non-participants involved.

Changes to Beanies membership constituted the departure of six members, including three long-term members¹¹⁹, and the arrival of three new members (Dave, Gemma and Jake) and one non-member book-keeper (Rocky). One of the departing members (Ruth¹²⁰) had a predominantly office-based role, taking responsibility for book-keeping, paying wages, ordering wholefoods and invoicing and paying companies.

As indicated in figure 4.1 the two changes outlined here concentrated over a two-year period placing the cooperative under significant strain, both financially and emotionally. These internal stresses coincided with external shocks, including a reduction in sales aligned with the 2008 financial crisis, and the opening of a Sainsbury's Local one minute-walk from Beanies. Space does not allow for analysis of these external factors; their identification serves only to indicate the extent of challenges faced by Beanies over the period immediately preceding my research.

Highlighting similar challenging events, figure 4.2 illustrates the closure of Regather's Small School project, the departure of two of the three founder members¹²¹ (Adam¹²² and Julia), and arrival of three new members (Lisa, Fran and Nicole). The closure of the Small School was caused by a mixture of factors including the challenge of meeting Ofsted requirements, limited engagement of project staff in the wider running of the cooperative, and the dis-alignment between the Small School and Regather's overall aims and skills base. The latter issue, combined with their desire to pursue alternative careers, contributed to Julia's and Adam's departure in 2013¹²³. Again, these changes

¹¹⁹ In the year prior to my research six members left the organisation. One took retirement, one left to focus on caring for family members, three left to pursue other careers and one left, in part, due to unresolved tensions and disagreements.

¹²⁰ Pseudonym used.

¹²¹ Reflecting on these departures in one observation session (fieldnote, 30/01/15), Gareth explained: *'Suddenly it was like, me on my own, and Julia and [Adam] going, "right, see you later". Dark time, they were. Very dark. But [we] got through it'*. Gareth's description of the period nicely captures the mood and feeling I experienced at Regather during this period.

¹²² Pseudonym used.

¹²³ The Small School played less of a role in Julia's departure than Adam's. In an e-mail (06/09/17) Julia explained: *'I left to pursue a different career and also to have kids. As I was already working multiple jobs with REGATHER it was time to cut back and focus, with time being more precious'*. For Adam, the shift away from Regather's initial focus on developing trading accounts (as a means to support and enable the development of creative/social projects) was a more central driver behind his departure. As he explained during a telephone discussion (fieldnote, 06/09/17): *the trading accounts were what excited him and once these were no longer being pursued, Regather lost its appeal.*

occurred over a short period of time between 2013 and 2014. In both organisations, these events have had significant formative impacts on the organisations democratic praxis, as will become clear through section 4.1.

	2009	2010 (rules written)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Gareth								
Tim					Traveling			
Rachel								
Lisa								
Nicole								
Fran								
Julia								
Adam								
Small School								
Personal involvement		(A)		(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	
	(A) Kitchen manager and member; (B) Governance and social reporting; (C) Limited involvement (remained a member); (D) Researcher-member; (E) Secretary (resigned February 2016)							

Figure 4.2: Summary of challenging events and researcher involvement (Regather)

Governing documents, life stage and the first glimpse of democratic commonality

Beanies' articles were written in 1983 and remain in their typewritten form, their story largely forgotten. Values of equality, non-hierarchical relations and worker ownership written into the articles have been transformed into ways of acting and being together, passed down from one generation of members to next through collective engagement in praxis. Highlighting the importance of inter-generational learning in relation to both the organisation's praxis of democracy, and cooperative practice more broadly, Evan explained (FG1):

I think pretty much all of us, our only experience of working as part of a workers' coop is actually just working here and how it has been set up before we worked here and how we understand the way things work.

In the following exchange (FG2) Gemma and Chris similarly recognise the embeddedness of democratic praxis. Chris' positive reflections are situated relative to

the challenges posed by scapegoating¹²⁴, and the period of turmoil discussed above during which meetings became infrequent and communication between members broke down (see section 4.2). In line with research carried out by Gibson-Graham (2003) at Mondragon Cooperative, this challenging period, and Chris' comments, reveal that the stasis of articles and established nature of cooperative practice does not negate the need for continual work to maintain democratic praxis.

Chris: Well, I'd like to come back on what Rocky was just saying about us ticking over quite nicely at the moment, and I think we are actually. But I certainly don't think it has always been like that. I think there is something about...and what it brought to mind was a situation I have been in in this company, and in previous companies, where an individual becomes a scapegoat of a lot of problems and [...] eventually it gets to the point where they move out of the coop because it is just too uncomfortable to have them in. And it might come from them or it might come from the group. But there is an area there that is quite tricky to deal with, and [...] we've done quite well to move past a situation that was potentially scapegoating a previous employee [...] I think we are working quite hard at being a cooperative even if we are not talking about being a cooperative at the moment. We are working cooperatively, which is good.

Gemma: And all just working hard together.

Chris: Working hard together and there's nobody that is being seen as not working hard. It is the same point as you [Gemma] were making I think, even if people are good at some things and not good at other things, you can't fault anyone for not playing as full a role as they can. It's really heartening.

In stark contrast to Beanies, Regather's structure, written into cooperative rules in 2010, remains chaotic and fluid. Fundamental questions about the form and function

¹²⁴ The issue of scapegoating emerged in both Beanies and Regather. Space has not allowed for the issue to be explored in depth. It does however warrant further investigation beyond this PhD research.

of membership continue to be debated¹²⁵, although (thankfully) within increasingly well-defined parameters. The extent of Regather's ongoing structural fluidity was illustrated during a meeting (17/07/15) set up to discuss the issue of membership. During this meeting Fran expressed confusion that, while Regather was set up as a cooperative consortium to support businesses and traders, there are kitchen users¹²⁶ who are not members. Surely, she argued, under the cooperative consortium form these small businesses should be members with a say in decisions. In principle, Gareth explained, this is correct. The cooperative was set up as '*legal vehicle*' to enable self-employed people to work collectively '*and make projects happen*'. However, in reality, the bringing together of diverse businesses has meant that potential members have lacked a common cause and therefore a foundation to meaningful engagement (a point that will be returned to in sub-section 4.1.3). Stressing this point, Gareth exclaimed, '*we struggle to get kitchen users to even share a market stall!*' He went on to explain that there has also been a shift in the form of engagement, from self-employment to employment, specifically amongst those most involved in the organisation. Recognising this shift Fran asked, '*is it OK for me to think about the coop as a worker coop?*' Gareth responded (fieldnote, 17/07/15):

What you are articulating is the challenge of being involved in Regather – having to deal with its evolutionary nature. The aim is to have people who are workers, small businesses, volunteers and services users being involved, but we are not there yet. A shift to a worker coop mentality is what we need to do now to develop functioning capacity as a business.

¹²⁵ As outlined in an early meeting with Gareth (fieldnote, 07/11/14), issues to be addressed included: (1) *the need to re-engage with the current membership*; (2) *the need to develop a better understanding of what membership means (including benefits to members and benefits to Regather)*; (3) *the need to encourage those engaged to be members/understand why they are not* (as Fran explained during our first meeting (fieldnote, 25/11/14): '*Membership is by choice. It's not linked to employment or involvement at all*'). In an earlier meeting Gareth (07/11/14) similarly explained: '*Membership is currently based on the purchase of a £1 share*').

Confusion around Regathers' membership structure is confounded by the existence of different 'engagement categories' including: follower, customer, supplier, associate, and supporter (fieldnote, 07/11/14). These categories arose from Regathers' consortium model and, while they are not linked to membership, are often mistakenly conflated with it. As indicated in the coming discussion, over the course of the research, Regather developed a more focused membership structure based on actually existing relationships.

¹²⁶ Comprising predominantly of people in the early stages of setting up food businesses attracted to Regather by the offer of high grade kitchen space at a comparative low cost with high levels of flexibility.

We see in this closing comment that the ongoing challenge of enacting their formal structure has been seen, at times, to be getting in the way of business. This concern was nicely captured by Fran who, at the 2016 General Meeting, exclaimed: *'once all this governance gumpf is done we will have more time to talk about trades'*. While such frustrations were less prominent at Beanies, tensions between the work of democracy and work of running a business were nonetheless still felt. This is illustrated in the following FG1 exchange:

Evan: Yes, because you lose it. You're that...

Heather: You're so busy 'doing' aren't you?

Evan: Yes. You've got your head down doing the everyday running of the business, you lose sight of an overall kind of view of coops¹²⁷.

Heather: And it's also an important part of Beanies business as well. And OK, we want a business and we want to earn a decent wage out of it but we still want to, [and] I think it's quite important that we, let other people know who we are and why we are and stuff. So, while we are doing our promotions and stuff, it is important to make sure people are aware of that.

Despite differences in the longevity and relative fixity of Beanies' and Regather's formal structures Evan's comments, situated alongside the experiences and reflections of Regather's members, highlights two key commonalities that offer early insights into the nature of democratic praxis. First, notwithstanding the tensions identified above, democratic praxis is understood as integral to, and interconnected with, the functional capacity of the business (Birchall, 2013). Second, democracy is conceived as an ever-becoming praxis that requires ongoing and critical work (Springer, 2010; Rasza and

¹²⁷ In an earlier observation session (fieldnote, 9/12/14) Evan explained: *'shortly after [the departure of two of the longest-standing members], Heather approached [two well established cooperatives] to ask them for advice. Beanies didn't know whether they were going to get anyone good in to replace [long-standing members] and were worried about the future. Someone from [an established cooperative] came to Beanies and gave us a useful pep talk.'* Evan went on to say *'it's good to check that you are on the right track sometimes. Make sure that you are doing the coop bit right. There is the business side of things and there is the coop bit'*. The distinction made by Evan here sits contra to the FG1 quote and my observations. Evan's point in making this distinction was to emphasise that *'the day-to-day pressures/need to make sure the business side is going ok sometimes pushed the coop bit and how decisions are made to the side lines'*.

Kurnik, 2012). It is, as Nicole and Tim explain (FG3), experimental, always contestable and 'necessarily mediated and partial' (Barnett and Bridge, 2012: 1025).

Nicole: I don't know if you ever achieve a like, 'we have done it' though.

It is supposed to be an ongoing struggle isn't it.

Tim: It's meant to be an ongoing struggle yes, but it's hard to take a back step maybe. Instead of going forward every year it's taken a back-step.

It doesn't mean it's over.

In the sections that follow I explore members' struggles over democratic praxis in more depth, starting with a discussion on the purpose and function of governing documents.

4.1.2: If there were governance police you would have been arrested! An exploration into the purpose and function of cooperative 'rules' and 'articles'

During this research, both organisations returned to and discussed their rules and articles. This section presents analysis of these, and wider discussions, focusing on the purpose and function of governing documents. The section reveals that, in both Regather and Beanies, the adoption of a cooperative legal form and its expression in rules and articles was understood as a means of enabling collective action towards social and economic change, rather than as a form of social action in and of itself. As Krishna (2013: 106, emphasis added; see also Luhman, 2007; Webb and Cheney; 2014) explains:

[...] forming a worker cooperative that acts as a change agent requires more than simply structuring the business as a worker cooperative.

Cooperative corporation laws and cooperative principles set a floor—typically, one person, one vote—but that floor does not, in and of itself, guarantee political activism or broader social or economic change [rather it] sets up cooperatives as potential sites of collective action.

This understanding of the cooperative legal form as enabling collective action emerged through comparison of the organisations' formal structures and their structures-as-

lived. We saw in the previous section, that tensions between Regather's written and practiced structure have been playing out for some time. As a long-term member, I have become familiar with these often highly theoretical debates, focused predominantly on how to bring traders, associates, supporters, and workers together as equitably contributing members of a single cooperative. The degree of attention given to these issues transformed the formal cooperative structure into an end goal: an agent of change in and of itself. Space does not allow for a historical account of these debates. The observation I wish to highlight here is that, following the turbulent period described in sub-section 4.1.1, there has been a shift in focus from fantasising about how Regather *should* function to exploring how they work in the present. This shift towards "starting from where we are" rather than where we should be is expressed in the following quote. Here, Gareth was describing Regather to a group of visitors from the School of Social Enterprise (20/04/15):

We are kind of leaving the coop bit behind to an extent and emphasising the fact that we are a building, a social action centre.

While this seemingly contradicts the integral nature the cooperative model to the functioning capacity of the business, further discussion reveals Gareth's comment, not to be a rejection of the 'coop bit', but a reframing of it as a vehicle for social action rather than an end in itself. This reframing came to light as Gareth described the motivation behind Regather to the same group of visitors. In this description, the complexity of the membership structure is stripped away to get to the essence of why the cooperative form was chosen. This essence is crucial to Regather's identity but is often forgotten amongst the minutiae of why and how different members can and should engage in the cooperative.

Basically, we were a group of people that were both self-employed and volunteering in the local community and we were in the position where we needed some kind of legal vehicle, and also a marketing vehicle, to do things that individually we couldn't actually do on our own. So that was the need if you like, the social need that was being met by the coop itself.

Its purpose was to enable us to work together and make projects happen, so a general purpose in that respect.

While focusing here on Gareth's verbal expressions of this role, observations revealed it to be an understanding shared and utilised by all members. As can be seen in the social action centres researched by Chatterton (2006) and Chatterton and Pickerill (2010), and in the Greek cooperatives explored by Kokkinidis (2012; 2014), the projects that comprise Regather's social and economic action, including the vegetable box scheme, the microbrewery, the events programme and social enterprise support, have been made possible by the creation of a 'site [for] collective action' (see also sub-section 4.1.3). This 'site' constitutes, not only the physical space of 'Regather Works' but the 'loose framework' offered by their rules that supports and enhances already existing ways of working, and members' shared focus on '*people and environment and sharing*' (Fran). As is the case in Argentina's worker-recuperated firms, the legally recognised organisational form of the cooperative thus offered a pragmatic solution to the challenges of precarious working and an opportunity to respond to these challenges through the develop non-capitalist socio-economic relations (Atzeni and Vieta, 2014; Vieta, 2010; see also Sandoval, 2016). Supporting this final point through further expansion on the purpose of this framework Gareth explained (FG3):

For me, coops and cooperation is a means of like re-engineering what comes around: a natural hierarchy. You can't avoid who talks the loudest, who votes with their feet. Those that turn up are deemed the most important, you know, in whatever circumstance (Tim: Yes), and I think the challenge of cooperation is that you put in place the framework that you work within, in order to kind of short circuit or re-engineer the natural formation of hierarchies that are basically a feature of being human. (Tim: Bound to happen) Yes, yes. So, it's like putting in place something that is a conscious decision that means that you have to operate in a more democratic way that reflects a set of values, that, in terms of a coop are prescribed in a certain way but give you the ability to work within a more kind of open framework, you know. That was the decision in a way to go with the coop.

The 'natural hierarchies' described by Gareth and observed in both organisations (discussed further in sub-section 4.2.3), and the purpose of the cooperative form in relation to these, is similarly recognised by Ng and Ng (2009: 184) who explain:

Individuals who are more articulate, persuasive, fair, responsible, energetic or committed naturally carry more weight in groups. Power based on personal attributes is difficult to eliminate. [...] In co-ops, one of the principles is to narrow the gap between 'leaders' and 'followers', instead of strengthening the hierarchy.

While Gareth's insights and my own interpretation of observed action support the view of the cooperative structure as a framework for action, wider discussions revealed a limited awareness of both Regather's cooperative form, and what 'being a cooperative' really means in relation to members' roles, responsibilities and controls¹²⁸. This could be seen to indicate that the cooperative form is inconsequential. However, reflecting on the following exchange, and returning again to Krishna's (2013) argument, we see that the presence of the cooperative legal form sets a floor: a minimum expectation against which to assess and improve practices of democracy as they are put under pressure from the day-to-day challenges of running a business. The focus group (FG3) exchange followed on from Gareth's earlier quote describing the cooperative form as a framework to '*re-engineer the natural formation of hierarchies*'. It focuses on the ill-defined role of Regather's management committee that, at the time, constituted Gareth, Fran and Nicole.

¹²⁸ I was first made aware of this limited awareness during an early observation session packing vegetable boxes with Fran and Lisa. I made the following note in my fieldnote book (04/12/14, researcher reflections in grey): *Lisa commented to me 'You will have to tell me more about Regather' adding that she still doesn't fully understand what it is. [Lisa has only recently joined the cooperative and is not yet a member]. The conversation continued, touching briefly on membership. Lisa commented: 'I think I wrongly understand myself as an employee' (rather than a member). Lisa also asked me 'What benefits would I get as a member?' [The conversation was interrupted by a visitor arriving. Once they left, it continued]. Fran asked Lisa if she wanted to be a member. Lisa: 'Yes (enthusiastically). What does it involve?' [There is something attractive to Lisa about being a member despite lack of understanding of what it means in practice]. Fran: 'Paying £1'. Lisa expressed surprised. Lisa: 'What do you get out of it?' Fran: 'You get invited to meetings, AGMs and stuff. I became a member just before a meeting. But then I didn't arrive until the end and just introduced myself!'. [There is uncertainty about what membership means and possibly regarding its value]. Uncertainty over the benefits of membership are further emphasised in sub-section 4.1.3.*

Nicole: But in terms of the management structure isn't that similar [to a charity], that the board of trustees would be like the management committee on a coop?

Gareth: Not really. Because you don't (Tim: You don't vote) have a voting membership.

Nicole: Oh, you don't vote.

Tim: No one would disagree with the board of trustees, whereas in a coop you could.

Gareth: Yes in principle a coop committee, I'd have thought.....my understanding of coops, is the management committee is a representative body of the members.

Lisa: The workers within a charity don't actually have very much autonomy or...

Nicole: But the trustees?

Lisa: The trustees do, yes.

Nicole: So that's what I mean, the trustees are like the management committee, in that sense. Between them they vote and discuss those things don't they, in a charity?

Lisa: Not all coops have management committees though do they?

Nicole: Oh, do they not? We do.

Gareth: We only have one principally as a failure of a wider functioning membership.

Nicole: OK.

Gareth: That's a really kind of, really sticks it.

Laughing

Nicole: Did it start like that?

Gareth: If you read line by line the rules, then we make...we have made a proactive decision to have a management committee. But actually, a membership of a certain number ought to operate collectively without a management committee (Nicole: Right) And so we, the management committee, currently operates because we don't have enough members.

Nicole: Are we a radical dictatorship of some descriptions?!

Laughing

Nicole: Is this what you are telling me now?!

Gareth: No, what I am saying is we are a dysfunctional coop at the moment.

Nicole: (Laughing). That's not as bad.

In addition to demonstrating a limited understanding of the cooperative form, this exchange reveals tensions between the structure-as-lived; the 'floor' set out in the governing documents; and an 'ideal' democratic structure, thought and theorised initially to involve multiple stakeholder and, in the exchange above, to constitute collective member control. More specifically, it reveals that, *despite* years of debate and what is stated in their rules, the current structure has emerged out of necessity, action and ultimately a dysfunctional and disengaged membership. Paid workers and those most involved operate as an unelected management team, collectively making and legitimising decisions based on what they know through day-to-day action and interaction, rather than on a formal acceptance of their representative capacity. The adoption of formal committee positions outlined in the rules serves only to fulfil a formality, namely the signing-off of the annual accounts. As such Regather is understood to *'only really function as a coop on a very informal basis'* (Gareth, FG3) guided, but not restricted by, their formal governing documents. What this somewhat "laissez faire" approach surmises is a recognition that (ever changing) behaviours, aspirations and actions do, and should, drive structure rather than the other way round. The development of this approach has culminated in a move to capture the *'culture and autonomy of being a collective in a structured way that enables energy to be put into trading not sitting in meetings'* (Gareth, Annual General Meeting, 02/02/2016).

In Beanies, any theoretical discussions over the reasons for selecting the cooperative model pre-date existing members. As highlighted in sub-section 4.1.1, the democratic structure has become deeply rooted in the organisation and accepted by members, through generational encounters, as the *'the way things work'* (Evan). In contrast to Regather where my research created time and space for continued debate over rules and structures, in Beanies debate was instigated by my involvement and curiosity. As the articles were dug out of filing cabinet and dusted off by the only member who

knew of their whereabouts (Chris), other members became aware that they had not seen or read them, and if they had it was too long ago for them to remember. These acknowledgments, combined with my reflections on the articles age and problems arising from the informality of both membership roles and employee contracts (both of which came to light during the turbulent period described in sub-section 4.1.1), led to a members' meeting focused on the issue (02/07/15). As was the case in Regather, the meeting revealed that members had limited understanding of the role and purpose of articles. Mark questioned, for example, whether articles are legally binding. Chris, who has a history of involvement in cooperatives, replied:

/ don't understand the full legal implications but the articles feel to be written in a way to allow a degree of flexibility and leniency.

Similarly reflecting this limited understanding, Dave explained that the purpose of reviewing the articles was *'to make sure that we understand the basics and are working towards the criteria that we should be'*. Again, similarly to Regather, these comments combine to conceptualise Beanies articles as a loose framework for action that supports and reflects the organisations evolving business focus and democratic praxis. This view is supported by members' comparison of their own, and more recently developed model articles¹²⁹. Though this comparison, Evan identified *'two glaring things'*. First, he commented that the *'objects, that are the basis to our existence'*, don't say anything about being vegetarian. On the one hand members appreciated this openness, understanding it to create opportunities for change in response to new information and perspectives (see sub-section 4.1.3). Conversely, Dave highlighted that too much openness can limit devolved decision-making. The following exchange (fieldnote, 02/07/15) occurred during a discussion on Beanies' choice of energy supplier. It highlights the article's role in defining parameters for

¹²⁹ Model rules and articles are essentially 'off the shelf' documents that can be adopted by organisations with limited modification. Adopting pre-approved model governing documents rather than creating bespoke versions saves significant amounts of money during the initial set-up of a cooperative. This is especially the case for organisations registering under the Cooperative and Community Benefit Society Act who must have rules approved by the FSA.

decisions and the potential benefits of revising articles to reflect *'what we stand for'* (Dave, e-mail, 03/06/16).

Dave: It comes down to principles.

Mark: That's exactly what it comes down to. But it is not an issue that we have considered before. We've not used a green energy supplier.

Dave: This is a consequence of not having articles to guide us. We need to decide whether want green at all cost or whether we want to focus on being cheap. I am happy to be empowered to make that decision but I need to know what parameters are we in?

Second, Evan highlighted that *'it's a bit vague in Beanies' articles [...] whether all employees should be coop members'*. Historically, Evan explained, Beanies has *'always employed part-time, non-member workers so it has gone without saying regardless of what it says in the rules'*¹³⁰. Furthermore, while the model rules suggest a requirement of a *'16, 24 or 32-hour'* working-week Beanies has always required members to commit to full-time work, typically 40 hours/week¹³¹. Members recognise the exclusionary nature of this requirement. As discussed in the introduction, it sits uncomfortably with the cooperative principle of *'voluntary and open membership'* (Webb and Cheney, 2014). However, following extensive discussion around flexibility, roles sharing and proven commitment, it was concluded¹³² that the requirement of full-time work should remain a condition of membership. As Heather (26/03/15) explained:

¹³⁰ Reflecting on the visit to Unicorn Grocery in an earlier observation (fieldnote, 11/03/15) Heather commented that, while she wanted to increase the number of full time cooperative members and believed this would be beneficial to the organisation, *'part-timers give them security and flexibility – shift cover in particular'*.

¹³¹ In an e-mail sent in response to the collective data review (03/06/16) Dave explained: *'The 40-hour week is an interesting one as it isn't actually contractual. My understanding is that it is based on 40 hours but can be less, depending on the business need – so if the shop opening times were reduced or hours needed to be reduced to cut back, the coop members do not have a right to work and, more to the point, be paid for the full 40 hours. This is quite different from other companies where there are contractual hours and thus 'guaranteed' pay for the contracted hours'*. Space does not allow for me to unpack this comment. It is worth noting however that it sits somewhat uncomfortably with the job security discussed in chapter 5, bringing to the fore an issue of precarity (also discussed in chapter 5). Moreover, it serves to reinforce the negotiated nature of wages and working hours and the centrality of individual-collective interdependence.

¹³² A conclusion was reached, in part, because it was felt that the discussion had dragged on too long (see appendix 23), rather than because consensus had been reached. This issue is returned to in sub-section 4.2.1.

[...] because you are working full-time, you still have the ability to do several different jobs. If you are only working part-time you have less flexibility... [less] opportunity to work different shifts. You are only going to work...do certain areas of the business then aren't you?

Employment practices that work, both in terms of supporting the organisations' business needs (for example, ensuring that there are people available to cover shifts) and in terms of ensuring member participation (specifically through role-sharing discussed further in sub-section 4.2.2), were prioritised over 'best practice' defined in either their own or the model articles. Again, we see here that form follows action.

Members' differing and changing relationships with their rules and articles have not been empirically explored in small UK worker cooperatives. Analysis presented here thus contributes to cooperative literature by highlighting two points. First, both organisations recognised that formal structures play an important role in framing and guiding action. The organisations' rules and articles offer a legal vehicle that reflects members values and supports both their democratic praxis and social actions. As such the organisations governing documents were a 'legal pronouncement' that held ongoing (if not regularly stated) significance (Healy, 2011: 368). Second, despite considerable differences in the longevity and establishment of rules and articles, both organisations recognise formal governing documents as necessarily flexible and open to (re)interpretation (see Healy (2011) for US example). This flexibility sits contra to the framing of governing documents (in both academic literature and practice) as fixed expressions of a pre-determined identity that must be 'followed or changed' (Webb and Cheney, 2014: 70). As I was pushed to let go of my own adoption of this view¹³³, I came to understand the (re)framing of rule and articles as a 'loose frameworks for action', as necessary to ensuring that the organisations' structure continued to serve changing business and member needs and not the other way around (Chatterton, 2010b). Thus, as Varman and Chakrabarti (2004: 204) explain, both the challenge and value of democratic structures:

¹³³ A view that drove me to suggest changes to Beanies governing documents and implement changes to Regather's.

[...] lies in progressively creating slack, so that the possibility of maintaining a fine balance among the contradictions remains.

Following the two points highlighted above we see that, while tension exists between the work of democracy and the work of running a business, the two are inseparable and mutually-supporting. More specifically, analysis of the role played by the organisations' rules and articles revealed that their values, business activity, and structure (in both its formal and practical manifestation) evolve together in action and interaction. This evolving nature, and its importance to democratic praxis, is the focus of the next section.

4.1.3: Organisation as conversation

Reflecting on research carried out with two community food growing organisations in Massachusetts, Graham and Cornwell (2009: 57) explain that a reliance on organic growth rather than strategic planning 'resonates with the familiar injunctions to community groups to 'start where you are' and 'build the road you travel''. As already indicated in relation to the development of governing documents, I found a similar resonance in both Beanies and Regather. Starting from recognition of the organisations' organic nature, this section builds on literature that positions narratives and conversations, not only as a methodological approach, but as a theory of organisational change and identity formation (see sub-section 2.2.5; Ford, 1999; Rhodes and Brown, 2005). In line with a 'learning to be affected vision of the world' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 325), this theoretical stance deconstructs the separation of mind and world, recognising that organisations are (re)shaped by the stories we tell and the meaning, values, experiences and emotions these stories contain. While, as the following quote shows, the consequent '*organic development*' brought certain challenges, this section reveals it to be essential to the organisations' democratic praxis.

During FG3, Gareth shared a section of his written narrative:

At early the stages of setting up Regather, maintaining multiple roles was very demanding. We did not assess and made various incorrect assumptions about the skill and experience levels of other founder members, and did not have a good understanding of what skills and experiences and attributes they had to offer. Lack of clarity over business purpose allowed for a very organic development of the organisation, but this took longer and potentially cost more money.

Nicole Laughed: That was very diplomatic: organic development.

The source of Nicole's amusement lies in the fluid and rapidly evolving nature of Regather's structure and business focus. The former was discussed in the previous sub-section and will be expanded on below. The latter was a consequence of Regather's 'open door policy and desire to welcome members with ideas and projects that would address the needs of the local community' (Gareth). During my time as a member of Regather I observed this policy giving rise to varyingly successful, long and short-lived projects¹³⁴ that have defined and re-defined Regather's business direction. The most extreme example of this was the opening of the Small School, instigated by a group of parents seeking early years childcare based on the Steiner Principles. It operated out of Regather from November 2012 to March 2014 amidst reductions in state childcare provision, including the closure of the local Sure Start Centre situated 0.1 miles from Regather. Reflecting, on departure of two of Regather's three founder members, Gareth described the impact of the Small School (30/01/15):

That was the impact of the Small School. Like, basically, Julia [and Adam] were like, 'I don't really want to be running an early year's child care centre'. And I didn't really know what the deal was to begin with, but that was like serious, serious mission drift in their mind. In my mind, it was like the challenge of adapting the coop to another operational

¹³⁴ Including a record label, events catering, and indoor food growing.

activity - events, food, early years' child care - but for them it was like a step beyond.

The departure of these members and closure of the Small School, which '*tested Regather's model to destruction*' (Gareth), played a central role in pushing Regather to reconsider, and more crucially limit, its project portfolio¹³⁵. In this move members recognised the dual necessity of. on the one hand, remaining open and responsive to current and future member creativity; and, on the other, setting project parameters based on a shared understanding of the values and objectives of the organisation, and the resources available (including member skills). The maintenance of openness is understood as essential to both the organisation's democratic praxis and its grounding in community needs; while the setting of parameters emerged as necessary to business sustainability. Combined, these recognitions instigated a shift in concern, from the expansion of Regather's membership base to the development of membership founded upon long-term dialogue and active engagement. In the exchange below (26/06/15) members share, contest, and negotiate the meaning of membership (Humphreys and Brown, 2005), and in doing so illustrate this shift in concern.

Nicole: We are reluctant to recruit new members because we don't know what the offering is.

Gareth: I don't want to get hung up about not being able to offer local community membership until we are working as a group.

Nicole: I wasn't just referring to the local community but also other potential members like kitchen users.

Tim: Historically, Regather has started by trying to recruit members when what it needed was to start a dialogue and develop active engagement. This active engagement should be the basis to membership.

Nicole: I still can't see what the offering is.

¹³⁵ Since the start of my research focus has been on the vegetable box, events, in-house catering, beer brewing, low carbon economies, and enterprise support.

Gareth: That's because there isn't one¹³⁶. We can't see this as a problem. We need to start developing a functioning membership between paid staff and regular volunteers. This needs to be focus of the conversation. Having kitchen users and the community as members is an aspiration.

Delving deeper into the case of the Small School, and the now closed kitchen rental project, unveiled two main drivers underlying the shift in concern described by Tim. First, members recognised that the rapid turn-over of projects was attributable, in part, to traders' limited awareness of, and willingness to engage in, the running of the cooperative. On the side of the traders, this led to the absence of a sense of ownership. For the few left responsible for making the space happen, it led to 'burnout, resentment and inefficiency' (Hodkinson and Chatterton, 2006: 312) that challenged the sustainability, not only of the project, but of the cooperative as a whole. Second, and interrelatedly, it was acknowledged that active and meaningful membership must be based upon some form of tangible offering that is founded in collective action and reliant upon individual-collective interdependence. The absence of these participatory processes and relationships posed significant barriers to the development of 'sites of collective action' (Krishna, 2013: 106), creating instead managed sites of individual action. This sits in contrast to the more recent experiences of paid workers and volunteers. As illustrated in the development of the microbrewery, described below¹³⁷, in these cases workers' interdependence on one another and the collective has given rise to projects that simultaneously support member creativity and the long-term needs and aspirations of the cooperative.

¹³⁶ In an earlier meeting between myself and Gareth (fieldnotes, 07/11/14), Gareth explained: '*The business rationale for membership (i.e. the dividend) is currently undermined by having creditors who require paying off. These creditors will be prioritised over payment of members' divi.*' Gareth acknowledged, however, that '*Having a share [and the potential to benefit from dividend payments] does not lead to meaningful involvement. Other forms of engagement do this.*' He also stressed that people are more interested in work than membership (a point repeated later in the research (16/04/15) when Gareth met with a new member). These extracts reinforced two points. First, the multiple motivations behind member involvement that have pushed Regather to focus on actually existing, rather than desired, modes of engagement; and second a concern over developing secure employment, that again, has directed Regather's membership structure, and specifically a move towards a worker cooperative mentality.

¹³⁷ The development of the microbrewery played out over the course of the research. The narrative below was written through reflection on observations held on 12/11/14, 21/02/15 and 24/02/15.

The two people who approached Regather with the idea, skills and energy to develop and run the microbrewery initially joined as volunteers. In return for their unpaid labour, Regather purchased the micro-brewing equipment and provided the space free of charge¹³⁸. This relationship was developed on the basis that it would enable the two new members to creatively pursue a passion for, and secure part-time employment in, brewing; and that it would simultaneously support, and be supported by, Regather's existing focus on events. Alongside the development of the microbrewery, Regather improved their events space with the addition of a stage and sound equipment, and expanded their in-house events programme. The consequent interdependencies provided the foundation to meaningful engagement in both the microbrewery project, and administrative tasks and decision-making processes associated with the wider running of the cooperative.

The comparison presented here shows that the move from a potential to an actually-existing site of collective action is achieved through the enablement of ever-changing and mutually beneficial relationships, in which the cooperatives' structure (as illustrated in sub-section 4.1.1) and business focus, develops in 'conversation' with members aspirations, skills and needs. Looking back over the past six years, it has been when these conversations and interdependencies have broken down that the feasibility of the organisation, as well as its claims to democratic praxis, are tested to their limits.

In contrast to Regather, Beanies appears relatively static. The clearly defined nature of their business – a wholefood shop – creates the parameters that Regather struggled to achieve. However, reflecting on the turbulent period described in sub-section 4.1.1, including the closure of Beanies' Bakery and the departure of long-standing members, unveiled the organic nature of their structure and business focus. Participants discussed the financial impact of the Bakery in FG1. At the start of the discussion Evan explained that detailed financial information about the Bakery had not been shared

¹³⁸ A similar model was used for the vegetable box. In this case the packing space was used free of charge on the understanding that the vegetable box would grow and contribute to the cooperative both financially and by increasing awareness of Regather through vegetable box deliveries. As was the case with the microbrewery, Fran and Lisa contributed significant voluntary time to the development of the vegetable box project (fieldnote, 04/12/14).

with all members. This was situated in the context of a wider absence of financial transparency, associated with limited role-sharing (see sub-section 4.2.2). Evan explained:

I think [they] thought 'oh no it will be fine, I have worked all this stuff out on a bit of paper in my back pocket, this is what we are doing'. And everyone is like, 'have you worked it out?' 'Oh yes'.

Dave: You want to see the workings?

Evan: Now we can see the workings, before we couldn't see the workings because it was all in [their] head

[...]

Heather: Yes, you need a combination of those things [a willingness to take a risk, enthusiasm and information], as you say, quite rightly so (Evan: Yes).

While recognising that the members most instrumental in driving the Bakery forwards acted in the best interest of the organisation, Heather went on to explain that, if the situation was repeated, the absence of detailed information would not be accepted. Further emphasising this change Evan added:

Evan: But the Bakery was nearly the end of us. You know what I mean? You know, that was just a financial disaster (Heather: Yes, yes) but, you know, anyway, there was that. But now we have the information, or I think we have, at least we are a step in the right direction.

Dave: Yes.

Evan: Rather than people just making decisions about things and saying, 'yes, it will be alright'. We are all kind of included in the decision-making process properly.

The closure of the Bakery, like the closure of the Small School, is complex and a subject of a thesis in its own right. Its reduction to a financial issue in this quote is misleading, eclipsing more traumatic social and personal tensions that I found, through members' wider accounts, and my own observations as a worker, played a far more prominent

role. Similarly, the use of absent members as scapegoats (an issue highlighted by Chris in sub-section 4.1.1 as a specific challenge facing cooperatives) for the financial risk obscures lengthy conversations about balancing Beanies necessary role in subsidising the Bakery, with a passionate desire (shared by most members) to fill a product gap of high quality bread in the city, and to do something creative to invigorate the cooperative during a period of financial loss. Reflecting on both the development and initial success of the Bakery, and on members narratives of its subsequent closure, we see again the dual necessity of remaining open to member's ideas and passions; and pursuing projects based on available resources¹³⁹, and a shared understanding of aspirations and risks. Furthermore, we see, as we did in the case of Regather, that it is when these shared understandings, and the conversations and relationship necessary to their maintenance, break down that the organisation, and its democratic praxis, are most tested. The tensions that emerged over the course of the Bakery's life illustrate that these conversations must be ongoing and founded in a shared commitment to both projects and the cooperative more broadly; and must seek to continually open spaces to hear and respond to the changing emotions and needs of those involved.

Focusing on Evan's closing comments we see how these conversations were reinvigorated through changes to organisational practice that emerged alongside the departure of long-standing members and the arrival of new members. Most notably, these changes have included the recruitment of a non-member book-keeper (Rocky), increased sharing of roles and responsibilities (see sub-section 4.2.2), a rise in meeting regularity¹⁴⁰ and the introduction of a business plan (see appendix 22). As Evan's

¹³⁹ I do not wish to suggest here that a project should only be pursued if the necessary skills are available amongst members: gaps in skills can be addressed through recruitment processes. However, as will be explored in sub-section 4.1.5, and illustrated in the staff tensions that emerged prior to the Bakery's closure, addressing skill shortages in a cooperative is made more complicated by the concomitant necessity to find the 'right' person for the organisation – a person, in this case, who could bake high quality bread, was willing to work unsociable hours, and shared Beanies' cooperative ethos and mentality.

¹⁴⁰ This was brought to my attention during an early observation session (fieldnote, 17/02/15) when I asked Dave how often meetings were held: *I explained that when I was at Beanies meeting had been fairly irregular and was worried (having missed a meeting) that I might not get another chance to attend one. He explained that meetings used to be held about once every three months, but that from January they had been trying to arrange them once every 4-6 weeks. They were making a point of arranging a date for the next meeting at the end of each meeting. In a discussion later that day, Evan expressed a desire to meet more regularly, explaining: 'I would like meetings to happen more than once a month but this rarely seems to work out. Members seem to go through phases of wanting to meet more but it doesn't seem to work out with people being away and busy'. He went on to comment (with some amusement in his voice): 'it is not like people don't talk to each other between meetings'. He explained that meetings were there really to minute actions and get majority agreement on certain decisions.*

slightly hesitant summation of Beanies progress reveals, these changes have combined to secure greater levels of transparency, specifically in relation to financial information¹⁴¹, and subsequent improvements in member participation in decision-making. Moreover, they supported the re-opening of spaces for members to critique current practices and propose alternatives, as illustrated through the implementation of a new business discussed below.

On my way down stairs from the office I spotted a typed up 'business plan' stuck on the wall. I asked Chris, who was pricing wholefoods in the adjacent stockroom, when it was produced. Chris explained (from fieldnotes):

Chris: Dave [one of Beanies newest members] did it after the last coop meeting. It's a bit different.

Referring to the varying tasks that need doing in relation to the running of the business, Chris went on to explain:

I do find that I start to drift a bit over time, and it's [the business plan] a bit bossy but it might help to keep us on track. Have you seen the chart on the back of the door in the office?

Researcher: No

Chris: In the office on the way to the toilet there is a chart with a list of tasks on it and initials next to them. Just to remind us what the main jobs are. (Beanies, fieldnote, 26/01/15)

Chris's tone and expression acknowledged that this new approach did not align with how Beanies is used to operating but may help to address recurrent issues, particularly those relating to 'drifting off track' and tasks being left incomplete (Hodkinson and Chatterton, 2006). The latter issue is made apparent in the following observation (Beanies, fieldnote, 9/12/14):

¹⁴¹ During one observation session (fieldnote, 9/12/14) Evan explained: *Rocky is now planning on breaking accounts down into information that members can use (e.g. what is selling well and badly, where most money is being made etc) (see figure 7.6, appendix 10). Evan went on to explain that this hadn't been the case in the past. Members would have been told that they didn't have much money and not to spend anything but wouldn't have seen additional details.*

I was standing in the [walk-in] chiller and commented to Mark (stood just outside) that 'I hate stocking the vegan cheese'.

Mark: Me too.

Researcher: That's probably why it always ends up so empty. No one likes doing it.

Mark: Yes. That's definitely one of the problems of not having a manager. No one can tell you to do stuff. If Gemma asked me to do that job I would just say 'why don't you do it?!'

This extract resonates with Freeman's (1972: 4) claim, that 'letting people assume jobs or tasks by default only means they are not dependably done'. Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006: 312) similarly found that the incompleteness of tasks was attributable to shared responsibility that means both everyone and 'no one is accountable for anything'. While this outcome was by no means inevitable, the allocation of tasks, according to members' skills and interests, was proposed as a means to address the issue where it occurred. Crucially this constituted, not the blind acceptance of a more traditional divisions of labour, but a collectively negotiated process that situated task allocation, as integral to democratic praxis.

This process of negotiation became apparent over the course of my research as I witnessed members' increasing acceptance of the 'more business-like' (Chris) approach. In FG2, 4 months after his initial reactions, Chris explained:

And certainly, we were interested in both Dave and Gemma for the skills that they demonstrated in their previous [jobs] [...] of the things that they were bringing from a different environment really. And, I think that both of them have made a significant difference to the way that the company feels and the sort of business-like approach that we have got to things. The more business-like approach anyway than we have had in the past. [...] I think it has been interesting having that new input into the company. And Rocky too, in the same way, you are bringing a sort of clarity to the process of putting numbers into a machine, which you know, it sounds fairly simple probably to you, but for us that's a bit

radical actually! To know, and to have access through you to it [the financial information] which is what was missing.

Further reinforcing the value of understanding the organisation as a dynamic and fluid conversation, this quote highlights the impact that new members, with new ideas, skills and perspectives, have had on Beanies' democratic praxis. Here, we see evidence of Wenger's (2000: 241) observation that:

In the generational encounter between newcomers and established members, the identities of both get expanded. Newcomers gain a sense of history. And old-timers gain perspective as they revisit their own ways and open future possibilities for others¹⁴².

The examples discussed in this section give insights into how Beanies and Regather recovered from turbulent periods, that saw meeting fatigue, member disagreements and informal hierarchies 'under scrutinised [and] left to fester' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 481). Combined with generational encounters, reflection on these processes of recovery revealed both the structure and business focus of each organisation to be a product of an ongoing conversation. Moving beyond the mobilisation of talking and listening as a process of meaning-making (Humphreys and Brown, 2002), these 'conversations' constituted interactions between members skills, creativity and dissatisfactions; reflections on organisational successes and challenges; and an openness to new perspectives and the ever-evolving needs of the collective. Building on a wider commitment to learning through trial and error (Cameron, 2009: 97; Chatterton, 2010b), these conversations were supported by a mentality '*that you [can] go back on something and actually say, ok, that didn't work...try again*' (Gareth, FG3; see also Sutherland et al., 2014). This mentality, combined with an understanding of governing documents as loose frameworks for action, enabled members to develop and maintain a sense of individual-collective interdependence necessary to the

¹⁴² Expanding on Wenger's claim (see also Ford, 1999; Chatterton, 2010b), I found that opportunities for new perspectives and practices were created, not only by the arrival of new members but the departure of long-standing members who had '*their own way of doing stuff*' (Evan, 19/02/15). For example, discussing the annual stocktake in a members meeting (19/02/15), Heather explained: '*I know [Ruth] used to spend hours and hours and hours doing it but we are not going to do that are we? We are all going to have a share of it all*'

creation of sites of collective action (Luhman, 2007). Moreover, as illustrated in Wenger's quote above, it supported and celebrated the anti-essentialist nature of both members' and the organisations' identity, recognising them as always in a process of becoming as they meet with, and are affected by different ways of seeing and being in the world. Combined, these two points position the understanding of the organisation as a conversation as central to a democratic praxis that seeks to mobilise passions, respond to emotions, and transform antagonism into constitutive agonism and enemies into advisories (Chatterton 2010b; Mouffe, 1999; 2009; Springer, 2010). In doing so it shifts concern from whether a structure is formal or informal (Freeman, 1972) to *how* these structures are developed. This shift highlights that the ability of the organisations to collectively engage in action is dependent, not on the existence of structure, but on the processes through which these structures are formed, re-formed and maintained and, as will become clear in section 4.2, the extent to which they remain open to challenge.

4.1.4: Individual-collective alignment

The previous section conceptualised the organisation as a conversation and in doing so illustrated the formative impact that members have on their organisations' structure, practices and business focus. This section looks more closely at the experiences of members to further highlight the two-way nature of this dynamic process. Reflecting again on the value of generational encounters in introducing new members to 'a sense of history' and expanding knowledge and identity (Wenger, 2000: 241), it explores processes of individual-collective alignment. Like Wenger (2000: 228), the concept of alignment is used, not to 'connote a one-way process of submitting to external authority'¹⁴³, but a mutual process of coordinating perspectives, interpretations and actions'. Reflecting members rejection of the activist/non-activist divide (see chapter 3), the starting point was not, in other words, a preformed ideological subject, but social interactions through which individual and collective motivations were explored and aligned (Chatterton, 2010b). As such, alignment develops incrementally as members and the collective engage in a push-pull that brings together 'the singular

¹⁴³ For further discussion see Humphreys and Brown (2002) and Kornberg and Brown (2007).

and the common' (Kioupkiolis, 2010: 142). Through this process, individual experiences and values are given new and coherent meaning as they are understood in the context of, and orientated towards, collective ways of being and knowing (Beeman et al., 2009). Concomitantly, collectively defined and enacted values are re-understood to assume 'greater salience' (Chen et al., 2013: 869) and again, new meaning.

Sharing her narrative in FG3, Rachel shows how her previous experience of working with 'horrendous bosses' gave salience and meaning to her relationship with Regather and consequent decision to engage in collaborative action (see also Sutherland et al., 2014).

My relationship with Regather has been an organic (Laughing. Lisa: The word keeps cropping up) slowly grown thing, mainly based on my relationship with Gareth and a recognition, having worked with several horrendous bosses, that I need to work with someone I respect [...] that I enjoy working with, who are passionate and dedicated. Gareth and the team he has developed around him are this. This recognition has led us from going from simply using their postal services to submitting joint bids and delivery projects together.

In Fran's case, I observed a notable shift over the course of my research from a limited understanding of the 'cooperative aspect' and a focus on 'food and people and environment and sharing', to an active desire to increase role-sharing and widen member participations. This shift is captured in Fran's 10-year vision for Regather (FG3):

I really hope that we have like really loads, like lots of member involvement with like all the people that are involved in Regather being involved in making decisions about the direction it goes in. And just like, a bit [no,] a lot of the sharing of ideas.

As illustrated in Rachel's story, for Fran democratic praxis gained salience as her past experience of organic and community farming were re-understood in the context of cooperative ways of thinking and being. Her engagement with Regather through the development and growth of an organic vegetable box scheme, alongside visits to other cooperatives (including the visit to Unicorn Grocery), led her to reframe democratic praxis as a means to play out her focus. The 'cooperative aspect' was no longer viewed as a consequential element of working at Regather but as central to achieving her aspirations and enacting her values. In line with observations of generational encounters discussed in the previous section, as Fran aligned with cooperative ways of thinking and being she concomitantly challenged Regather's approach to member engagement, pushing specifically for increased member involvement in cooperative administration and management, and the development of practices of role-sharing (see sub-section 4.2.3).

Similarly highlighting the gradual development of cooperative ways of thinking and being, Chris explained (from fieldnotes, 19/12/14):

Gemma and Dave are from traditional employment perspectives. Dave came to the interview in a suit and I thought 'he is going to have a culture shock'. I have seen Dave relax since he became a member and we also appreciate his business minded approach. Jake is the same [from a traditional employment perspective] and even more so. He still sees himself as an employee in a business.

Thinking back to the introduction of the business plan discussed in sub-section 4.1.3, we again see Dave's experience of working for a large FTSE 100 company reframed and re-appropriated in the context of democratic praxis. Dave's introduction of a business plan pushed and pulled against Beanies' 'normal' approach to business at the same time as Beanies' democratic praxis pushed and pulled against Dave's more '*traditional employment perspective*'. Gradually a temporary equilibrium was reached, in which forward planning, task allocation, budgeting and efficiency were given new meaning: Dave's experience and knowledge were reoriented towards democratic practices of role-sharing, transparency, and collective decision-making.

Further commenting on Dave's, Gemma's and Jake's gradual alignment with cooperative practice, Chris went on to stress (04/11/14):

You can't make people change their mind-set. You need to come to an awareness and understanding yourself. If you get told that reinforces the mind-set of being a worker. It's much easier to have a boss there.

Reflecting on Chris' comment in relation to the three examples discussed above reveals 'an emergent cooperative [and democratic] subjectivity'. This subjectivity develops alongside, and is enabled by, processes of individual-collective alignment that sees both individual and collective knowledge and experience reframed and re-understood (Cornwell, 2011). As Vieta (2012: 138) found through research into Argentina's worker-recuperated firms, the 'acquisition of cooperative knowledge, skills, practices and values' occurs:

[...] via informal and intersubjective processes [...] from their collective responses to their difficulties rather than from an enlightened vanguard; from within their collective moments of struggle, not from above or outside them.

As was the case with understandings of the organisation as conversation, these processes of individual-collective alignment accept that identities are never fully formed but rather are co-produced and constituted in action (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). Observations of each organisation have shown that 'knowledge of the world and the self [are] brought into being through historically and culturally situated social processes' (Gergen and Gergen, 2008: 161) and thus resides, not in the individual but in relationships. It follows from this view that there are many subjectively constructed realities and therefore that all (propositional) knowing is a subjective-intersubjective account of what is there (Heron and Reason, 1997). This conceptualisation of knowledge as temporal and discursively formed within the context of a given community's norms and values (Gergen and Gergen, 2008; Kemmis, 2008) enables members to re-frame and re-appropriate past experience to shape democratic praxis. Stressing the importance of this formative impact, Webb and Cheney (2014: 77; see

also Cheney et al., 2014; Etxagibel et al., 2012; Cohen and Fung, 2004; see sub-section 4.2.1 for further discussion) note that expanding member engagement from involvement in specific decision or activities to involvement in ‘shap[ing] the very future of the participative system itself’ is crucial to ‘authentic, comprehensive’ democracy.

While the processes of alignment described in this section plays a crucial ontological role they also pose significant challenges, that are explored in the next sub-section. Reflection on member departures in both Beanies and Regather revealed risks of dis-alignment, associated with the absence of a “do-it-yourself” mentality, a lack of active engagement with the organisation beyond specific activities, and a limited understanding or acceptance of individual-collective interdependence. These sources of dis-alignment bring forth the need to find the ‘right’ mix of people’ with complementary skills and knowledges, and shared ways of thinking and being. This in turn introduces concerns over exclusion, ‘indicative of a broader societal rejection of difference and the continued search for ‘like-minded’ communities’ (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 743). As will be explored in section 4.2, this concern has been partially addressed through the foregrounding of difference as an ever present and highly valued transformational tool. However, questions over who can and cannot access cooperative working spaces, including concerns over the dominance of a white British membership, remain. Like Sandoval (2016: 66; see also Ruccio, 2011; Shukaitis, 2010) I found that demands on members to invest time and energy in the cooperative, and to have the financial and temporal capacity to take risks, means that cooperatives ‘will not automatically abolish inequality’. The challenges and contradictions created through these demands are explored in chapter 5. They do, however, warrants further investigation beyond this thesis (see section 6.9).

4.1.5: Finding the ‘right’ mix of people

The previous sub-sections have revealed the fluid and organic nature of each organisation. In doing so they have demonstrated that the organisation never becomes ‘whole’ but rather remains ever in a process of becoming. This is captured beautifully in the following FG2 exchange:

Rocky: So yes, it struck me at the start of the meeting today people talking about getting the right person in for the group and how the group works quite well at the moment. And I think you mentioned Gemma that there are different people with different skills that complement each other quite well, and it's, how much can you engineer that? I've been aware that ever since I have been here there have been recruitment processes going on¹⁴⁴ and generally you are putting out [an advert] and coming back with one person that sounds like they might be good. It's not like you have got these 10 million candidates, which is the one with the traits that we need to make the collective the whole? It's more saying, oh this person is really good at x, y and z, yes, they are the outstanding candidate, we will employ them. I think that has nearly always been the case, so your group dynamic is always going to shift because that person is going to change it and it is really hard to judge [...] the ways that's going to change. It's going to change it in lots of ways. [...]

Gemma: I think it's like you say, you try to employ the best candidate and then what their skill set is perhaps, in some ways, more just shapes the path that the business goes.

In addition to reinforcing the ever-becoming nature of the organisation and the formative impact of members, Rocky's observation begins to unveil the subtle interrelational and interdependent processes that determine the 'right' person for the group¹⁴⁵. The exchange shows that complementary skills do play a role here. Members' identified communication, the ability to listen and respond to requests, flexibility, and a willingness to take initiative and '*just muck in and do whatever it*

¹⁴⁴ See appendix 23 for a summary.

¹⁴⁵ The importance of finding the 'right' person and subsequently maintaining a 'good mix of people' is captured by Heather who explained (FG1): '*It has felt stressful in the past yes. I think that's more to do with the combination of people [...] I think working with the mix of people has the most influence on the business. Good and bad. [...] But you know having the right, having a good mix of people, can just make it feel so much more relaxed. And the business working better as well [...] Whereas, when it has been a bad mix of people and things have not been so good, it can feel awful. It can feel to the point that, you know, you don't want to go to work today because you are going to be working with this mix of people*'.

takes' (Dave, FG1), as necessary to ensuring that the business operates smoothly and consistently. However, as the following discussion (19/02/15) reveals these necessary skills form only part of the picture. In this exchange Mark and Evan discuss recruitment of a new member.

Mark: It's one of those things. Anybody can [or] should be able to do this job¹⁴⁶. So if we think we need more people we need more people.

Evan: Yes, but it has to be a nice, the right person, doesn't it?

Mark: It doesn't have to be someone who is qualified at this work though.

Heather: No.

Mark: What you have said is a nice person straight away isn't it.

Evan: That's what I meant yes¹⁴⁷.

We see here that members are not, as Ng and Ng (2009: 196) similarly observed, concerned with applicants 'résumés' of abilities as demonstrated by their background. Rather, getting the 'right' mix of people is, in Heather's words, '*a bit of a personality thing*': it is about the potentiality of friendship. Members are not referring here to personal friendships. As Heather explained (FG1): '*I'm not saying we all have to be best mates and stuff, that would just be a bit bonkers*'. Rather, they are referring to the necessity of 'reciprocal awareness, good will, and practical doing' for one another, developed alongside an acceptance of member plurality and diversity (Schwarzenbach, 2005: 234). Thinking back to Rachel's narrative presented in sub-section 4.1.4 it is, in other words, about the potential to build working relationships based on respect, shared passion, mutual dedication and a sense of shared responsibility for one another.

¹⁴⁶ Mark stressed this point during an earlier observation session (fieldnote, 16/01/15). *Responding to Heather, who had complemented Mark on how nice the vegetable shop was looking, Mark exclaimed (jokingly): 'Well, it's not hard. It's not rocket science. Children play at shop don't they, and we are all adults doing it!'*

¹⁴⁷ The need for a 'nice person' was starkly illustrated in Mark's comment (fieldnote, 19/05/15) on one member-applicant who had recently attended an informal interview: '*I just don't like the guy. I would say yes if I didn't have to work with him*'

Such relationships resonate with the ethic of care (see Tronto, 1993; Held, 2007)¹⁴⁸: an ethic that, as I will explore further in chapter 5, challenges the neoliberal ideal of the independent, competitive and self-reliant individual (McDowell, 2004). Learning specifically from the application of this concept to social research praxis (Blazek et al. 2015), this challenge is posed through the foregrounding of the ‘interdependence and interconnectedness of human relations, responsibilities and practices of care’ (Evans, 2016: 214) that push us towards a collective understanding of autonomy (Notes from Nowhere, 2003; see chapter 6). As was the case in Swart and Oswald’s (2012: 553) research, in both Beanies and Regather recognition of human interconnection and interdependence took practical expression in a commitment to ongoing dialogue and acts of collaboration that awarded ‘equal weight and value to the diverse perspectives, experiences, knowledge bases, and personal belief systems’ of all members (see also sub-section 4.2.1).

The interconnection between the ethic of care and a commitment to ongoing dialogue came across particularly strongly in the quote below (FG2). Here Chris describes the difficulty of addressing member dis-alignment and a consequent ‘bad’ mix of people. We see in the quote that addressing this challenge, not through a formal process but through ongoing discussions that are founded in a respect for difference and a sense of shared responsibility, gives rise to constructive processes of learning and a more human response. My own observation of the situation described by Chris revealed that when discussion breaks down relationships deteriorate leading to an unpleasant working environment and a demise in democratic praxis.

If I were to find anything wrong with the cooperative system, I suppose we have had difficulties with personnel in the past in terms of if somebody doesn't fit very well, it's harder as a cooperative to face that situation. But, at the same time you come out with a better resolution at the end of it. I think you feel more human in the way that we deal with those sorts of situations even if it is more uncomfortable and difficult. It's

¹⁴⁸ Space does not allow for a full exploration of this concept. It does however offer fertile ground for further understanding the praxis of democracy and its role in challenging the inevitability and dominance of neoliberal capitalism. While I explore this in chapter 5, it warrants further research.

about a human interaction. That's what's so important about being a cooperative, that aspect of talking to each other with respect and honouring the individuals in the company. And I think it's times when we haven't done that when things have gone wrong.

The value of friendship and its foundation in an ethic care, and the challenge of dealing with dis-alignment, are further highlighted in the following exchange between myself and Gareth (30/01/15). As acknowledged by Dave above, the exchange also reveals the need to balance the potentiality of friendship with certain skills and members aspirations (Spear et al., 2009). In this discussion Gareth reflects on difficulties experienced by the three founder members during the time of the Small School.

Gareth: [...] You know, it's because Julia [and Adam] were involved from the beginning, and they were involved because I invited them to get involved, and they did it, just as much out of friendship as out of, like a business decision. And because of that, and this is really like a long time in hind sight, at various points they either lacked the confidence or they just didn't say anything at the time, where they were just like 'do you know what, I haven't got a clue what's going on, I just don't understand what it's about; no I don't want that to happen'. There was that little bit of a limitation. And I can only see that and talk about it because it is like 18 months, 2 years ago, that sort of length of time. [...] So yes, I made, I think, some big assumptions, incorrectly about how much they knew and understood genuinely. [...] You are pointed out to one piece of advice at the start of text books, and it's like 'establish the skills you need at a board level and make sure that your board members have those skills.' And it's just, you know, that's easy to write, but it doesn't you know...? I wouldn't want to have done those first few years with anybody else.

Researcher: [Reflecting on my own experience as a member] Yes. I'm not sure it is just about skills really is it?

Gareth: No, it's not. Exactly.

Researcher: What you have just described there isn't... You can teach someone skills [...] There was almost, kind of a bigger issue there than skills.

[...]

Gareth: Yes, it's about passion.

Researcher: Yes. It's about shared vision. [...] Knowing where you are and where you want to get to.

Gareth: Yes, yes.

Underlying Gareth's admission that, despite its challenges, he would not have wanted to start a business with anyone else, is recognition of the value of shared passion, vision and emotional connection that underpin friendship. The presence of the latter come across most strongly in his description of a two-year period of grief, during which he came to terms with the circumstance surrounding the departure of the two founder members.

Learning from the two cases above, we see that the 'better' and 'more human' response referred to by Chris does not necessarily amount to the reinstatement of some former, or ever illusive, harmony. This became acutely apparent in the departure of Ruth following the situation described by Chris, and in the departure of two of Regather's founder members discussed by Gareth. Rather, it amounts to recognising, and respecting, members' emotions and connection to others, and developing a 'relational view of the self' (McDowell, 2004: 156), as a means to learning from experiences of dis-alignment and developing new approaches to practice. From this it becomes clear first, that dis-alignment does not only mean that a member is no longer 'right' for the organisation but also that the organisation is no longer 'right' for the member; and second that this may indicate a need to revisit and revise organisational practice – an outcome that, as discussed in previous sections, was pursued in both of the above cases. Thus, like Kokkinidis (2015: 866; see also Chen et al., 2013) I found that, when based on human emotion and a desire for friendship rather than on formal procedures, both 'entry-exit procedures create the grounds for building close relationships, and [rebalancing] individual and group interests'.

However, we have seen also that what constitutes the ‘right’ mix of people is intangible and difficult to pin down. In line with the understanding of the organisation as conversation, the concept is fluid and interrelational; formed and reformed through the arrival and departure of members and the changing needs of the organisation. As Rocky explained at the start of this section *‘your group dynamic is always going to shift because that person is going to change it’* in unpredictable and unexpected ways. As such, there will always be an element of chance and a temporality to achieving a membership that *‘gels quite well together’* and are *‘pulling together towards [the same] goal’* (Heather, 16/04/15).

On the one hand, this unpredictability needs to be managed through long and arduous recruitment processes, including a period of probation¹⁴⁹. These processes are designed to bring to light personality clashes; emphasise the importance of passion and commitment; and create time and space for individual-collective alignment or disalignment to emerge. On the other hand, relatively intangible understandings of what constitutes a ‘good’ mix of people must be preserved to help ‘in progressively creating slack’ (Varman and Chakrabarti, 2004: 204) and maintaining ‘constitutive processes of living and learning’ (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 325). As discussed in the previous two sections, the balancing of these two hands – the development of parameters and systems to manage unpredictability, and the active maintenance of unpredictability – is understood as central to each organisations’ democratic praxis.

In and amongst this intangibility, and common to both organisations, are two factors. First, I found like Byrne and Healy (2006: 249) a view that ‘anyone could learn the skills but you couldn’t learn the attitude’. This did not equate to a requirement for prior

¹⁴⁹ In Regather this most commonly takes the form of a period of volunteering during which potential members demonstrate their commitment, alignment with Regather’s ways of working, and the viability of the business ideas. This process, while challenging and in some ways exclusionary (see section 5.2.1), acknowledges that Regather’s business model *‘will only work if people take responsibility’* (Tim, 10/04/15) and drive their ideas forwards. In Beanies, the probationary period has been formalised with each new member working for six months on a lower wage. In line with Beanies’ understanding of what constitutes the ‘right’ mix of people, the aim of this period is *‘more than anything just to see the kind of people that you can get along with’* (Chris, 19/02/15). As with Regather, lessons have been learnt from previous *‘more lenient and laid back’* (Heather, FG1) approaches to recruitment that have tended to disrupt complex and delicately balanced individual-collective relationships. Reflecting on these processes of recruitment and probation has helped me to develop a deeper understanding of Kokkonidis (2015: 861) claim that *‘established procedure for joining [...] the collective provide solid safety valves against capitalist tendencies’*. Specifically, it has highlighted the importance of these procedures in ensuring the *potential* for individual-collective alignment that, as we saw in sub-section 4.1.4, is so central to democratic praxis.

experience of cooperatives or to the foregrounding of the cooperative element in terms of members attraction to the role. As highlighted in sub-section 4.1.3, member's diverse backgrounds and perspectives were valued for their transformational potential. Rather it meant finding people with a 'cooperative orientation': people who neither 'reduced being a worker-owner to [the fantasy of] having "just a job" or an "alternative experience" (Byrne and Healy, 2006: 249; Luhman, 2007; Chen et al., 2013; Borgaza and Depedri, 2009; Vieta, 2010)¹⁵⁰. Second, like Kokkinidis (2015) I observed the importance of friendship, understood in this context as relationships based upon a shared ethic of care. This ethic of care encompasses a commitment to the socialised view of the self and member interdependence that underpin processes of individual-collective alignment and the understanding of the organisation as a conversation. Combined, these shared ways of thinking and being shape, and are supported by, practices of democracy that are the focus the focus of the next section.

4.2: Meetings, role-sharing and the ongoing challenge of informal hierarchies

This section explores two practices of democracy. Sub-section 4.2.1 discusses the role of meetings in processes of decision-making. While revealing stark differences between the purpose and practice of meetings in each organisation, analysis also highlights key commonalities, namely the members' shared reluctance to vote, and a drive towards consensus. Sub-section 4.2.2 investigates the value of role-sharing in harnessing individual-collective interdependencies and concomitantly supporting practices of mutuality. Both sections show that the absence of these key practices limits meaningful member engagement and increases the risk of informal hierarchies taking hold. This ever-present risk is the focus of sub-section 4.2.3. While bringing hierarchies to the surface, the section challenges claims that they make the

¹⁵⁰ Reflecting on applications Beanies had recently received (fieldnote, 19/05/15), Evan and Gemma linked this required 'cooperative orientation' to the recruitment and probation process: *Evan and Gemma agreed that one particular applicant seemed like she wants the job rather than a job. Gemma: If you have read any of the others'... the other applicants had only really paid lip service to cover letter and reasons for wanting a job at Beanies. Evan commented that they have had people before that have 'talked the talk' but then not been right for the job. 'That's what the trial period is for'.*

organisations undemocratic by highlighting their temporality and their exposure to ongoing critique.

4.2.1: What I have been thinking is, what's the purpose of the meetings?

During one observation session (17/02/15) I asked Gemma if many decisions are made in meetings. 'Yes, lots' Gemma confirmed: '*it's the only time everyone gets together.*' Gemma went on to explain that in a meeting later that day she planned to ask members about her idea to change bank accounts to get a better overdraft. She described the decision as a '*no brainer*' but also as the kind of thing that everyone needs to agree on. Sharing Gemma's understanding of the purpose of meetings Mark explained (16/01/15):

Meetings are for big decisions. You might bring up small stuff in a meeting but because it's convenient to tell everyone together.

Meetings were also understood as an opportunity to open discussions. Illustrating this point, Gemma explained that a £1 increase in the price of their vegetable box had been proposed in summer 2013 and debated, within and between meetings, until it was finally implemented in January 2014. While members expressed frustration at the time taken to make this decision (sub-section 5.3.1), I observed that informal discussions held between meetings created valuable time and space for dissent, and for members to frame the decision on their own terms¹⁵¹. Overflowing the space of the meeting, reflection and deliberation became, in other words, 'a diffuse process, taking *effect over time*' (Dryzec, 2005: 229, original emphasis).

At Regather, informal discussions played a more direct role in decision-making. During my time observing in Regather's office, I witnessed decisions about financial restructuring, equipment purchasing and funding opportunities being made by a limited number of members, commonly by those with the relevant knowledge or

¹⁵¹ Specifically, it created opportunities for members to call upon and share their own views and relevant experiences in the work context and, through this, grapple with the business, environmental and social implications of the prices increase in more depth.

information, or those most involved and physically present. My observations resonate with Atzeni and Vieta's (2014: 58) description of decision-making in worker-recuperated firms. They explain:

Communication flows on the shop floors are usually informal, open and flexible. Day-to-day concerns relating to production issues are worked out on an ad hoc basis on the actual shop floor via production processes that are (re)organized around temporary work teams and consensus. These teams tend to be informally led by the expert in the production line or task on a per-project basis.

While I observed 'shop floor' decision-making processes at Beanies these were of a far smaller magnitude than was the case at Regather (see sub-section 5.3.1 for further discussion)¹⁵². This disparity is, in part, due to the different nature of Beanies and Regather's business. In contrast to Beanies where workers are involved in and concerned with all aspects of the business Regather is, in essence, a collection of projects each with their own team of traders. As Tim, who focuses mainly on events, explained in a members' meeting (26/06/15), while he wants to hear about how the vegetable box is progressing he neither wishes, nor feels qualified, to be involved in decisions around its development. However, as the exchange below reveals, the reliance on ad-hoc, devolved decision-making is also a product of Regather's dysfunctionality as a cooperative. The exchange formed part of a discussion on the purpose of meetings that arose during FG3.

Researcher: Also, what I have been thinking is what's the purpose of the meetings? Is it just to [give] feedback [on project progress]? You could do that in a multitude of ways.

¹⁵² For example, I observed Mark, Heather and Jake discussing, and deciding to relocate, a sign proving Beanies Organic Certification (fieldnote, 16/01/15): *Following a discussion on the problem of competitor shops selling organic produce without the necessary certification, Mark asked Heather where the organic certification certificate was. Heather pointed to a shelf about the bread shelves and replied 'up there, high and proud.'* Mark commented that the location wasn't very visible for customers. He put his hand to his face in thought and said, 'you know what [my partner] would say. She would say that we should have the certificate in a more prominent place with a sign next to it telling customers to look for one of these (when they buy organic)'. Mark, Heather and Jake were enthusiastic about the suggestion. Heather said to Mark, 'yes do it, get the sign written'.

Nicole: [...] Like what Rachel was saying, that you found out about the Big Lunch really haphazardly¹⁵³ or whatever, it would be an opportunity for all the things coming in the next week and month to be discussed and highlighted and to see how other people might be able to help.

[...]

Rachel: At what point are they like strategic decision-making, planning for our future?

Gareth: Yes, I mean, I think that will come out of the project updates. There will also be decision you know, like on major purchases. Like we went and bought a microbrewery.

Nicole: We didn't buy it did we?

Gareth: We bought the microbrewery.

Nicole: I thought it was given to us. We ended up buying it?

Gareth: Yes, yes.

Nicole: Bloody hell! You see I didn't know that.

Gareth: Yes exactly.

Nicole: Bloody management committee meetings¹⁵⁴.

Gareth: That's a really good example.

Tim: That's the point. These are the things [that should be] coming up in the meetings.

Gareth: Yes, this is where...

Rachel: Where it's functioning as a coop.

Gareth: Yes, it would be great if there was the structure and the vibe from everybody and the understanding of what [the structure] is for and then we agree to make it happen, which is what we are doing now, which

¹⁵³ Rachel found out about the event when she found the printed fliers on a table.

¹⁵⁴ As illustrated in the following observation (fieldnote, 12/03/15, researcher reflections in grey), even actions discussed at committee meetings seemed, at times, to be insufficiently or clearly resolved: *I was standing in the Regather shop with Fran, Lisa and Nicole discussing an up-coming market stall. Nicole asked us if we had seen what Gareth had done (referring to him knocking the door through upstairs). She explained that this had been discussed at the committee meeting, but it seemed that no one expected to walk in and find it done! Nicole commented that Gareth said: 'he just felt like being destructive!' Nicole said that this was great but now we have to deal with the problem of having wind howling through the building. Gareth was clearly pleased with what he had achieved and Nicole, Fran and Lisa also seemed happy to see progress (although a little surprised that it had happened so suddenly!).* [It seems that there is a challenging meeting point between collective decision-making and autonomous working, between talk and action].

is great. But, there has been inevitably various decisions on the way, just to survive and just to kind of kick things along.

Nicole: You know you [Gareth] were saying about not wanting to feel like the founder member or like this hierarchical kind of thing, I think the fact that you are the only one knowing what those sorts of spends are month to month is kind of ...

Rachel: And also, what's in the bank.

Nicole: Yes, and you are the only one with that worry.

Rachel: I have no idea what the bank account looks like. (Laughs)

[...]

Gareth: Yes great, ask these questions and we will create a space to ask, because that's the only way that it is going to happen.

[...]

Rachel: I'm not criticising, I'm just saying it's very difficult to be part of a decision about whether we can make a purchase or not if you have no concept of what the bank balance...(Tim: Your financial situation, yes) ...yes.

Gareth: That's the difference...just to be really brutal about it...that's the difference between being a supplier of a service and an active member of a coop. You know [in the former], you submit your invoice, you get paid...

This exchange situates Regather's cooperative 'dysfunctionality' in the absence of regular structured meetings, transparency over the organisations finances and clear processes of information sharing. In line with Freeman's (1972: 5) contention that 'access to information enhances power', Rachel's and Gareth's closing comments illustrates that these structures and processes, and perhaps more importantly members' demands for them, are crucial to active member engagement and the collective development, progression or abandonment of ideas. In their absence, natural hierarchies are created and reinforced (Webb and Cheney, 2014; see subsection 4.2.3 for further discussion) and decisions are necessarily devolved to select groups of people.

On first reading, this case supports Freeman's (1972: 1) claim that 'as long as the structure of the group is informal, the rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is limited to those who know the rules'. However, taking into account the role of members demands, and further supporting arguments made in sub-sections 4.1.3, I argue that the development and maintenance of democratic praxis relies not on the formalisation of rules as Freeman claims, but on the development of these rules as a function of 'intersubjective negotiation and mutual expectations' (McQuinn, 2009: 3)¹⁵⁵. Thus, as will be illustrated throughout this section, the distribution of power and the emergence of meaningful forms of participation in both Beanies and Regather was a product, not of structure itself (as Freeman claims), but of ongoing processes of individual-collective alignment and conversation that enabled structures to be formed, re-formed and contested to meet the needs of the group. Coming to the core contention of this chapter, while recognising the value of task delegation (see sub-section 4.1.3), task rotation (see sub-section 4.2.2) and 'equal access to resources' (see sub-section 4.2.1), this understanding expands democracy beyond 'principles of structuring' and their relationship to democratic procedures of representation (Freeman, 1972: 5).

Reflecting this understanding, over the course of my research I observed Regather's members building on a growing desire for more active engagement, and an interrelated ethic of care (expressed by Nicole above) that drives members willingness to share worries and responsibilities. This has given rise to a more formal, collectively determined meeting structure that seeks to address issues of dysfunctionality while maintaining members' "do-it-yourself" mentality (Shukaitis, 2010), and desire to focus on action and productivity. The format and purpose of meetings began to emerge in a members' meeting held on 26/06/15. At the start of a meeting Gareth and Tim explained:

Gareth: The fact that we have found it so difficult sorting out a date [for this meeting] demonstrates that we need to sort out some other basics.

¹⁵⁵ This argument is further supported in sub-section 5.3.1 where Rocky and Chris (Beanies) highlight that creating rules or formalised structures in the absence of conscious member agreement risks creating relations of power and exclusion that undermine democratic praxis.

Tim agreed: We need a set date for meetings. Work out a six-month schedule and accept people won't always be able to make it. This can be accompanied by a clear agenda so that if people can't make it they can still contribute.

Gareth: A meeting schedule isn't just about getting people round a table, it's about having a reporting structure for collating and reporting information [...] The point is not the attendance¹⁵⁶. The point is the deadline it creates to feed into a reporting structure.

Gareth's final point is further emphasised in the following extract from FG3. Following a discussion on members shared "do-it-yourself" mentality, and desire to 'take control of one's own situation' (Gareth) Tim explained:

[The] power to hold to account is key, but like Fran was saying about the coop not necessarily being the driving force for [her] to get involved, it's the ability to hold to account that is essential about the coop. But it doesn't need to be that every decision is micro-discussed. So you have to have autonomy within the framework of something that like ultimately gives you an equal say and an equal voice.

We see in these exchanges members addressing key concerns around transparency and information sharing while retaining a focus on day-to-day interactions and recognition of project-based decision-making. As expressed by Tim, this dual focus is part of a wider understanding of autonomy as an individual-collective project: an understanding based on the recognition that, through the development of a deep understanding of, and respect for, individual and collective needs, and a shared commitment to mutually accountable common action (Zamagni and Zamagni, 2010: 31)¹⁵⁷, members can work individually and in small groups to make decisions and take

¹⁵⁶ Commenting on the issue of attendance, Rachel explained (fieldnote): *[Who attends] should come down to the points on the agenda and who can contribute to these points. This should be where you draw the line in relation to who should and shouldn't be at a meeting.*

¹⁵⁷ Zamagni and Zamagni (2010: 31) identify 'common action', when carried out under conditions of mutual responsiveness, respect and support, as a central element of the cooperative identity. Reflecting Tim's quote, they explain that common action is distinguished by three elements: a shared awareness of what constitutes the action; a maintenance of individual authorship and responsibility over actions; and alignment towards a shared objective.

actions in the interest of the collective¹⁵⁸. Taking this argument further, we saw in sub-section 4.1.3 (see also section 5.2.1) that, in Regather, members sense of shared responsibility and interdependence in fact enables members to develop projects they may otherwise not have been able to pursue. In the context of this understanding, and in contrast to Beanies, meetings at Regather are valued less as decision-making spaces and opportunities to get everyone together, and more as spaces to improve productivity, enable devolved decision-making and support mutuality through the sharing of information. Meetings are viewed, in other words, as a means to improve active engagement *through* the creation of structured reporting and information-sharing procedures that enable members to shape their roles, responsibilities and resource use around the needs of the collective (see Sutherland et al., 2014).

In and amongst the differences in the purpose of meetings, I observed one key commonality: the practice of voting in both cooperatives was rare. At Regather, I observed only one example of voting, performed in an Annual General Meeting (02/02/15). In this case, the decision about the appointment of a secretary and cooperative directors had already been made through discussion. The act of voting, performed in adherence to the 'floor' (Krishna, 2013) set by the cooperative's rules, was nothing more than a formality that concretised these decisions. This understanding of voting as nothing more than a procedural practice is further supported by the informal, and non-representational role adopted by directors (see sub-section 4.1.2)¹⁵⁹. As captured in the focus group discussion above, and in section

Further emphasising these elements, and the distinction between cooperative and capitalist enterprise, they go on to explain that in the former members act for a purpose they have chosen that will benefit both themselves and the collective and are, therefore, 'accountable for the purpose of their work' (ibid.: 32). In capitalist enterprise, workers act to meet an end determined by some 'other' and are accountable only for their individual action.

¹⁵⁸ This understanding is similarly present in Beanies. Specifically, I observed individual-collective autonomy expressed through the development working patterns that both met the needs of the shop and reflected members' skills, preferences and out of work commitments. In addition to supporting a work-life balance (problematized in section 5.4), this enabled members to utilise their knowledge and creativity when making day-to-day decisions, such as what to buy from the wholesale market, how to organise a delivery round or how to 'dress' the shop to capitalise on new products, promotions or seasonal items. In these self-directed acts members recognise that '*we don't need to manage each other. We are responsible for ourselves, for our business*' (Heather, 26/03/15, emphasis added).

¹⁵⁹ At the end of my research members met with a cooperative consultant (26/04/16) who, having heard about Regather's structure-as-lived, commented '*if there were governance police you would have been arrested!*' The consultant argued that directors and members have different legal responsibilities and that this needs to be reflected in day-to-day practices of decision-making. He added that this did not mean shifting to representative democracy but rather making more members directors.

4.1, the aim is to move towards wider and more active engagement of workers and volunteers that will enable Regather to operate collectively without the need for a management committee. In making this move, members recognised, like Kokkinidis (2014: 865), that representative democracy can ‘creat[e] rather than alleviates, oligarchic tendencies’ by legitimising representatives to act as the voice of the masses. As illustrated in the focus group discussion above, the concentration of information with, and devolution of decision-making to, select members increases the gap between decision-makers and workers and restricts opportunities for more active and meaningful engagement. Thus, while it may allow for ‘equal access to power (...) the system [of representation] does not create conditions for an equal exercise of power’ (Kokkinidis 2012: 236; see appendix 24). Following this critique, voting and representation were understood as occasionally necessary but insufficient mechanisms of democracy (Beeman et al., 2009).

The reluctance to vote and desire to operate as a collective was similarly observed at Beanies where, again, I witnessed voting on only one occasion. During a discussion on marketing (07/05/15) Dave asked members to mark on a written list their first and second favoured options for activities planned to celebrate Beanies 30th year.

Dave: I want it to be interactive.

No one moved.

Mark: They are all valid through. [He smiled at me and added] very topical, voting.

Gradually all members marked their choices and entered into a comfortable and natural feeling discussion. It was this discussion, rather than the initial vote, that determined subsequent marketing actions.

As suggested by Mark’s comment above, voting and representative democracy were seen to create homogeneity and limit contestation by reducing valid options to an opposing and dichotic either/or (Graeber, 2013; Springer, 2010). Such reductionism risks limiting, or even denying, pluralism and creating antagonistic ‘us’/‘them’ divisions. The discussion around Beanies 30th birthday did not position marketing

options in competition. Nor did it limit the debate to a series of bounded, fixed proposals. Rather, it focused on the potential, feasibility and challenges of each option and allowed these to inform, and feed into, the final marketing plan.

Moving beyond mechanisms of voting and representation, and focusing on ongoing deliberation, participants demonstrated a commitment to both consensus decision-making and 'agonistic pluralism' (Mouffe, 1999; 2009). Reflecting this dual commitment, consensus did not equate to the marginalisation of non-aligned views, or to rational agreement necessitating persuasion and coercion. As Mouffe (1999; 2009) warns, such a consensus risks concealing oppression and limiting opportunity for dissent (see also Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2006; Springer, 2010). Rather it amounted to a 'provisional hegemony' (Mouffe, 1999: 756) and 'temporary respite in an ongoing process of contestation' (ibid.: 755). In line with understanding of the organisation as conversation and product of individual collective-alignment, this understanding of consensus seeks not to eradicate antagonism but transform it into agonism, such that consensus becomes 'a matter of learning and culture, where people care and dare to speak and critique' (Varman and Chakrabarti, 2004: 199). In practice, this meant embracing the pluralistic and anti-essentialist nature of member views and ensuring that all members (Cornwell, 2011: 732; Polletta, 2012; Sutherland et al., 2014; Kokkinidis, 2015):

[...] have been heard and their opinions taken into consideration before an agreement is reached and an action moves forward (or not).

In some cases, as Evan recognised, this necessitated 'agreeing to disagree', seeking, not to resolve conflict but rather to embrace conflicting positions, and *momentarily* accepting the majority (or dominant) opinion for the sake of progress. Reflecting on the sources of Evan's recognition, I observed members 'agreeing to disagree' over the required working hours for members (sub-section 4.1.2) and the supply of products to Beanies' competitors (see sub-section 5.2.3 for further discussion). In both of these examples, debates continued over and between several meetings, surpassing temporal agreement to delve deeper into members' feelings and concerns. Discussions in these cases lasted only so long as they remained productive, often ending in frustration and

the reluctant acceptance that, like democratic praxis itself, consensus is ever a 'means without ends' (Springer, 2010: 531)¹⁶⁰.

Moreover, these examples reveal that consensus and deliberation are not only compatible, but 'mutually dependent' (Kokkinidis, 2014: 851). This interdependence acknowledges that it is through deliberation that we become aware of difference, inequality and the nature of conflict itself (Erman, 2009; Knops, 2007), and through common understanding – some form of consensus or 'shared symbolic space' (Erman, 2009: 1046) – that differences become contestable. As illustrated in sub-section 4.1.4, this 'shared symbolic space' does not take the form of fixed or pre-determined utopian thinking grounded in generalisable rationalities or moral logics. Rather it constitutes a 'common feeling' (Razsa and Kurnik, 2012: 249) and 'shared adhesion to the ethico-political principle of democracy' (Mouffe, 1999: 755). Reflecting this thin consensus, a fellow Regather member expressed '*if you join a co-op and are into co-op working you are saying that you are into equality*' (Langmead, 2017a). This shared value of equality that, as Snyder and Brigg (2007: 7) recognises forms a 'part of members' personal identity', is accompanied by a 'deep respect for the other' (Erman, 2009: 1041), a profound understanding of individual-collective interdependence, and a desire to 'progressively creat[e] slack' and maintain the spaces of negativity (Byrne and Healy, 2006; Kioupiolis, 2010; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). This final point creates a paradox: the desire to maintain negativity as a means to meaningful participation makes the very shared ways of thinking and being around which consensus is formed a contestable terrain.

Drawing on the theories of radical democracy, that expand contestability from the issue under discussion to the praxis of democracy itself, thus reinforces two points made in the previous section. First as we saw in sub-section 4.1.3, Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism reaffirms that alongside general agreement over certain values and

¹⁶⁰ The following exchange expresses, at once, the limits to ongoing deliberation, the temporal nature of decisions, and the frustration these cause (fieldnote, 19/05/15): *In the office Mark and Evan discussed the issue of members' working-hours and the option of job sharing. They highlighted that few people had applied for the recently advertised member position, with only one short listed. Mark and Evan felt that a job share would widen pool of people. Evan expressed confusion over the objection to job sharing and explained that, when he brought it up in a meeting, Dave 'poo pooed' it because we had already discussed it and made a decision, and couldn't go back on that. Mark joked sarcastically about coop not being able to go back on decision.*

principles, 'there will always be disagreement concerning the meaning of those values and the way that they should be implemented' (Mouffe, 2009: 10). As we have also seen, and again Mouffe (ibid.) affirms:

[...] in a pluralist democracy such disagreements are not only legitimate but also necessary. They allow for different forms of citizenship identification and are the stuff of democratic politics.

Extending this argument from the ethico-political principles of democracy to members passions and focus, Steve¹⁶¹ (Beanies) and Roy (Wholesome cooperative¹⁶²) responded to the coupling of equality and cooperative working with the following points (see Langmead, 2017a):

Steve: It is invasive from outside a group that they think everyone thinks the same, and you think there is no way that everyone will have the same focus

[...]

Roy: Yes. [...] There is a general agreement to not liking certain things, like not liking Nestle, but people have different focuses.

This exchange, together with reflections on participants journeys to cooperative working, reveals that while equivalences between struggles, and the antagonisms, beliefs and passions that underlie them are necessary to democracy¹⁶³, those equivalences are never total and are always 'penetrated by constitutive precariousness' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1984: 184). As Maeckelbergh (2009: 7) argues in relation to the alterglobalist movement, and Steve brings to the fore, recognising the irreducibility of members aims to a constitutive oneness challenges the

¹⁶¹ Pseudonym used.

¹⁶² Pseudonyms used for member and organisation.

¹⁶³ Specifically, equivalence between struggles takes us beyond individual concerns and problems to first respect as equal the problems of others, and second to understand the rights of ourselves and others as interdependent. This move from the individualistic to the collectivist view of the self is central to the development of radical democracy.

'assumption that difference precludes unity'. Moreover, as will be explored in chapter 5, this precariousness is necessary, both in enabling deliberation and the ongoing (re)balancing of contradictions, including those arising from the organisations' positioning within, against and beyond capitalism.

Second and interrelatedly, the theory emphasises that 'without feeling both freedom and connection it is difficult to engage in dialogue' (Chatterton, 2006: 276). Reflecting on an experience of protest, Chatterton emphasises that this is not only an issue of democracy but also one of inclusion/exclusion. As debates over consensus and plurality have recognised (Wenman, 2003; Rummens, 2009), and Beanies' and Regather's search for the 'right mix of people' demonstrates, a values-based consensus, however thin, creates an inside and an outside. Respecting the 'autonomy of individuals to make every day moral judgements' (Chatterton, 2006: 276) and maintaining the contestability of democratic praxis, are essential to ensuring that the 'them' is not a permanent outsider' (Rummens, 2009: 379). Bringing together these two points, consensus is further conceptualised as a collaborative world-making process (Carlone, 2013) constituting the simultaneous transformation and alignment of the self and the collective; and the bringing together of divergent positions through the mutual acceptance of their validity and creative potential. Thus, while offering a distinct approach to decision-making, it is more fundamentally an expression of, and means to develop, collective ways of thinking and being, and an act of prefiguring non-antagonistic relations.

4.2.2: Harnessing individual-collective interdependence: the importance of role-sharing to democratic praxis

I have indicated throughout this chapter the role of individual-collective interdependence in maintaining democratic praxis. This section explores the value of role-sharing in harnessing these interdependencies. The following exchange (19/02/15) illustrates this value highlighting that, while potentially inefficient, role-sharing plays an important part in ensuring members remain connected to and knowledgeable about all areas of the business.

Dave: I think the principle of 'everyone can do everything' is great, but it makes it inefficient in some ways. And [...] this is why I am trying to get people take something away and put your name on something, and then go away and do it and present it back to the group (H: Yes, yes).

Heather: That's how the coop should always work. It should work that everybody has a bit to do, and stuff like that, because the thing is, it keeps you connected to it. If you don't feel that you are connected to it, if you just feel that you are just doing 'my little job' that's it, you've got no passion, no connection to the rest of the business at all, you've got no willing to help anyone else out have you? And that's half the thing of working in the coop¹⁶⁴.

Dave: Yes, I wouldn't advocate someone staying in the office all day either, because that doesn't work either.

Heather: No, that doesn't work, and it's [referring to a past experience of a member working solely in the office] proved it doesn't work hasn't it?

All members agreed

Heather: [...] But it just feels so much better now that things are working, and everybody is doing different bits and pieces.

Picking up on Heather's final comments, and comparing my time as an employee to when I re-entered Beanies as a researcher, I observed that the sharing of formerly segregated (office-based) roles, specifically those relating to the organisations accounts, members wages, and utility and service procurement, has enable increased member participation and control¹⁶⁵. For example, since Evan has become involved in

¹⁶⁴ Dave's and Heather's comments seem contradictory, with Dave suggesting greater division of roles and Heather implying an increased level of role-sharing. Paradoxically, both are true. Members do now have specific tasks related to the overall functioning of the cooperative, for example paying wages, renewing contracts with service providers, and organising the rota. Formerly these roles were concentrated with a limited number of members: those who spent the majority of their time in the office. They are now shared between members, increasing *all* members' connection to overarching concerns. Discussing the recent stock take, formally organised by ex-member, Ruth, Chris highlight this change, explaining (fieldnote, 01/04/14): *'it has been funny this time because no one really knows what they are doing. This [people not knowing what they are doing] is happening a lot since Ruth left – now we are all having to get to know more about the business side rather than just focusing on our little sections'*. Chris commented that this has to be a good thing: *'It is a lot to learn and we are working out as they go along'*.

¹⁶⁵ Fran recognised similar benefits of role-sharing in the following quote (fieldnote, 27/03/15): *'[...] maybe I get to do the accounts which I just am so weirdly passionate about. I love doing accounts. And I feel like that would help me...like if I am going to be part of the management committee, like actively, it would really help me if I could have that as something that I could really bring to the meetings [...]. And I would enjoy getting a deeper understanding of everything through the finances'*.

paying members' wages he has identified discrepancies in the number of hours different members work. As he now understands the accounts, and therefore knows that wages are the organisation's biggest expense, he felt empowered to bring the issue up at a meeting. Having developed also an increased connection to the business, and with this a greater awareness of individual-collective interdependence, Evan framed the issue as a collective problem, rather than one attributable to individual members. This is captured in the exchange below (members' meeting, 19/02/15):

Evan: If you are doing a shop shift, you should have an hour break, so you know, you shouldn't say I have got extra bits to do I will only have half an hour break and do something else. You should incorporate that something else into your 8-hour day [...]. And if you are doing too many things, there are other people here, so you could say, 'I need to get this done', and instead of saying, I need to get this done as well as all this other stuff, try and pass something on to somebody else that's already here.

[...]

Dave: What I would say Gemma is (Evan: It's time management isn't it) you don't have to do it all, you can put it off.

[...]

Heather: But we are supposed to be sharing things anyway. That's the other thing isn't it. You know, we are all capable of doing everyone else's job. That's the whole point

Mark: I wouldn't go quite that far! Well I suppose, we all have our specialities...I wouldn't expect Gemma to come to me and say 'can you do the banking?'

Heather: Well why NOT?

Mark: Because I can't count.

Heather: Course you can count.

Dave: [Have you seen the] state of the bagging count?

Laughs

Heather: OK, apart from you saying you can't count, which you obviously clearly CAN...

Mark: Well yes.

*Heather: Everybody else can do that job. You know what I mean. [...]
That's the point of us all doing different jobs, having the hand in it and
having a back-up for someone.*

This exchange brings to the fore three key points in relation to members' interdependence and role-sharing. First linking this exchange back to previous negative experiences associated with the 'monopolisation' of role-specific skills, jobs and knowledge¹⁶⁶, I found role-sharing to ensure that (Sutherland et al., 2014: 771; see also Cornforth et al., 1988; Freeman, 1972):

No member saw a role as their 'property', where only they knew how to perform tasks. This [emerged as a] significant factor for preventing temporary leadership actors becoming permanent leaders.

Second, and again in line with Sutherland et al.' (2014) findings, Evan's experience shows that role-sharing empowered all members to adopt temporary leadership positions. This challenged assumptions that leadership requires 'special skills or a particular type of person' (Sutherland et al., 2014: 772). Finally, the exchange reveals that the overtime some members were putting in was not understood as a consequence of their inefficiency, but rather as an indication that greater role-sharing and mutuality was needed. As Heather's frustration indicates, the practice of mutuality is not just about saving money but, more fundamentally, is about maintaining an ethic of care (see sub-section 4.1.5)¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁶ Emphasising this issue Chris (fieldnote, 04/11/15) explained: *Ruth leaving made us realise how much influence she had. She decided what wholefoods were stocked because she did the ordering – others had a say but she made the final decision. She paid the wages [and] did the accounts – some of this work was passed on to other members in order to reduce Ruth's work load; and some information was passed on to members but Ruth always knew more than other members'. It is important to note here that this comment is made in hindsight. Members did not view Ruth's greater influence as a purposeful act. Rather, it was something that they were all complicit in by virtue of the absence of democratic practices, including regular meetings. It has only through the re-emergence of these democratic practices that the impact on 'monopolisation' was truly understood.*

¹⁶⁷ While recognising the limits posed by the availability of members and paid hours, a similar commitment to mutuality and an ethic of care was observed in Regather. This is captured in the following exchange (fieldnote, 11/12/14): *In a discussion about how to use Regathers shop space Nicole explained that if she had a shop full of stuff she would go out and market it but 'it's just too much to do on my own' (Nicole appeared and expressed being overwhelmed). 'I can't do it on her own'. Gareth reminded her it's not her project/job it's ours. While agreeing, Nicole added 'yes but you are so busy'. Gareth recognised this was a problem.*

Further illustrating the value of role-sharing to the development of interdependencies and mutuality, Heather explained (19/02/15) that the practice helps members to understand the interconnected nature of actions and the impact that their decisions have on others. As the quote below shows, it is through this that role-sharing contributes to the development of what Harnecker (2012:107-8) terms a 'collective consciousness' and I refer to as individual-collective interdependence: an 'awareness of the interests and problems of [...] co-workers; a willingness to contribute resources towards their solution; and the materialization of this disposition into statements and/or actions'.

[...] it's like [driving to Hereford to pick up the organic produce]. It might seem like a ridiculous thing but actually I think that everyone agreed that when Jake was doing it, it worked well, and Jake got the understanding of why it needed to be done in a certain way, and he also got, I think, I believe anyway, to understand why Gemma did all the things she did before he got back [to the shop], so now he's doing that in place of Gemma doing it.

In Regather, the practice of role-sharing is more difficult to achieve. Members necessarily adopt distinct roles defined by their project area. As Gareth explained to Fran (27/03/15):

There is a collection of activities. Pop up trading, the box, events, you know, various strands of work, some of which Lisa, Tim and [volunteer] might have some involvement in, but combined with the box. I don't feel I will redirect you in any way, you know, you are box.

Furthermore, lack of clarity over the organisation's structure, and the leadership role adopted by Gareth has limited opportunities for member participation in the maintenance, planning and operation of shared resources. The following discussion (17/07/15) expresses members desire to overcome this problem and achieve a balance

between members' individual project-based responsibilities and a desire for role-sharing stemming from the cooperative ethos.

Rachel: We should also recognise that we need to support you [Gareth] at different times and need to think about what that support would look like.

Gareth: Again, we need to look at coop code and see if there are some points on mutual support and peer learning because those are quite compatible in that if you learn what other people do you have a better understanding of [...] how you can help and involve yourself in that support function. Being able to empathise with what they are doing as the basis to being able to chip in. This avoids the management burden being shifted onto people you are trying to help which can be a source of tension.

[...]

Rachel: Education is also on the coop code.

Rachel went on to suggest running peer-to-peer learning sessions and workshop, explaining that in addition to helping members to understand different roles, it would help them to identify what skills they have to offer.

Fran: It will also help with cohesion too.

Rachel: Yes, if you better understand what the person does.

As is the case in Beanies, Regather's members recognise the benefits of mutual support and cohesion arising from a greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities of others. As Gareth's comment reveals, empathetic resonance – the ability to use one's own experiences to feel into the experiences of others (Finlay, 2002; Langmead, 2017b) - plays a crucial role in developing this understanding. Such resonance takes members beyond a basic understanding of actions and practices to reveal the tacit ways of thinking and being encompassed in each role. This more in-depth appreciation of the challenges and responsibilities facing fellow members allows for stronger emotional connections that forms the basis to individual-collective independence.

This section has shown that that role-sharing is not about the act of doing all of the jobs all of the time¹⁶⁸. Rather, it about the essence of role-sharing: the preparedness to do everything, founded in an ethic of care and a deep recognition of individual-collective interdependence; and an understanding of the opportunities role-sharing opens for the development mutual support, cohesion and meaningful engagement. In Heather's words (FG1) *'it's the fact that you might not do it but you know what is going on'*. What distinguishes Beanies and Regather from their hierarchical counterparts is not therefore the way that tasks are allocated but 'the way that work is understood and experienced' (Kokkinidis, 2015: 856). As Kokkinidis (2015), Ng and Ng (2009) and Sutherland et al. (2014) argue, this understanding is centred on demystifying and eliminating differentials in specialised knowledge, challenging the view of individually performed tasks as individually owned, and reframing work as collective effort. These reconceptualisations of work are important in two regards. First they challenge individualised notions of work that position individuals as 'ultimately responsible for their ability to engage in waged work and compete in the labour market' (Diprose, 2015: 18; McDowell, 2004). This issue is explored further in chapter 5. Second, role-sharing contributes to limiting and addressing the development of informal hierarchies, that are the focus of the next section (Ng and Ng, 2009; Sutherland et al., 2014).

4.2.3: The ever-present risk of hierarchy

The previous two sub-sections highlighted the importance of regular meetings, consensus decision-making, transparency and role-sharing to the maintenance of meaningful member participation. We saw also, in sub-sections 4.1.3 and 4.1.4, that understanding the organisation as a conversation and product of individual-collective alignment creates space for the ongoing development and renewal of these democratic practices. Focusing on the case of Regather this section returns to these

¹⁶⁸ Throughout my research I observed members doing the same tasks week-in, week-out, specifically when it came to ordering food and delivering vegetable boxes. This repetition ensured consistency, and the development of in-depth knowledge necessary for task to be performed efficiently and effectively.

arguments, exploring the role of shared ways of thinking, being and acting in challenging informal hierarchies, and therefore in the resistance of degeneration¹⁶⁹.

It has become evident throughout this chapter that Gareth, the one remaining founder member of Regather, continues to play a leading role in shaping the form and direction of the organisation. This observation is reinforced in the following extract from one members' meeting (17/07/15).

Gareth: We are just about ready to do a business plan and that needs to be the basis to what we are doing and the job roles.

Fran: I think the roles of the workers and the roles of the directors needs to be something that everyone feeds into.

Gareth: There is a basic structure to start with and then there are existing roles. Those are things that need doing, things that we have invested in.

Gareth produced a list of roles and went through them one by one.

Gareth: This is the working document, so it's there in terms of the tasks that need doing.

Fran: Has it ever been shared?

Garth: No. I only wrote it two days ago.

Fran: But the list in the past hasn't been shared?

Gareth: No, because they haven't existed like this. That is part of the problem. Everyone has discrete responsibility related to a specific project but there hasn't been a list of generalised roles.

Fran: When this is shared, first we will know what is going on in that brain of yours, and also we can take responsibility for some of it. It's not just your burden. And I think we quite want to. I quite want to feel more involved.

[...]

¹⁶⁹ Informal hierarchies are still present at Beanies. Reflecting the nature of hierarchies in this organisation, a member of another UK worker cooperative explained: 'there are [always] people that can speak louder and for longer and sometimes get listened to more'. However, the issue is much more prominent and complex in Regather, hence the focus of this section.

Gareth: My aim is to get a business plan done during the holidays. That is going to be my present, selfishly to myself. I so want to get this to a point where everyone can contribute but it's just not been there.

Rachel agreed that it would be good to share the list so that people can 'start to formulate ideas around it' and then develop these into a concrete plan.

Gareth: It's all moving in the same direction. You will read this [referring to the list] and it will be familiar. You know, when I am writing this you are all contributing. I don't just write it without thinking about getting you involved¹⁷⁰.

Reflecting on this exchange, together with observations dating back to Regather's establishment as a cooperative, reveals two drivers behind Gareth's continued ownership over the business plan. First, he is the only one party to financial information, and to historic knowledge about the organisation. Second, he has made significant personal, financial and emotional investments in Regather. This investment, combined with the fact that the organisation is a personal mission born out of an essay Gareth wrote for his Masters degree and his own negative experiences of work, makes this informal hierarchy difficult to break. The following quote (20/05/15) reinforces this challenge, highlighting its link, not only to Gareth's ongoing sacrifice, but to certain societal expectations around the limits of democracy and the need for some form of leadership.

Visitor (from School of Social Enterprise): How do you get it all to fit together? I know you are democratically run, but are you the strategic person?

Gareth: Yes, I manage it yes.

Visitor: That's the only way to do it isn't it?

¹⁷⁰ This closing comment shows that an understanding of individual-collective independence, developed through day-to-day action and interaction, informs the decisions Gareth makes. The preceding discussion reveals a desire to move beyond this indirect member influence, to challenge and re-engineer natural hierarchies that prevent more direct and active member engagement.

Gareth: I think you need somebody, yes, and knowing lots of other social enterprises in the city they tend to have definitely one, maybe two or three at the most, core individuals that are passionate, and love what they are doing. And I have recently...I have turned down full-time jobs on a regular basis [...] to work full time here. And it is insane really in some respects. I have two young children and lots of other commitments, but equally I am confident that we will make something work. I can't say for definite that it will be exactly how I explained it to you today but that's what we would like to do.

At the time of this conversation, and based on his experience of social enterprise, Gareth agreed with the need for a core group of passionate, committed individuals to lead the organisation (see Cornforth et al, 1986). The following exchange further illustrates this assumed need, and the role of experiences and historical knowledge in determining perception of what is and isn't possible in relation to organising. In this conversation (27/03/15) Fran and Gareth discuss the possibility of implementing role-sharing amongst vegetable box workers. Fran brought the idea to Regather following an inspiring visit to Unicorn Grocery where she observed the practice in action.

Fran: So, urm I think...I have been thinking about how can the tasks be shared? Because when we went to Unicorn it was fantastic, everybody knows how to do every part of the work and they all shared the responsibility.

[...]

Gareth: OK. My concern would be expecting either [volunteer] or Lisa to do the [business] development work.

Fran: Well they both have said that they would be interested...

Gareth: I know they are interested in doing it. But there is a difference between being interested in doing it and being capable of doing it. (Fran: Yes). A big difference. And we spend a huge amount of time, and in the scheme of things quite a bit of managing as well, basically paying people to do things that they are interested in and don't really know how to do.

Fran: Yes, yes.

In this conversation, Gareth draws on negative experiences of Regather supporting members to undertake activities they did not have the skills to carry out (see sub-section 4.1.3). This has contributed to Regather's organic development, understood as positive in relation to creativity and the maintenance of democratic praxis, but negative in relation to its cost and time implications. In this discussion, concern over the latter won out, and Fran was (re)positioned as entrepreneurial leader: the member best placed to drive the business forwards. After the meeting, I asked Fran how she thought the meeting had gone.

I feel like things are all moving along aren't they? I feel like it is a step forwards. I do feel like I will probably change my mind, tomorrow, or I will probably feel less sure about the me do the development and the others don't. Because I so loved at Unicorn how everybody was involved in everything, and I really like wanted to try and instigate that here. But I could also feel like yes, I could understand what Gareth was saying as well. So...

While the data presented here appears to support sceptics concerns over the 'limited capacity of non-hierarchical movements to block hierarchical tendencies' (Kokkinidis, 2015: 852), this scepticism overlooks three points. First, returning to discussions played out in sub-section 4.1.4, we are reminded that democratic subjectivities develop over time through 'collective moments of struggle' (Vieta, 2012: 138). Understanding the organisation as a conversation and product of individual-collective alignment plays an important role here, creating opportunities for members to look out to others, draw on diverse experiences, and engage in their difference as well as their 'common ground'. It is through these encounters that members 'explore[d] the edges of [their] competencies' (Wenger, 2000: 233) and opened previously taken for granted rationales to questioning and critique. In the exchange above, we see Fran's newly gained understanding of what if possible in relation to member participation challenging established practices and pushing in the direction of greater collectivity. While the outcome of Fran and Gareth's meeting was maintenance of the status-quo it did, nonetheless, pave the way for new understandings about the purpose and

meaning of Regather and how these relate to, and are expressed in, organisational norms and practices.

Second, the sceptical view of this data overlooks the role democratic praxis plays, not in eliminating relations of power, but in 'constitut[ing] forms of power that are compatible with democratic values' (Mouffe, 1999: 753). Learning from Sutherland et al. (2014) this means decoupling leadership from individual leaders. Performing this task, and re-understanding leadership as a process and series of unstable moments, repositions both Fran and Gareth as emergent 'leadership actors', each with relevant skills, knowledge and experience to progress certain ideas and actions. I do not wish to use this framing to deny the presence of informal hierarchies. Rather, my purpose is to highlight that hierarchies are (re)produced, not only through actions but through our own ways of thinking about, and framing, those actions.

Finally, we see, as Ng and Ng (2009: 197) explain, that informal leaders:

[...] have to tread a fine line in co-ops. On the one hand, they should contribute their strengths (e.g. analytical skills) to the co-op's successful development; but on the other hand, they need to allow space for all members to participate in keeping egalitarian principles.

While informal hierarchies persist, the required space identified by Ng and Ng has been increasingly opened. As illustrated in this section's opening meeting exchange, and in line with the findings of Jaumier (2017) and Sutherland et al. (2014), the opening of this space constitutes first naming, and then contesting, informal hierarchies *through* the praxis of democracy. Smith and Glidden (2012: 291) explain that, from this perspective, the aim of direct democracy is to:

[...] enable [members] to recognize legitimate and illegitimate sources of authority [and identify] new forms and sources of leadership that respond to group needs while socializing and empowering new leaders.

Long-term involvement in, and comparison between, Beanies and Regather suggests therefore that what is important is not the elimination of natural hierarchies but a commitment to maintaining spaces of negativity and dissent. Thinking back to argument made in relation to consensus decision-making, this reinforces the necessity of extending contestation from specific issues to the praxis of democracy itself. Through this extension we frame democracy as ever in the process of becoming, and always partial and incomplete. Informal hierarchies are transformed from a route to degeneration to an inevitable part of members ongoing struggle towards collectivity.

4.3: Conclusions on what constitutes democratic praxis in small worker cooperatives

Analysis presented in this chapter has framed democracy as praxis. Reflecting my methodological approach, this framing brings to the fore the interconnected nature of thinking, being and acting that enlarge democracy beyond formal structures and practices of decision-making. Through exploration into this enlarged praxis I support Kokkinidis' (2014; 2012), Beeman et al's (2009) and Land and King's (2014) claim that democracy cannot be reduced to finite and definable actions, revealing it instead as experimental, temporal, and contestable; 'always in the process of becoming' (Springer, 2010: 530; Barnett and Bridge, 2012; Rasza and Kurnik, 2012). Elaborating on this understanding I argue that the emergence and maintenance of democratic praxis requires an understanding of the organisation as a conversation and product of ongoing processes of individual-collective alignment. Moreover, I contend that these understandings, which constitute and underlie shared ways of thinking and being, are supported by and expressed through collectively agreed and developed ways of acting, outline in figure 4.3.

DEMOCRATIC PRAXIS		
WAYS OF THINKING	WAYS OF BEING TOGETHER	WAYS OF ACTING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisation as conversation. - Socialised view of the self. - Anti-essentialist stance. - Weak theoretical and post-fantasmatic position. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Processes of individual-collective alignment. - Individual-collective interdependence. - Shared ethic of care. - Celebration of plurality. - Mutuality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Framing of governing documents as loose framework for action - Consensus decision-making - Role-sharing - Practices of bricolage - Cycle of action-reflection: learning-through-action

Figure 4.3: Shared ways of thinking, being and acting that constitute democratic praxis

My understanding of the organisation as a conversation arose primarily from the study of what I refer to as “turbulent periods”. These periods constituted financial hardship, the closure of projects and the departure of members, and saw meeting fatigue, member disagreements and informal hierarchies ‘under scrutinised [and] left to fester’ (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 481). Moreover, they brought to the fore tensions and challenges that were addressed through successive cycles of action-reflection-(re)action that sought to reinvigorate democratic ways of thinking, being and acting. Analysis of each organisations’ response to project closure revealed that these cycles were utilised to restore mutually beneficial relationships, in which the structure, aims and business focus reflected the aspirations, needs and skills of current members. Focusing on changes in membership, I found that the departure of long-standing members, and the arrival of new members, created generational encounters (Wenger, 2000) that disrupted established structures and relationships, and opened opportunities for disagreement over values, priorities and ways of working (see also Chen et al., 2013). These encounters created the conditions for organisational change (Ford, 1999; Chatterton, 2010b), including the re-establishment of regular meetings, information-sharing and horizontality. I do not wish to suggest here that project failure and high member turnover are required for the development and maintenance of democratic praxis. Rather I seek to deduce two points. First that contestation plays an important role in creating ‘conditions that allow for growth, change and creative input, thereby fostering greater democracy within the group’ (Chen et al.. 2013: 870).

Second, that democratic praxis necessitates an openness to the changing knowledge and ideas of present and future members, and to the 'possibility that a new wave or generation of employees will decide to alter the system in significant ways' (Webb and Cheney, 2014: 78; see also Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c). It requires, in other words, the maintenance of a continuous and dynamic conversation between members and the collective that actively opens and maintains opportunities for dissent (Byrne and Healy, 2006).

Further exploration of this "dynamic conversation", beyond turbulent periods, revealed deeply embedded and ongoing processes of individual-collective alignment. Reflecting and reinforcing members' weak theoretical stance and post-fantasmatic position, this process does not constitute the alignment of members thinking with a predefined set of aims and values, but a 'mutual process of coordinating perspectives, interpretations and actions' (Wenger, 2000: 228). It is a process that sees members (re)framing and re-understanding past experiences of hierarchy, community organising, work and play through a cooperative lens. While serving to challenge members' preconceptions, introduce them to new possibilities, and contribute to the development of democratic subjectivities, these emergent understandings concomitantly raised questions over the organisations' established approaches to organising. Analysis of interconnected processes of individual-collective change thus highlighted that it is at the meeting of different ways of seeing and being in the world that assumptions and perceived inevitabilities are challenged, and that the rationale underlying adopted positions and practices are scrutinised and truly understood (Takacs, 2003; Dryzek and Neimeyer, 2006). Interrelatedly, it brought to the fore Mouffe's contention that, alongside a shared adherence to the ethico-political principle of democracy' (Mouffe, 1999: 755) - constituting values of equality, a respect for difference, and a deep understanding of individual-collective interdependence - 'there will always be disagreement concerning the meaning of those values and the way that they should be implemented' (Mouffe, 2009: 10). Bringing these points together we see that processes of individual-collective alignment enable members to move beyond engagement in decision-making to become involved in 'shap[ing] the very future of the participative system itself' (Webb and Cheney, 2014: 77): a level of involvement that, like Webb and Cheney (see also Chatterton, 2006; Cheney et al., 2014; Azkarraga et al.,

2012; Ridley-Duff, 2013), I understand as crucial to ‘authentic, comprehensive’ democracy.

Understandings of the organisation as a conversation and product of individual-collective alignment are supported by and reflected in shared ways of acting, including the organisations’ practices of democracy; and their conceptualisation of governing documents as loose frameworks for action. Focusing on the latter, and following Krishna (2013: 106), the legal pronouncement of the organisations’ democratic structure in rules and articles was not seen as a guarantee of ‘political activism or broader social or economic change’, or as an expression of some ideal democratic form to be replicated in action. Rather, the formal adoption of a cooperative form was seen to create a site for *potential* collective action: a means to multiple ends rather than an end in itself. This framing helps to address tensions between the work of democracy and the work of running a business, by ensuring that the organisations’ structure continues to serve the changing needs of members and the collective (Chatterton, 2010b). It thus cements and reinforces members’ acknowledgement that both the challenge and value of democratic structures (Varman and Chakrabarti, 2004: 204):

[...] lies in progressively creating slack, so that the possibility of maintaining a fine balance among [emergent] contradictions remains.

Turning attention to practices of democracy, I saw members move beyond reductive practice of representational democracy (Graeber, 2013; Kokkinidis, 2014; Springer, 2010) to adopt instead a consensus approach to decision-making. Reflecting the shared ways of thinking and being outlined above, reaching consensus does not equate to permanent agreement or the necessary marginalisation of conflicting logics, but to an ongoing commitment to ‘agonistic pluralism’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). It is, in other words, about embracing the creative potential of divergent positions and achieving ‘temporary respite[s] in an ongoing process of contestation’ (Mouffe, 1999: 755). From this perspective, consensus becomes ‘a matter of learning and culture’ (Varman and Chakrabarti, 2004: 199) that recognises that ‘without feeling both freedom and connection it is difficult to engage in dialogue’ (Chatterton, 2006: 276). Looking beyond the space of ‘the meeting’ revealed that achieving this momentary

consensus relies on a deeply embedded ethic of care (McDowell, 2004; Blazek et al. 2015; Evans, 2016), sense of mutuality (Zamagni and Zamagni, 2010), and acceptance of individual-collective interdependence (Harnecker, 2012). Again, focusing on practices of democracy, I found these shared ways of being to be developed through, and expressed in, practices of role-sharing, member recruitment and devolved decision-making.

Running throughout the framings and practices explored in this chapter we see that the challenge of performing and maintaining democratic praxis (Byrne and Healy, 2006: 250):

[...] is not in constructing [the] subject in relation to a particular symbolic order (the law governing coops), but in keeping the space of decision open, keeping the negativity of communal production intact at every phase [...] of collective economic activity.

It is through this that members create the freedom to reinvent the individual and collective self, reframe and challenge established knowledges, and break through preconceived notions of what is and what is not possible, both in relation to organising and the economy more broadly. Building on this understanding I argue that democratic praxis plays a central role in opening creative moments of experimentation in which ‘something new [can] be called into existence’ (Kioupiolis, 2010: 146). The next chapter explores role.

5: An exploration into the role of democratic praxis

Having outlined in chapter 4 what constitutes democratic praxis, attention in this chapter turns to role this praxis plays in supporting a shift from the perceived dominance and homogeneity of capitalism towards performative, post-capitalist praxes of economic diversity and interdependence. Linking back to theoretical arguments made in chapter 3, and in response to research question two, section 5.1 explores how democratic praxis lays the epistemological and ontological grounds necessary for this shift to occur. Sections 5.2-5.5 investigate how these grounds, and the praxis of democracy itself, are utilised to enable everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy, as manifested in processes of negotiation, reframing and reconceptualization. Following Chatterton and Pickerill's (2006: 737) research on autonomous geographies, these sections bring to the fore the *realpolitik* of autonomous projects:

[...] their existence in a global capitalist economy where profit, a wage economy and the corporate control of goods and services prevail. Hence the tendency for autonomy is always contested and fractured, contradictory and overlapping. On a practical level, there are constant and multiple negotiations between those seeking autonomy and their interactions with the family, workplace, consumer society, institutions and the state that impose a series of compromises [...] manifest in everyday 'realities'.

Focusing on these everyday realities, section 5.2 considers how members use democratic praxis, to creatively negotiate contradictions stemming from this '*realpolitik*'. Section 5.3 focuses on understandings of efficiency and hierarchy and investigates how these are connected to conceptualisations of success. More specifically, it explores how efficiency, hierarchy and success are problematised and reframed to resist degeneration and maintain the organisations' dual social-economic characteristic. Section 5.4 explores the role of democratic praxis in supporting the reconceptualisation of work. Here I argue that democracy creates space for members to move away from negative experiences of the capitalist economy and towards

positive experiences of collective organising. Through this they achieve new levels of personal coherence that challenge the inevitability and completeness of labour abstraction. Section 5.5 provides a summary of the main acts of re-thinking and re-making emerging from the processes outlined above. Further developing links to theoretical discussions played out in chapter 3, the final section investigates how members use democratic praxis, and the acts of re-thinking and re-making identified, to deconstruct the hegemony of capitalism, foster economic diversity and interdependence, and cultivate post-capitalist subjectivities. In doing so the section addresses researcher question three.

5.1: Laying the epistemological and ontological grounds for emergent post-capitalist worlds

Drawing on my own experience of teaching diverse economies theory, section 3.4 argued that first conceiving of the economy as performatively produced, and then moving from the performativity of capitalism to performative post-capitalist praxes of economic diversity and interdependence, necessitates a struggle against ourselves, and a culture of thinking that speaks of cooptation and failure in the face of dominant challenge (Chatterton, 2005; Gibson-Graham, 2006b). Central to this struggle is an act of epistemological and ontological reframing that sees the rejection of reductive and alienating (Routledge, 1996) practices of fantasy and strong theorising, in favour of a post-fantasmatic position (Bryne and Healy, 2006; Glynos, 2011) and weak theoretical stance (Roelvink and Carnegie, 2011; Sedgwick, 2003). Recognising that little possible when 'everything is seen to be decided' (Tonkiss, 2008: 306), this stance encompasses the re-appropriation of thinking as an act of resubjectification, and concomitant reframing of meaning-making, not as a 'conceptual activity taking place in our heads' (Cunliffe, 2003b: 488; Graham, 1992), but as an everyday relational praxis. Here, the primary qualities of the world become (re)connected to the secondary qualities of mind, not only through language but through multiple intermediaries of imagination, empathy, desire, worries and stories (Graham, 1990; 1992).

Exploring the mind-world, thinking-action connection through the lens of the participatory worldview, these intermediaries are positioned as part of a wider,

intersubjective process that sees our understanding of the world shaped by experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing, and by their association and dissociation with one another. Constant moves between these ways of knowing reveal understanding, knowledge and their narratives to be performative, grounded in experience and consummated in action. Our coming to know in and through this intersubjective process foregrounds a 'learning to be affected vision of the world' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 325; Latour, 2004) that, in contrast to the static body-world separation consonant with strong theory, 'depicts a dynamic, changing, living body-world, proliferated and differentiated rather than stable and monolithic' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 325). As will be explored over the course of this chapter, in this world our shared experiences of disempowerment, desires to expand spaces for creativity and express our belief, and our worries about the precarity of work, are re-appropriated as tools of an active bricoleur. They are used to foreground the already diverse and interconnected nature of the economy, interrogate the meaning of economic practices, and weave a sense of temporal coherence that increases our capacity for actions, gives our (cooperative) practices greater salience and counters the perceived inevitability of abstraction. As such, our engagement with these multiple intermediaries, our connection to and disconnection from other subjects and objects, and our care for the world become ethical practices through which we question statements of truth and stretch the (perceived) boundaries of the economy.

From this perspective learning to be affected is a co-transformative process that increases our capacity for action by creating a more highly differentiated world (Roelvink, 2010). It gives rise, not to statements of how the world is or should be, but to living-learning processes that encourage curiosity, and embrace the inspiring possibilities of conflicts and contingencies (Bryne and Healy, 2006: 249; Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c; Gibson-Graham, 2009). Underlying this reflexive thinking praxis is a necessary anti-essentialist stance, that celebrates the presence of multiple subjectivities, and accepts individual (and collective) identity as decentred, unbounded and always in transition (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Graham, 1992).

Adding to a narrow body of literature that empirically explores the role of democracy through the lens of diverse economies theory (Cornwell, 2011; Gibson-Graham, 2003; Healy, 2010; Bryne and Healy, 2006), this section argues that democratic praxis lays the epistemological and ontological grounds for the work of re-framing described above. More specifically it argues that democratic praxis supports the adoption of an anti-essentialist position, weak theoretical (Roelvink and Carnegie, 2011; Sedgwick, 2003) and post-fantasmatic stance (Bryne and Healy, 2006; Glynos, 2011), and 'learning to be affected vision of the world' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 325). The following paragraphs outline these three arguments in turn.

First, understandings of the organisation as a conversation and interconnected processes of individual-collective alignment challenge notions of fixed identities and the 'subject as fully subjected' (Cornwell, 2012: 728). Accepting instead that members and the collective body are co-produced and co-constituted in action (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010), and concomitantly celebrating and utilising the presence of multiple and transitory subjectivities, these processes embed anti-essentialism into each organisations' praxis of democracy. As will be illustrated in section 5.6, it was from this anti-essentialist stance that members came to understand and embrace their role in the (de/re)construction of the economy and the positions that they had come to understand as inevitabilities or 'universal truths' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010).

Second, and interrelatedly, neither cooperative see themselves 'to have a pre-existing, necessary or transhistorical shape' (Bryne and Healy, 2006: 250). As expressed through ongoing processes of alignment, and the conceptualisation of governing documents as loose frameworks for action, the aim is not to construct the subject in relation to a predetermined order, but to maintain spaces of negativity that make change, and re-politicisation possible (Bryne and Healy, 2006: 246; Glynos, 2011). Within these negative spaces I observed members rejecting alternative/mainstream and activist/non-activist binaries to embrace instead the inspiring and productive possibilities of contestation and bricolage. Understanding democracy itself as a 'continuous articulation of antagonism' (Bryne and Healy, 2006: 248) members thus moved beyond hopes of "the ideal collective to come" to engage instead in a performative praxis of being open to 'what is novel', working to challenge perceived

barriers, and cultivating new relations and ways of being in the world (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xxvii; Gibson-Graham, 2009). In and through the praxis of democracy, and in line with diverse economies theory, the cooperatives thus adopted a weak theoretical stance, to become post-fantasmatic projects of exploring both many (capitalist) no's and many (post-capitalist) yeses (Kingsnorth, 2003; Razsa and Kurnik, 2012).

Finally, a focus on learning-through-action enabled members to reconnect experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing. This ongoing engagement with 'constitutive processes of living and learning' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 324) challenges the mind-world, thinking-action separation consonant with strong theory and supports the development of ontologies of 'learning to be affected' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2010; Latour, 2004). These ontologies are further developed through practices of decision-making and role-sharing that foreground and re-create a socialised view of the self, and foster an interrelated commitment to mutuality and an ethic of care. Following Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2010; see also Cameron and Gibson, 2005), I found these ways of being to share a deep recognition of individual-collective interdependence, a celebration of member diversity and plurality, and the acceptance of an anti-essentialist position that views knowledge and understanding as intersubjective, and identity as never fully formed. It is from this starting point that we seek-out and utilise opportunities to be (re)animated by our 'care for the world and its inhabitants' (ibid.: 324), and subsequently come to 'problematize ourselves and our positions' (Chatterton and Pickeril, 2010: 482) and the positions that they had come to understand as 'universal truths'.

Developing this final point, I have indicated throughout chapter 4 that democratic praxis both contributes to, and constitutes, a project of individual-collective autonomy. More specifically, analysis has shown that the 'realization of [our] self-creating, self-altering and self-initiating capacities', and the subsequent development of 'rule-creating rather than rule-following subjectivities' (Kokkinidis, 2015: 849), is enhanced by mutual and interdependent relations with others, a shared ethic of care, and equal and voluntary participation in direct action (Chatterton, 2006; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). Chatterton's (2010b) conceptualisation of collective autonomy as a simultaneous act of refusal and creation further emphasises this point. In line with this

understanding I have illustrated how the praxis of democracy, and specifically processes of individual-collective alignment, and the sharing of narratives of struggle and hope, support the refusal of hierarchy and the ongoing creation and recreation of spaces of self-management and self-determination (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). From this perspective democracy becomes a transgressive and prefigurative act of making free and diffuse spaces, in which the inevitability and necessity of capitalist socio-economic relations can be questioned (Arthur et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2014a; Chatterton, 2010a; Graeber, 2013; Maeckelbergh, 2009; 2012; 2011). Pickerill and Chatterton's (2006) concept of autonomous geographies offers rich ground for further exploring this role (see section 6.6). Here attention is turned back to the epistemological and ontological work outlined above. Delving deeper into this contribution to knowledge the next three sections explore how these grounds were used as a site for everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy.

5.2: Negotiating contradictions

In the previous chapter we saw that the 'coop bit' and the 'business bit' of both organisations are viewed at once as interdependent and in constant tension. In FG2, Chris explained:

It's an interesting balance to strike I think when you are looking at an organisation like this, to have that [business] focus without being overwhelmed by the need to make a profit. You know, that is important but it is not our primary goal. It is significant only in that it allows the business to continue to make that bit of profit that we make.

This section explores some of the contradictions, and processes of negotiation that underlie this 'balance'. It does so through analysis of (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 480):

[...] difficult discussions which balance the desire not to dilute political ideals nor make compromises, with a pragmatic desire to maintain and

build alternative projects, and see a return on emotions and time invested.

These discussions constitute processes of 'border crossing' between 'reality' and hoped-for-futures (ibid.: 487). As this section will show, these journeys create both challenges and opportunities for creative responses that challenge the hegemony of capitalism and prefigure post-capitalist worlds.

5.2.1: The work of negotiation and the negotiation of work: challenging the voluntary/paid labour dualism

In contrast to other sections where data from each organisation has been interwoven, this and the following sub-section use Regather and Beanies as contrasting cases. This sub-section explores the case of Regather, where volunteering remains common¹⁷¹. The chapter draws upon, and contributes to, theoretical and empirical research that brings to the fore the interconnected and interdependent nature of paid and unpaid work (Taylor, 2004; Williams and Windebank, 2002; Williams and Nadin, 2012; White and Williams, 2012). While attention in this literature has been on the interdependencies of work carried out in different spatial locations, focus here is on the nuanced interplay between paid and unpaid labour *within* a single organisation. In line with literature on volunteering, this section illustrates the interdependence of paid work and voluntary labour; the embedded nature of reciprocity (including volunteering) in organisations with dual social and economic aims; and the role of voluntary labour in making possible the production of certain goods and the provision of certain services (Cameron, 2009; Pattiniemi, 2006; Gardin, 2006; Defourny, 2009). It

¹⁷¹ The embedded nature and “normalness” of volunteering was emphasised when I was asked to volunteer to cover vegetable box collections. During one early observation session (30/01/15) I wrote in my fieldnote book: *This is my second Regather observation in the same week. Nicole e-mailed earlier in the week to ask if I could cover the veg box collection on Friday so that she could attend an event. I agree but did not want to cancel Thursday as I had told Fran that I would be there to help pack veg boxes and wanted to speak to Lisa about participating in the research.*

Requests to volunteer at Regather sat in contrast to experience at Beanies where my voluntary input was discouraged. For example, following one observation session (02/12/14) I noted: *Both Gemma and Dave commented ‘you are not getting paid’: Gemma in response to me carrying heavy boxes (last Wednesday during delivery she similarly commented ‘you are not getting paid enough to break yourself’); and Dave in response to my comment ‘I was going home. I only came down to get chilled stuff for my shopping!’ (I actually went down stairs for my shopping and ended up helping with the chilled stocking for longer than intended). Dave (who was in cellar pricing up the Lembas stock at the time): ‘Yes. That happens. And you’re not even being paid! Go home!’*

highlights also the complex interconnection between voluntary labour and self-exploitation (Atzeni and Ghigliani, 2007; Sandoval, 2016). In addition to bringing lived experiences of this issue to the fore, findings presented here offer insights into the purpose and meaning of volunteering beyond individual benefits and the enablement of collective aims. More specifically, it contributes to the debates outlined above by revealing volunteering, and more specifically the blurring of the paid/unpaid labour dichotomy (see Kelemen et al., 2017; Taylor, 2004), as integral to Regather's reconceptualisation of the economy. Understood through the lens of the total social organisation of labour (see sub-section 3.3.2; Glucksmann, 2005, Williams, 2009 and White and Williams, 2014), this reconceptualisation is centred on challenging the (hierarchical) positioning of paid work as a 'social and moral imperative' (Diprose, 2015: 13; Williams and Nadin, 2012), and the separation of paid and unpaid work into bounded and opposing spheres (Taylor, 2004). Moreover, it confronts, and highlights the contradictions arising from, capitalist notions of 'freedom' that claim workers are 'free' to 'dispose of [their] labour-power as [their] own commodity' (Sandoval, 2016: 54). Countering this 'freedom' Sandoval (2016: 54) explains:

Left with a 'free' choice the worker can decide to either sell her labour power according to conditions determined by capitalist labour markets or to refuse to do so, accepting all the potential life-threatening consequences of this free decision.

Bringing these challenges together, Regather seeks to offer multiple options of volunteering, employment and self-employment through which members can meet their material and emotional needs. While these practices are restricted by the dominant 'free choice' outlined above they nonetheless confront the either (engage in paid work)/or (struggle to survive) mentality presented in Sandoval's quote and its underlying culture of individualised work and self-responsibility.

In section 5.2.2 attention moves to Beanies where volunteering is no longer required. Working overtime is actively discouraged (see sub-section 4.2.2) and, in the most part, when it does occur members are paid. As such, the section explores Beanies' practices

of wage setting, bringing to light their fluid and collectively negotiated nature. In doing so it demonstrates how negotiations are used to (Rogers, 2016: 6):

[...] detach work from a value system based on market logics that skew our understanding of what “valuable work” is.

Despite differences in working practices arising from Beanies’ and Regather’s varying life stage, I identify three commonalities. First, the importance of self-determination as a means to valuing labour beyond financial reciprocation. Second, the existence of contradictions between the economic limitations and needs that determine how labour *is* valued, and the social and political aims of both members and the organisations. Third, a common utilisation of shared ways of being and acting together, and specifically members’ commitment to mutuality and an ethic of care, and their deep recognition of individual-collective interdependence, as a means to challenge dominant capitalist narratives around the meaning, value and valuing of work.

In Regather volunteering is both part of the process of becoming a member and a necessary component of project development. This comes across most strongly through informal periods of probation. These probationary periods see potential members volunteering to develop financially viable projects that will both contribute to the collective and generate (their own) employment. From this perspective voluntary contributions are viewed, on the one hand, as mutually beneficial acts tied to the organisations’ democratic praxis, and specifically to members deep recognition of individual-collective interdependence (see for example the development of Regather’s microbrewery discussed in sub-section 4.1.3). Building on this sense of interdependence, volunteering becomes linked to members’ “do-it-yourself” mentality, and expressions of commitment to and passion for their project. It becomes, in other words, ‘a form of collectively sanctioned self-exploitation’ (Chatterton, 2010b: 1214) through which members acknowledge that Regather’s business model ‘*will only work if people take responsibility*’ (Tim, 10/04/15) and drive their ideas forwards. On the other hand, they are understood as a financial necessity (Amin et al., 2003a) and, to an extent, an inevitable part of the (collective) self-

employment ethos. In relation to the latter, and returning again to member's desire to 'take control of one's own situation' (Gareth, FG3), my observation and experience of volunteering at Regather bring to the fore the risk that (Sandoval, 2016: 51-52):

More than autonomy and insecurity just existing alongside each other, it is precisely the experience of autonomy and fulfilment that makes cultural work an ideal field for introducing insecure and precarious working conditions, and for constituting the creative worker as an ideal entrepreneurial subject of neoliberal capitalism. Or, as Tokumitso puts it: 'Nothing makes exploitation go down easier than convincing workers that they are doing what they love'.

Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005; 2007) work on 'the new spirit of capitalism' further emphasises this risk. Emerging in response to the 'artistic critique'¹⁷² of the 1960s and 70s the new spirit of capitalism, together with value system of the 'projective city'¹⁷³, serves to both justify and make attractive people's commitment to capitalist processes of accumulation. They do so through promises of 'freedom, autonomy and self-expression' (duGay and Morgan, 2013: 20). In this value system 'genuine autonomy' is attained through the development of one's own employability and the pursuit of self-fulfilment (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 90). Thus, as illustrated in section 3.1.2, success constitutes, not the pursuit of a single career path, but the utilisation of flexibility and adaptability, and the willingness to take risks and accept precarious, low-paid and unpaid work that accompanies portfolio project working. Emphasising this conceptualisation Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 155) explain:

¹⁷² In contrast to the 'social critique' that was focused on inequality and exploitation, and sought to challenge individualism through solidarity expressed in labour movements, the artistic critique was founded on 'values of expressive creativity, fluid identity, autonomy and self-development' (Budgen, 2000 :151) and a concomitant challenge to alienation, commodification and the meaninglessness of the generic landscape of mass production (Boltanski and Chipello, 2005: 38).

¹⁷³ The projective city is one of seven 'justificatory regimes' that set out 'universal principles' on which to judge and legitimise the actions of agents (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 22-24). DuGay and Morgan (2013: 17) explain that these regimes (or orders of worth) imply a 'specific set of beliefs about how the world works, which in turn lead to expectations about appropriate sets of behaviours, actions, and outcomes'. If the actions of the state, employers or employees do not 'fit the prevailing justificatory logic' (as was seen in relation to 'the industrial city's' claims of common good (see DuGay and Morgan, 2013: 19)), either these actions will be challenged (through legal means or through debate and protest), or a new logic of justification, and different ways of seeing the world, will be sought and adopted (ibid.: 17).

To be doing something, to move, to change – this is what enjoys prestige, as against stability, which is often regarded as synonymous with inaction.'

Understood as such autonomy, self-fulfilment, and the development of one's employability are revealed, at once, as a means through which to establish a sense of worth, and as an ever-unfulfilled fantasy obtained only through self-sacrifice, self-exploitation and the 'capitalization of [personal] attributes' (Du Gay and Morgan, 2013: 31; Bloom, 2013). It is from this basis that Bloom (2013: 787) argues that 'the contemporary subject of employability struggles not for the eradication of exploitation, but rather the right to 'self-exploitation', and the concomitant mastery of their own 'material alienation as a capitalist subject'. Thus, far from deconstructing hierarchy, the new spirit of capitalism creates forms of 'capitalist self-disciplining' behind a veil of self-determination and a promise of self-realisation (Bloom, 2013: 788).

I do not wish to imply in here that Regather members are adopting the role of the capitalist entrepreneurial subject or that their project-working, the use of voluntary labour, and self-exploitation are performed in the name of employability. Rather I want to use the arguments above to highlight two points. First, that democratic praxis can help to decouple fulfilment and autonomy from insecurity by reframing autonomy as a collective project (see sub-section 4.2.1). Here I support empirical work that finds worker cooperatives used to address issues of precarity through the collectivisation of both risks and rewards (Atzeni and Vieta, 2010; Seda-irizarry, 2011; see section 1.2). Second, I highlight that democratic praxis risks creating new forms of self-exploitation by embedding acts of volunteering into the organisation's structure and social aims. As Shukaitis (2010: 65) explains:

[...] self-exploitation is indeed a real problem and concern [in worker cooperatives] precisely because of how easily the pleasures of self-directed labour and forms of exploitation can mingle and overlap.

We will see over the course of this section that these pleasures are linked to members' 'desire to see projects succeed', and a sense of achievement at creating the conditions for their own enjoyment and political satisfaction (Shukaitis, 2010: 66).

Focusing on the first point, my findings contrast to those of Puusa and Hokkila (2015). Through interviews with members of three 'multi-professional worker cooperatives' in Finland, Puusa and Hokkila identified six motivational factors underlying cooperative self-employment. The first three - empowerment, self-management and freedom – are seen to 'reflect the universal autonomy needs identified in self-employment literature' (Puusa and Hokkila, 2015: 5). The second three - security, diversity and communality – are understood to 'stem from the established cooperative principles' (ibid.). While aligning with Puusa and Hokkila's findings with regards to members' desire for empowerment, self-management, and freedom¹⁷⁴, and the benefits stemming from security, diversity and communality, my findings diverge when considering how these desires and benefits interconnect. It is in this divergence that cooperatives disassociate with 'the new spirit of capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Puusa and Hokkila (2015: 11) conclude that 'individuality [the three factors of autonomy] and communality are the two rival forces that form the most inherent contradiction in worker co-operative operations'¹⁷⁵. In contrast, my own findings reveal autonomy and communality to be co-constituting. As illustrated in sub-section 4.1.3 and 4.1.4, the 'realization of [our] self-creating, self-altering and self-initiating capacities' and the subsequent development of 'rule-creating rather than rule-following subjectivities' (Kokkinidis, 2015: 849) is enhanced by collective self-rule and equal and voluntary participation in direct action (Chatterton, 2006). Underlying this realisation is a deep recognition of individual-collective interdependence, and an interrelated commitment to an ethic of care that sees conflicts, risks and responsibilities associated with projects shared, both between members and between members and the collective. This understanding challenges the conceptualisation of

¹⁷⁴ In participants' terms, the desire to maintain '*control over their own life*', work flexibly and achieve self-fulfilment.

¹⁷⁵ These contradictions are, Puusa and Hokkila (2015: 9) recognise, a consequence of members' passivity towards exercising their democratic rights, their view of the cooperative as an infrequently used means for 'gaining individual benefits', and their understanding of work in the cooperative as an individual act. This points to the importance of democratic praxis in challenging dominant capitalist narratives.

autonomy as an individualised project of self-rule and self-actualisation: a project that utilises autonomy as a vehicle of responsabilisation, and a means to organise work along increasingly more flexible lines (Bohm et al., 2009; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007; Du Gay and Morgan, 2013; Chatterton, 2005; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). Moving beyond this understanding, members align with the view expressed in Notes from Nowhere (2003: 110):

To be autonomous is not to be alone or to act in any way one chooses – a law unto oneself – but to act with regard for others, to feel responsibility for others. This is the crux of autonomy, an ethic of responsibility and reciprocity that comes through recognition that others both desire and are capable of autonomy too.

In addition to being conceived as a collective project, autonomy was framed as a matter of ‘freedom from’ as well as ‘freedom to’ (Parker et al., 2014a): in this case, ‘freedom from’ people and organisational structures that ‘stifle creativity’ (Rachel), and from the pressures, challenges and limitations of sole-trading, including those associated with the precarity of work. As illustrated in sub-section 4.1.2 (see also sub-section 5.4.3) and 4.1.4, these concerns have driven member involvement in Regather and the decision to adopt a cooperative legal form. Viewed as such, the drive for autonomy is supported by a drive away from individualism and towards the relative security, diversity and communality of cooperative working: a move made with the explicit aim of concomitantly enhancing fulfilment and escaping employment related insecurity. Thus, we see in this reconceptualisation of autonomy a further illustration that democratic praxis creates the epistemological and ontological conditions for the deconstruction of dominant capitalist notions of work.

Turning to the second point, my research found complex interconnections between the risk of self-exploitation; members’ commitment to social aims, and the associated delivery of certain projects; shared values of mutuality and individual-collective interdependence embedded in democratic praxis; and economic needs associated with Regather’s operation within a capitalist context. The potential of worker cooperatives to limit, challenge and contribute to self-exploitation warrant further investigation

beyond this thesis. Focus here is on how these interconnections played out in the context of Regather's democratic praxis to blur paid/unpaid labour dichotomies¹⁷⁶ and through this, construct a vision of work situated at once within, beyond and against capitalism.

Taking a historical perspective on social enterprise in Europe, where social enterprise and cooperatives are closely connected, Defourny (2009: 79-80) explains:

One of the major but long-standing specific characteristics of the third sector is its capacity to mobilise volunteer work. In itself, the use of volunteers is thus not innovating; however, it is innovating in numerous recent initiatives insofar as it makes it possible to produce goods or provide services that were not previously available.

Given the publication date of Defourny's work, it is worth acknowledging the development of this volunteering innovation as a neoliberal project, and more specifically a response to (neoliberalising) measures of austerity imposed in the shadow of the 2008 financial crisis (see section 1.1; Kelemen et al., 2017; Williams and Nadin, 2012). While Regather can be viewed as partaking in *and* problematising this project, as illustrated in the example of the Small School, further exploration of this contention lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Attention here is on the role of volunteering in making projects financially viable, and as a means to achieving social aims, as is illustrated in the following exchange (22/01/15). The exchange is taken from a meeting about a food event Regather was planning as part of a citywide Festival of Debate.

Gareth: It might be good if we're going to do it as, you know, principally voluntarily run, if people are paying for the food and obviously covering our costs, then, I'm just thinking that if we are generating significant surplus, then we could maybe donate that to some food related cause. That's like an added you know...

¹⁷⁶ As Kelemen et al. (2017: 3) explain this dichotomy is itself founded in a 'managerial understanding of what constitutes work'.

Nicole: Could we not donate it to the Regather charity that's doing all these things anyway.

Gareth: (Laughs)...yes, I'm not saying that we will be...

Nicole: Gareth is always going on telling me that we are not making any money and then at the first sign of any he wants to give it away!

Leah¹⁷⁷: I was going to suggest that you pay yourselves (Laughs).

Nicole: Yes...that would be a good one wouldn't it?!

Gareth: Yes, good, I just thought I'd raise it...I'm glad we are all...

Leah: I mean by all means donate it to charity if you want, but I'm not getting paid for doing any of this but if you can pay yourselves then go for it.

Laughing.

In addition to affirming the role volunteers play in enabling cost recovery, the above quote reveals, first the conflict between members' commitment to social aims and a desire for paid work (discussed further below), and second the embeddedness of volunteering in individual-collective ways of thinking and being. Further exemplifying this embeddedness Rachel explained (17/07/15):

[Volunteering] should be recognised as just as valid, or more valid, than work you are paid for because you are doing it for free. This is the principle of the Solidarity Economy¹⁷⁸. It's important to value that time and you need to make it two-way so volunteers know what they are getting out of it¹⁷⁹.

This quote, and wider debates on how volunteers should be reciprocated, built on the interconnection between the value attributed to volunteering and members'

¹⁷⁷ Pseudonym used. Leah is a member of the Festival of Debate organising team.

¹⁷⁸ See, for example, Miller (2005).

¹⁷⁹ During this discussion Gareth commented on the availability of exchange system such as Timebanks (Seyfang, 2010; Diprose, 2016). Reflecting on past experience, he argued (contra Diprose (2106)) that such systems commodified voluntary labour. He explained that past volunteers had rejected such forms of reciprocity for that reason, feeling that it de-valued rather than valued their work.

commitment to mutuality and solidarity. The consequent framing of volunteers and workers as collectively and equally engaged in shared struggles challenged, not only the positioning of wage labour as ‘the most credible, necessary and desirable’ (Diprose, 2015: 18) option, but the framing of it as distinct from bounded and subsidiary practices of volunteering (see chapter 3)¹⁸⁰. Thus, I observed, like Taylor (2004) and Kelemen et al. (2017: 5) the conceptual boundaries of work being extended to ‘account for volunteering as a form of [unpaid] work’.

This blurring of the (paid) work/ (unpaid) volunteering dichotomy comes to the fore in the level of responsibility¹⁸¹ held by Regather volunteers. In the context of Regather’s democratic praxis, that has been developed to ‘welcome members with ideas and projects that [will] address the needs of the local community’ (Gareth) and to promote individual-collective interdependence as a means to project delivery, we see volunteers setting up, managing and running projects (see sub-section 4.1.3). This level of responsibility and the tasks undertaken by volunteers were often identical to those of paid workers such that the distinction became (at times problematically) fluid. Whether or not a member was paid was determined, not by the task or some clearly defined role, but by a combination of individuals’ desires, needs and willingness, and the availability of income to pay wages¹⁸². Rochester’s (2006) comparison of the ‘non-profit’ (dominant in the UK and the US) and ‘civil society’ (more common in Europe and the global South) paradigms of volunteering helps to make sense of the meaning

¹⁸⁰ This positioning of paid labour and volunteering is similarly highlighted by Lisa’s expressed frustration at people distinguishing between her ‘volunteering days’ and her ‘work days’. For her this is false dichotomy, with volunteering viewed as of equal value to herself and society as paid work (fieldnote, 12/03/15).

¹⁸¹ In one case, a volunteer who joined Regather to help improve its IT provision was tasked with selecting and purchasing the materials needed for the job. In empowering him to do this the volunteer’s skills and knowledge were recognised above any formal work relation (fieldnote, 11/12/14).

¹⁸² When I made jam for Regather to sell I was paid for 1/3 of my hours. This rate was determined by the income generated from sales and by the agreed hourly wage level of £8/hour together with my own needs and willingness. I observed similar practices occurring amongst current members. This is illustrated in the following exchange between Nicole and Gareth (fieldnote, 11/12/14): *As Nicole was packing up to leave Gareth asked her for her hours so he could sort out pay. Nicole: ‘Oh, am I not on pay role?’ (Nicole assumed that as she was on the pay role she didn’t need to tell Gareth her hours). Gareth confirmed that she was and explained process. They then had a brief conversation about what extra hours Nicole would and wouldn’t get paid for. Nicole was reluctant to add these additional hours (over and above her ‘contracted’ 16-hours/week) but acknowledge that some of the things that she put extra time into had made money. They agreed that Nicole should claim for some of this time so long as she ‘didn’t take the mick’ (Gareth). Nicole acknowledged that she knew that she would need to put some time in voluntarily to get projects going.*

and significance of this blurred view. He explains that in the former (Rochester, 2006: 3¹⁸³):

Volunteering is seen as philanthropy - as a gift of time analogous to the donation of money – and represents an additional resource for the organisation, the sector and the economy as a whole. In this view volunteering is essentially about unpaid labour which contributes to the work of a formally organised agency and, as such, needs to be managed according to the ‘workplace model’ in which the norms and procedures of managing paid staff are applied to volunteers. [Volunteers are viewed] as helpers, as people filling a distinct, contributory role in [...] certain kinds of organizations.

In comparison, the ‘civil society’ paradigm is interested in ‘organisations that are the product of people’s ability to work together to meet shared needs and address common problems’ (ibid.). This paradigm sees volunteering as activism and ‘a force for social change’ (ibid.), organised horizontally rather than vertically. Thus, while I observed discussions about (but never a commitment to) the development of volunteer management in line with the dominant non-profit paradigm, Regather’s approach to volunteering aligns more closely with the ‘civil society’ paradigm. Volunteers were not recruited and trained for a predefined role. Rather they were attracted by a particular activity or shared interest. Building on this initial attraction, volunteers were subsequently supported (Rochester, 2006: 7):

[to] develop the roles they will play in the organisation in response to what is needed and what they feel able to take on.

¹⁸³ Like Keleman et al. (2017: 10) I recognise that, in practice, what they describe as altruistic, instrumental, militant and forced volunteering, often occur concomitantly. Drawing on interviews with volunteers they explain: ‘These practices accommodate multiple motivations simultaneously, change over time and allow for both individualistic and collective agendas to co-exist in various degrees as individuals can locate themselves within multiple categories of work simultaneously.’ This quote highlights a non-essentialised view of the self that, as illustrated in chapter 3 and 4, is present in both Beanies and Regather, and informs approaches to, and understandings of work. This is explored further in section 5.4.

Reflecting members' shared desire to move away from hierarchical organising and challenge the 'authority of the professional expert' (Rochester, 2006: 32), focus was, in other words, on volunteering as self-help, mutual aid and participation with emphasis on the importance of experiential knowing.

Despite the integration of volunteering into Regather's democratic praxis concerns remained over the reliability of voluntary compared to paid labour (see sub-section 4.2.3), and the viability of projects too reliant on the former. Voicing Regather's concerns, one participant in Cameron's (2009: 108) study explained '[our social enterprise] should not be built on free labour, as that would create a false economy'. Bringing to the fore cooperatives' dual social-economic character, too greater reliance on volunteering was thus seen to contradict their desire to prove that socially motivated enterprises can be financially sustainable. Through her study of European social enterprise, Gardin (2006: 119-120; see also Knutsen, 2013) similarly highlights this contradiction, and its connection to the centrality and embeddedness of reciprocal practices of volunteering discussed above. Expanding on this sense of contradiction, and reflecting Cameron's (2009) concern, she goes on to describe some of the voluntary work carried out in cooperatives as 'forced voluntary participation': 'work carried out without being paid in order to ensure [...] economic balance' (Gardin, 2006: 127). Sandoval (2016: 64; see also Shukaitis, 2010; Vieta, 2010) highlighted similar practices occurring in self-employment cooperatives, explaining that:

Workers might end up co-owning very little or nothing. In order to increase chances of succeeding in competitive markets, worker owners might even reproduce patterns of self-exploitation, working long hours for little pay.

We see an example of this in the following exchange (12/03/15). In this case, Nicole's volunteering is pushed into the realm of 'forced voluntary participation' and self-exploitation. These un-paid working practices continue to be viewed, on the one hand as acts of mutuality, expressions of individual-collective interdependence and commitment to Regather's social mission (see also Knutsen, 2013), and, on the other a

consequence of Regather's relatively early stage of development. However, as Nicole shows, they are nonetheless a source of tension and frustration.

Nicole: I can't do all the markets. [Another employee] wanted me to work there every other Saturday and last week I worked an extra 16 hours over the weekend for Regather on top of the 16 hours I get paid for.

Fran: Aren't you getting paid for the markets?

Nicole: We haven't worked that out yet. The point is that I only got to see my partner when he isn't at work in the evenings and weekends and I feel like Regather is increasingly encroaching on that time. I'm not really happy with it and I'm not willing to continue doing it.

Fran: If this is the case we need to pay another person to work on the markets.

Nicole: Until we are making some money we can't. We just have to work with what we have got.

In contrast to Nicole who identified boundaries associated with her time and energy, Tim identifies (FG3) financial restrictions to ongoing volunteering. These resonate with Sandoval's (2016: 66) warning, discussed in sub-section 4.1.4, that demands on members' financial and temporal capacity will confine a cooperative's ability to abolish internal inequality.

[...] after speaking to people that have left, they've felt that they have only got so much time to put voluntary hours in and if there wasn't a reward after a period of time then it's difficult to see how you can plan your future out. And people were obviously getting...need to earn money from somewhere else.

By focusing on financial restrictions to volunteering, Tim highlights a contradiction between the acceptance and willingness to volunteer, often as a means to re-imagine the economy, and the need to make the money necessary to survive in the existing

economy. When members were no longer able to internalise this contradiction¹⁸⁴ they were forced to leave. Similarly to Fran and Nicole in the quote above, Tim thus recognises that too great a reliance on volunteering can create a '*stumbling block*' to organisational development, not least by imposing limits to members' long-term involvement. As such volunteering (and un-paid work more broadly) concomitantly demonstrates, and poses limits to, members' commitment. Reflecting on this in relation to his involvement, and taking us critically back to the issue of security discussed at the start of this section, Tim added (FG3):

I can't really remember the reason why I got back [involved] more heavily, but it was kind of around the time where there was more commitment to start putting paid hours in for people, or guarantee them, and getting the ball rolling in that way. And I think that has been a key thing for myself and a lot of other people, to sort of get your teeth into something and feel like you've got some stability.

In addition to highlighting, like Borzaga and Depedri (2009: 85), the necessity for both intrinsic (shared values, social aims, involvement in decision-making) and extrinsic economic rewards, Tim's above comment exposes the organisation as (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 737, emphasis added):

*[...] an incomplete terrain where daily struggles are made and remade, both symbolically and materially, and where people live their beliefs and face contradictions from **living between worlds - the actual existing and the hoped for.***

Acknowledging their position between worlds, members' experiences emphasised that the risk of self-exploitation, and the contradiction between social aims associated with volunteering and economic needs, must be continually discussed and negotiated. This

¹⁸⁴ For example, by balancing volunteering and part-time work, using savings or utilising the support of family and friends.

negotiation, enabled by democratic praxis¹⁸⁵, is part and parcel of challenging the dichotic and hierarchical relation between paid and unpaid labour and to the decoupling of fulfilment and autonomy from work precarity. Through these challenges members questioned the conceptualisation of money as a 'timeless thing that holds our minds in captivity' (Holloway, 2010: 110). They questioned also what constitutes meaningful work, emphasising a commitment to 'valuing the contributions people are able to make' and harnessing social connections (Cameron, 2009: 112). Quoting Kokkinidis (2015: 848):

[...] by rejecting the privileged model of waged labour and by perceiving work as a collectively owned creative potential [cooperatives] offer a platform to question existing capital-labour relations and inter-work relationships.

While these practices did not overcome the contradictions between 'actual existing and the hoped for' worlds, they did demonstrate a desire to escape capitalocentrism and move towards an economy based on mutuality and solidarity. Positioning abstraction and liberation on a continuum, the focus was therefore on 'push[ing] in the direction of self-determination and away from the tyranny of abstract labour' (Young and Schwartz, 2012: 224). This 'pushing' constituted emphasising and utilising the interdependence of paid and unpaid work; recognising and building upon member's skills and offering them new experiences; empowering them to make desired changes to their own lives, their community or their environment; and including them in decision-making processes (Cameron, 2009).

¹⁸⁵ Not least by the ongoing promotion of an ethic of care.

5.2.2: Wage setting in a democratic context

As discussed in the introduction to this section, volunteering is no longer expected or required¹⁸⁶ at Beanies. Despite this difference members continued to view self-determination as a means to valuing work above and beyond pay. In FG2 Gemma explained:

At least though for me it became easier to accept pay cuts when it was for my benefit you know, about being part of the decision-making process and taking ownership for my work. And yes, hopefully you know, you feel as though what you put in at some point it will yield rewards. In my previous business we were just getting more and more things to do and, whilst I didn't strictly take a pay cut, I lost benefits [...] and my pay stayed stationary for a very long time as well, so yes. I don't mind the financial thing if I feel as though my voice is being heard and that kind of thing, and we are all going in the same direction. So while ever that happens then you know, I am happy to do what is necessary. But yes, in an ideal world we would like to build the business up and get everyone on a decent standard of living.

In this quote we see that involvement in decision-making and a sense of ownership is viewed to compensate for reductions in wages (Kokkinidis, 2015: 857; Borzaga and Depedri, 2009). Moreover, we see, as we did in the previous sub-section, the value placed on autonomy and its connection to democratic praxis. As this section progresses, analysis will reveal how this connection supports the decoupling of autonomy from work insecurity, specifically by enabling collective decisions to maintain wage fluidity, over reductions in the quantity or availability of work. The extent and impact of this fluidity and its relation to organisational income are captured in the following FG2 exchange:

¹⁸⁶ Members have however been required to accept late payment of wages due to financial challenges. I also observed members working beyond their agreed hours and not claiming this back in pay (Kokkinidis, 2015). In some cases, this was done because members enjoyed the work and wanted to develop a specific aspect of the business. In other cases, it was done out of necessity. As illustrated in sub-section 4.2.2, these practices did not go unchallenged.

Chris: Yes certainly, I think with a business like Beanies when you are in a particular sphere of trading business - food and retail - there is a temptation to pitch your wage level at the sort of market norm I suppose but there's no reason to do that. It's your business, as a coop you can decide what you want to be earning and make your business work towards that. Yes. Certainly, when we were on £10 an hour it had a very different feel, a very much more motivating feel than when you are constantly just scrabbling. It has been hard over the last few years when we have had to take pay cuts to keep the momentum going, keep the morale up.

Rocky: How dramatic were your biggest pay cuts?

Chris: I think we were on £10 an hour and that went down to 9.50 I think and then to 8.50.

Rocky: In one go from 9.50 to 8.50?

Chris: Yes. In fairly quick succession.

Rocky: Because it is unusual for any business to take a pay cut because of inflation going the other way.

Chris: Well, we had always operated on the system whereby you...we gave ourselves a reasonably pay...as reasonable as we could...and then topped it up with bonuses and then when we went to £10 per hour the bonuses ran out because you are using more of it in the wages (Rocky: Yes) and we only went up on the understanding that if times got harder we would have to bring it down again, which they did...so we did. But it was hard. It was hard.

This exchange brings to the fore three points. First we see, as we did in Regather, that despite non-monetary motivations wages, and specifically wages perceived as “fair”, continue to play a role in maintaining morale¹⁸⁷. This was similarly seen to be the case

¹⁸⁷ In an e-mail sent in response to the collective findings review (03/06/16) Dave questioned the role of wages in driving up morale. In line with Gemma's earlier quote he explained 'I personally don't believe they do. I feel that low wages adversely affect morale but wages that are perceived as 'fair' or 'good' are generally taken as only what people deserve, so are a 'satisfier' once people have them. Although the opportunity to drive up wages to a 'fair' level could be a motivator, once you reach 'fair' I personally feel other factors effect morale far more than money (good working relationships, a fair working environment, a sense of 'worthwhile work', personal learning and development). Hence my being at Beanies!'. This is supported by Boltanski and Chiapello (2007: 8) who, following claims made by work psychologists, argue that 'pay is insufficient to induce commitment and stimulate enthusiasm'.

for part-time staff, whose wages were increased (but never decreased) alongside increases in members' wages. Commenting on the most recently proposed increase, Mark commented (26/03/15) '*there's got to be an incentive to work*'¹⁸⁸.

Second, the exchange brings to the fore the application of wage fluidity as a response to reductions in revenue (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014). As Carlone (2013: 542)¹⁸⁹ found, in this collective response, surplus value was 'directed towards the maintenance of employment levels, rather than towards profit'. Building on this finding and drawing direct links to cooperative ownership and democratic praxis Cheney et al. (2014: 595) explain:

[...] although in both cases, wages and employment were negatively affected, the loss of jobs was much greater in capitalist firms than in worker cooperatives. In this sense, [...] cooperatives also take advantage of employee ownership, which is associated with two types of rights: one pertaining to returns, the other to control. The system allows in many cases for collective decisions about sacrifices in wages and benefits that have the important result of maintaining jobs.

Wages are framed in this system not as an individual right to be fought over but a collective resource shared for long-term individual-collective benefit (Clementer et al., 2012; Cornwell, 2011). In contrast to participants' experiences of redundancy (see sub-section 5.4.1), this approach supported employment stability over profit and enabled members to become (collectively) '*more in control of [their] own future[s]*' (Dave, narrative; see also Restakis, 2012; Borzaga and Depedri, 2009). I argue therefore that it is through this framing that members countered the interconnection between autonomy, and precarious and insecure work conditions. As Cheney et al. (2014) highlight, I found that members collective right to benefit from and determine the use of surplus, combined with their understanding of autonomy as a collective

¹⁸⁸ In the absence of participation in Beanies, the incentive to work was considered more important for part-time staff.

¹⁸⁹ For a comparison of cooperative and capitalist organisations' response to recession see, for example, Ben-Ner and Jones (1995).

project supported by acts of interdependence, forms the very basis to a more secure working environment distinct in its commitment to maintaining member numbers over profit.

Finally, Chris and Rocky's exchange highlights that ownership and democratic praxis enables members to set wages differently to the market norm. As is the case in Regather, the following meeting extract (26/03/15) reveals how accepted approaches to valuing labour were debated, resisted and challenged in order to encompass social as well as economic aims, including a commitment to collectively fair wages.

Chris: If you are talking about the living wage...what we briefly talked about last time was a wages policy...where we can decide where we want to be (Heather: Yes) and gradually move towards it. And obviously things will change as we do that. But we can say, 'living wage, that's our target, to get our part-timers on to a living wage' (Jake: Right) and we can sort of adopt a scheme by which we try to plan that in and look at ways of increasing revenue and things like that in order to be able to facilitate that. I think that is the idea of a wages policy, is you use the incentive of getting your wages up to the level that you want them to be to drive other sort of energies in the company really, like profit making. [...]

Jake: I know it's a spanner in the works but should we be paying [the living wage]? We obviously get more than the living wage, but [part-timers] are getting less.

Mark: Yes, but for part-timers that's different because that is just...they are not relying on that job for living...that's why they can get less. Living wage is for people who use that job to live where as a part-timer just does it while they are tossing off at university. No offence Kiri.

I consider protesting but instead shrug and allow the conversation to progress.¹⁹⁰

Rocky: I think that can't be said for all the part-timers looking at how much people work though.

Chris: Yes, but it is choices they make.

Mark: [...] that's the difference. Living wage; I think they set that up because that is how much it costs to live in that area and feed yourself. There probably isn't any enjoyment in that life £7.65 or whatever. So that is what I think it is...I don't think the part-timers...I think increasing that to what it is they will be happy enough.

[...]

Chris: I think there is something about it for me that is to do with our role as a sort of social aware and ethical employer, that if, you know, there is this idea that you should be paying people as much as you can within certain parameters.

Heather: Which is one of the things that we have always said, which is why I said it before, [we want to] actually increase part-timers wage.

Mark: Which is why we always pay them above the minimum isn't it¹⁹¹.

Heather: Or we have always tried to isn't it...

Mark: They could go somewhere else and get minimum wage.

Heather: Yes, yes. But hopefully they come to us for another reason as well not just the money.

Dave: And there are other things that help the cost of living, because they get free fruit and veg which is a bonus for all of us.

¹⁹⁰ While recognising that my reaction to Mark's comment does not converge with the adoption of a solidarity action research framework, it was motivated by a desire to observe how practices and understandings were collectively developed, and the extent to which Mark's views were endemic to Beanies (see section 2.2 for further discussion). We see as the conversation unfolds that Mark's comments were challenged first by Rocky on the basis of hours worked by part-timers, and second by Chris on the basis of ethical business practice. A more fundamental question, excluded from this conversation, is whether it is appropriate to use part-time, non-member, workers at all. This challenging issue is touch on later in this chapter but warrants further research beyond this thesis.

¹⁹¹ Members aspired to pay part-time staff 'either 20 or 50p more than the minimum wage' (Heather, 26/03/15) and offered additional bonuses of a 10% discount on items bought in the shop, and free (and prioritised) access to low quality or out of date produce (known as 'chod'). For some staff (including myself) this 'chod' made a significant contribution to reducing living costs.

We again see in this exchange that wage levels are determined, not by market norms¹⁹² or minimum legal requirements, but by the fluctuating and *interdependent* aims and needs of both the individual and the collective. The concept of the minimum and living wage were debated in relation to the (perceived) needs of workers, the limits imposed, and opportunities created, by business revenue and the organisation's role as an ethical and socially aware employer (Gibson-Graham, 2003).

Moreover, we see in this debate that the generation of profit is understood to set parameters for, and as a means to increase, the wages of both members and part-time staff. As illustrated by Fran, Gareth and Tim below in Regather's case, where expenditure continues to outstrip revenue, paying members a fair and living wage is prioritised above the generation of profit (30/04/15).

Fran: We are making three quarters of a grand a week on the [sale of vegetable] boxes. I just put figures in [a spread sheet] each week. It's funny how money just flows through you.

Tim: That's encouraging. Hopefully it will keep increasing.

Gareth: It is encouraging but we want a profit margin. We don't just want a turnover, we want a profit.

Fran: If you paid us minimum wage we would make a profit.

Gareth: That's a good idea (smiling).

Fran: But you pay us a fair wage...which is an even better idea. It's something we can be proud of, isn't it?

Gareth: Yes absolutely.

While we see here once again, the impact of Beanies' and Regathers' life stages on their organisational practice, we see also a common understanding of the role of revenue in relation to social aims. Specifically, the examples show that wages are not viewed as an expense that eats into revenues, and therefore an expense that should be minimised for the sake of profit. Rather, maximised wages are viewed as

¹⁹² In their study of Mondragon cooperative, Gibson-Graham (2003: 142-3) found that wage context (specifically wages offered by similar local organisations) and a commitment to 'equilibrio and solidarity' within and beyond their cooperative, did impact on wage setting practices.

'something to be proud of', integral to the organisation's social aims, and a central motivator for the generation of profit. This furthers our understanding of Chris' earlier comment that profit is *'significant only in that it allows the business to continue to make that bit of profit that we make'*. Situating analysis of wage setting practices in the context of an ethic of care, business continuation is seen to require, not only the ongoing production of revenue but also a commitment to collectively fair wages that recognise individual-collective interdependence and ensures ongoing member involvement and wellbeing.

Reflecting on data presented in this and the previous sub-section, my analysis resonates with Cornwell's (2012: 735) finding that:

[...] in contrast to a capitalist shop, the boundary between necessary and surplus labor and the distribution of surplus is visibly and verbally negotiated [and] varies according to the cost of production, including wages and benefits, which are rates that must be continually negotiated.

In these negotiations we see that, while accepting the commodification of labour as necessary and appreciating the motivational role of financial reward, in neither organisation was labour reduced to socially necessary labour time (Shukaitis, 2010; Cleaver, 2000). This constituted resisting normative practices of defaulting to minimum legal wage requirements, and the push toward individualised and competitive practices of wage maximisation. The aim rather was to earn a 'decent living' while helping others – colleagues, the community and future members – to do the same. As Dave (Beanies, 03/06/16) explained during the collective findings review:

My quote saying 'we want a pay rise' I feel needs context! This comes from the fact we all do want a pay rise because we feel we deserve it we want to be more financially comfortable, and as a minimum that we need to be able to at least keep pace with minimum wage and additional cost of things like auto-enrolment which are a legal requirement. As a group, we seem to sometimes lack the awareness of future rising costs and so the need to increase trading profit (as opposed to overall

operating profit) to cover these additional expenses. This is, I feel, in part to the strong ethics of the coop members, in putting others first.

The aim to balance needs and ethos within and beyond the organisation gave rise to processes of ‘collective bargaining’ that accepted wage fluidity (in the case of Beanies) and the blurring of the volunteer/paid labour dichotomy (in the case of Regather) as a means to develop and maintain job security. By asking members to ‘consider their needs in relation to the needs of others’ (Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 67) these practices both relied upon and reinforced democratic subjectivities, brought the ‘sociality of the economy to the fore’ (Gibson-Graham, 2003: 156), and encouraged ongoing engagement in practices of re-thinking and re-making the economy. Amongst the contradictions and challenges of wage setting, I found therefore a commitment to (Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 65):

[...] building an ethical economy through pay equity, thereby acknowledging that each worker can make a living and have their needs met without harming other workers¹⁹³.

Bringing together practices of ‘collective bargaining’ with members’ acceptance of individual-collective interdependence, we begin to see members as ‘communal subject[s]’ (Byrne and Healy, 2006: 249):

One could understand such a person as a subject of two contradictory demands: (a) a worker-subject concerned with his or her individual reproduction; and (b) an owner-subject occupied with the continued viability of the firm. Instead we choose to theorize this subject as a communal subject who is located in, and identifies with, the gap between his/her individual self and the social space of the firm and its reproduction.

¹⁹³ An acknowledgement that sits in stark contrast to Dave’s past experience of: ‘*all the back biting and all the people wanting to climb over people*’ in competition for pay rises that are now only given to ‘*the top 10%*’ (FG1; see sub-section 3.1.2).

In the former division we see the origin of concerns that 'self-interest will be the downfall of worker cooperatives' (Cornwell, 2011: 735). This concern was captured in research carried out by Puusa and Hokkila (2015) who concluded that the dual nature of a cooperative no longer constitutes its social and economic aims but rather the aims and needs of the individual and the collective. As Zamagni (2014: 161) argues I have found that this individual-collective contradiction is addressed through members' commitment to mutuality and solidarity and their understanding of autonomy as a collective project. More specifically, this section counters this concern by bringing to the fore processes of communal bargaining and the fluid and negotiable nature of the necessary/surplus boundary, and consequently theorising members as communal subjects.

5.2.3: Social values vs economic needs: negotiating the dual social-economic characteristic

The constant negotiation of social aims and economic needs discussed in relation to wages extended across multiple decisions. As Chris explained in the introduction, having a business focus '*without being overwhelmed by the need to make a profit*' is a difficult balance to strike. The following exchange (FG3) captures the difficult relationship with profit observed in both organisations.

Nicole: Isn't it only as simple as in a corporate world where profit is the bottom line, it's like ethics are our bottom line? (Tim: Yes, sure, yes) It's as simple to apply that?

Tim: But coops can be like...Money can be the bottom line of the coop, can't it.

Nicole: If it is being reinvested I suppose¹⁹⁴.

Tim: I'm not saying our coop, but it could be couldn't it...kind of...

Gareth: It would be nice if it was like that.

Laughing

¹⁹⁴ During a discussion on the vegetable box's turnover, Lisa expressed a similar view explaining (fieldnote, 04/12/14): '*the aim is not to make a profit. It is to break even. Not to rip anyone off.*' She expressed a view (with a questioning tone) that making a profit would be against Regather's aims/values.

Nicole: No it wouldn't.

[...]

Gareth: Just to like have enough money to like, have that as an issue...sorry!

We see here that profit was simultaneously viewed as a requirement and as a potential distraction from the organisation's ethical bottom line: a further example of the contradictions arising from the organisations' 'incomplete terrain' and position 'between worlds' (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 737). Emphasising the need to achieve a balance, members of Regather went on to explain (FG3):

Tim: There is a really tough argument though because you could like, you know, there is the ultimate trouble that there could be so many good ideas that could come about but do they actually work in terms of providing enough money to like kind of pay the wages and the bills?

Nicole: Well, we do need to weigh that up in every decision we make because otherwise we would just be feeding the 5000 everyday wouldn't we? We would just be inviting people in everyday and feeding them for free and doing whatever we could for free. But we do try and make financially viable decisions. Sometimes they're not but...

At Beanies, members similarly expressed concerns over balancing the need to make money with the risk of getting 'stuck in the thing of getting everything as cheap as possible' (Heather, FG1) and forgetting the cooperative principles and organisation ethic. During one members' meeting (26/03/15), Mark explains his concern over the latter¹⁹⁵.

¹⁹⁵ Mark expressed similar concerns in a discussion with an ex-member, over the box price increase. The member told me about the conversation during an observation session on 14/03/15 (from fieldnotes): 'Mark asked whether I thought the box price increase should go on increasing the amount spent on vegetables, or to increase profit margins, or a little on both'. Mark had explained to him that in a previous meeting other coop members thought that it should go on profit margin but having seen the vegetable prices Mark had got worried, and was thinking of going back to coop members to discuss it more. (When I asked Heather about the box increase on 11/03/15 she said that the additional money was going on vegetables which had increased in price. She said that they had been buying cheaper produce in order to keep the cost of the box the same but this had been reducing the quality of the box. This risked driving customers away as they expect a quality box and are using Beanies because of this). The member I was speaking to went on to explain: 'My response to Mark was influence by the visit to Unicorn, specifically by their focus on looking after the customer'. He commented that it was nice to see that there is another way – to focus on the customer and understand that if you don't do this you might lose them and then the price increase would be a waste of time.

Mark: This just leads into my other business bit...[the] pricing of things. It depends on [for] me on where you want to drive this. I know that we are talking about making more money and that sort of thing, we put the [price of the vegetable] boxes up, [but] there are two or three things here that I have noticed are overpriced [Mark gives some examples]. We are buying them for x amount and we are still putting them out for this. Some of this when we started, when I started, some of the Beanies thing was to give the customer back something. I don't know whether it is across the board that these things happen but I think some of that, when we are saying let's make as much money as we can, whether we are losing something of the essence. And because if you have been to Unicorn and realise that they didn't make money by trying to rook as many people as they could as fast as they could. They earned it by reputation.

[...]

Evan: It's not...there are certain items that get sold for more money, but it's not a lot. And some of the veg and fruit and the organic pricing of vegetables isn't the full mark up because it would be too expensive. So the margin on that isn't as big as it would be because we are thinking about the customer.

[...]

Chris: It's like that thing that [ex-member] used to peel all the stickers off the Provamel when it was on [promotional offer of] £1.19.

Mark: It's just annoying. It's robbing. [As a] community shop we are supposed to be... (Heather: yes, yes, yes) so we got to think, you know what I mean.

[...]

Dave: We want a pay rise.

Mark: You got to think of Beanies ethic. If there is any left.

We see in this exchange that decisions about pricing are not rationale economic acts or straight forward decisions based on product income verses expenditure in the here

and now. Evan's comment reveals practices of cross subsidisation, that saw prices of some products inflated to counterbalance losses accrued through the sale of organic produce at more affordable prices. These practices played a crucial role in supporting Beanies' social aim of promoting and increasing the accessibility to organic food. Together with Mark's comparative reference to a similar worker cooperative, these pricing practices also encompass an awareness of 'the market': the direct and indirect competition that informs both product price and approaches to promotion. This was seen prominently in Regather's decision over the price of tickets for film nights. In this case, the cost of tickets was not calculated based on expenditure but on the cost of attending cinemas and similar events in the local area. This resulted in film nights relying on voluntary labour, a practice problematised in section 5.2.1. This example and Dave's comment brings to light contradictions, not only between economic and social needs, but also between two distinct social aims: the desire to offer a decent wage that enables members to '*be more financially comfortable*' (Dave, e-mail, 03/06/16); and the desire to maintain the organisations' ethos, including product and service accessibility. These concerns add complexity to Mark's opening worry that in focusing too much on financial viability Beanies are deprioritising concern for community and a commitment to fairness.

Taken again from a members' meeting (26/03/15), the following debate on whether to continue supplying one of their competitors similarly reveals the complexity of business decisions and Beanies' commitment to the social aim of promoting organic food. It demonstrates also a wider acknowledgement of interdependence that goes beyond the cooperative to encompass producers and processors of local and organic food.

Evan: Let's stop supplying our competitors with organic fruit and veg.

Yes, that's quick isn't it?

Laughs

Dave: What are the implications of that? Just talk them through.

Evan: Well, my main bug bear, there's all kinds of factors in there, but the main one for me is that it just feel[s] fundamentally wrong that we are

enabling a competitor at our detriment [...] I kind of feel like we are being taken for a ride.

Mark: [...] It's all on the back of us, our wages and our [time] and it's this community shop thing, don't get me wrong, but don't take us for a bleeding ride.

[...]

Evan: Yes, if we weren't such nice people, in some other business world that wasn't a cuddly fruit and veg shop, you would think why on earth are we supplying...

Mark: It wouldn't happen anywhere else.

[...]

Heather: It's to encourage organic [produce].

Mark: You what?

Heather: Encourage organic.

Dave: It depends on the margins.

Mark: We sit round here, every time we have a meeting, we sit round here and say, 'oh the box there's a lot of competition' and then we are supplying to one of them.

Heather: [...] I don't agree necessarily I have to say...I think [its] the fact that we are helping other small independents to develop.

Support for, and interdependence with, other similar local businesses was also observed at Regather. Here it took the forms of the cross-subsidisation of market stalls and resources for new social enterprises. As we saw in the above deliberation, Gareth (20/04/15) recognises that this support needs to be balanced with forms of mutuality that ensure Regather's own sustainability.

Gareth: [...] we are seeing small food businesses come in [and hire low-cost facilities] and then move on because they are growing. We had one that's now in Holland and Barratt and Suma. So they started life here and it's really exciting when you see [business owners] with a bowl each mixing up jam jars which is now being manufactured in a factory facility, distributed nationally and soon to be internationally. So yes, really nice

to see. But the challenge for us is how we kind of get value out of that, buy shares in a company and make a decision early on that they have to be the right kind of company in order for us to see a return on that investment. We are just pitching ourselves at a particular target group that can make the use of this in an economic way from our point of view.

We see from the above quote that for Regather there is an element of risk and long-term investment in striking the social-economic balance. This introduces new and as yet unknown players and outcomes into decision-making processes, adding a further layer of complexity. Reflecting on this, together with Beanies' decision to supply its competitors, and debates over the pricing of produce, brings to the fore my rationale for referring to practices of mutuality, rather than reciprocity, throughout this section. Reflecting the ethic of care identified in relation to the organisations' democratic praxis (chapter 4), the former term recognises the value of shared experience and common interest (see Ince, 2015), and encompasses a temporal element. It recognises, in other words, that exchange is not necessarily direct or instantaneous, but rather can be a (Kropotkin, 2012: xvi):

[...] force that is borrowed by each man [sic] from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own.

In their re-imagining of the 'market' - so often conflated with individualism and self-interest (Cameron and Hicks, 2014) - as a space of mutuality, the organisations thus expressed and extended their understanding of individual-collective interdependence to include those outside of the organisation and future (human and non-human) actors who are as yet unknown. Supported by the organisations' culture of democracy these concerns highlighted each organisations' place in a wider socio-economic and environmental context and, in doing so, acknowledged the overdetermined nature of the economy. We see here, as Gibson-Graham (2006b: 82-3) captures in their chapter on 'The Community Economy' that:

[...] when a cooperative sets its wage level, when a food seller adjusts her price for one customer and not another, when a green firm decides to use higher-price recycled paper [...] when a not-for-profit enterprise commits to “buying local” some recognition of economic co-implication, interdependence and social connection is actively occurring. These practices involve ethical considerations and political decisions that constitute social and economic being.

The deliberations presented in this section have brought to light the dual social-economic characteristic of each cooperative (Somerville, 2007; Atzeni and Vieta, 2014; Cornforth, 2004; Zamagni and Zamagni, 2010). While at times creating tensions and contradictions, the negotiation of this dual role within the context of democratic praxis revealed also opportunities for members to perform an economy that reflected a shared ethic of care towards the community, service users, members and workers. Capturing the latter during a discussion on Beanies’ opening times and related unsociable working hours¹⁹⁶, Mark explained (02/07/15): ‘*We need to think about **what you want to do** regardless of whether you are taking one for team’*. Concluding this discussion, and highlighting once again the importance of empowerment and ownership to the determination of working practices (Cherney et al., 2014; Shukaitis, 2010), Dave summarised (02/07/15):

[Let’s just be aware that] it’s about enjoyment of our job and we work for ourselves so we can determine our work environment. Profit is important but not the only thing.

Similarly capturing members’ ability to perform an economy that supports aims of empowerment and an ethic of care towards the community, Rachel (FG3) described her aim to establish Regather as:

¹⁹⁶ Mark was specifically talking about 8:30pm finishes. Prior to this quote Dave had commented that he doesn’t do the 4am market shift so feels it’s reasonable that he finishes late some days.

[...] a centre for social action in the area. Like empowering people to take more action on things that they are passionate about and to have our own funds to be able to support that are independently generated from our own trading activities to be able to pump back into the community. So to have a specific...to be generating profits that are set aside to support other local people to make their projects possible.

In section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 we saw that profit is understood in both organisations, not as an end in itself, but as a means to improve working conditions and create employment (Cornforth, 2004). This closing quote reveals a further reconceptualisation of profit as a condition of possibility: a ‘means of enacting social commitments’ (Cameron, 2009: 102; Miller, 2013b). While the reconciliation of social and economic objectives remains a major challenge (Amin, 2009), in this reconceptualisation, processes of negotiation and associated risks of degeneration were transformed into opportunities for ‘ethical economic decision-making’ (Cameron, 2009) and the negotiation of the surplus/necessity boundary.

5.3: Reframing efficiency, hierarchy and success in the cooperative context

Expanding on the reconceptualisations of profit presented above, this section explores how dominant narratives of efficiency and hierarchy, and economic notions of success are problematised by each organisation. Emergent understandings of the three concepts simultaneously create the context for and are informed by the contradictions discussed in section 5.2. Reflecting the organisations’ organic approach to development (section 4.1), they demonstrate a commitment to ‘starting from where they are’ and a willingness to innovate ‘with a diversity of economic practices to sustain their operations and enact their ethical commitments’ (Cameron, 2009: 107). Through this willingness to innovate, the organisations align with Parker et al’s (2014b: 625, emphasis added) contention that:

[...] forms of organizing are ‘political’, which is another way of saying that they are contested. They have upsides and downsides, and it simply

isn't possible to say that there are some arrangements which are unambiguously good, and others that are unambiguously bad.

5.3.1: Does it have to be thrashed out? Problematizing efficiency in the context of democracy

Ng and Ng (2009; see also Atzeni and Ghigliani, 2007), found that the most recurrent of all tensions facing cooperatives is between upholding democratic principles and achieving a reasonable level of efficiency. Similarly highlighting this tension Atzeni and Vieta (2014: 47) claim that business managers:

[...] dismiss the idea of collective democratic management as either totally unrealistic, inefficient or as a direct threat to the sustainability of business [often citing] the 'inefficiency of democracy on shop floors when returns must be maximised'. This is the old productivity vs. democracy debate.

This tension between democracy and productivity is, Harnecker (2012: 121) and Charves et al. (2008) claim, a key driver of degeneration towards 'specialized and autonomous management' (see also Ng and Ng, 2009; Cornforth, 1995). While my research suggests that degeneration is by no means inevitable, it did reveal ongoing concerns over the potential inefficiency of collective decision-making processes. In FG2 Gemma, a relatively new member of Beanies, explained:

I don't know, group decisions are an interesting one because if we are working to the future, it does seem to be one that slows the process down. I think we are going about things in the right way but is there a quicker way of doing it? Or does it have to be kind of thrashed out? Or does it need to be that we spend more time discussing things in smaller groups, you know, as you are talking to people rather than having to get everybody in the same room having this discussion?

Adding to arguments made in sub-section 4.1.4, this quote highlights opportunities for challenge and change created by generational encounters. The new perspectives of Gemma, Dave, Jake and Rocky raised questions over established practices and, as will become clear through this section, led to the rebalancing of devolved and group decision-making with a view to improving efficiency.

Resonant with the views of managers discussed by Atzeni and Vieta (2014) and similarly recognising the time-consuming nature of meetings, Tim expressed concerns that collective decision-making gets in the ways of productivity, understood as vital in the context of limited resources and financial challenges¹⁹⁷. In the following quote (FG3), he captures members shared desire to focus on positive action not talk: a desire encompassed also in members' shared "do-it-yourself" mentality (Land and King, 2014; Davis, 2013).

That's something that I find difficult about...all the great things about the rave culture that I experience and bought into, I find the rhetoric sometimes too much [and] obviously doing something that is just kind of so fundamentally, you know, kind of focused on your outcomes is important. I don't know, for [community music festival] it was a good idea to have these community meetings all the time, twice a month, where everyone makes decisions but it just turned into these meeting that no one wanted to be there, everyone's clock watching, everyone's like, oh my god another meeting. Decisions would be made but actually there was a better way, that we never really achieved, of making the same collective decisions but in a more stream-line way and one where, actually a lot of people, who were keen to meet didn't even feel empowered to make decisions.

Again, reflecting processes of individual-collective alignment presented in section 4.1 this quote reveals how Tim's understanding of what constitutes efficient decision-making was informed by wider experiences of the rave culture and organising

¹⁹⁷ As we saw in chapter 4, this concern posed a significant barrier to implementing a regular meeting schedule.

community music festivals. Drawing parallels between these two experiences he expressed his frustration at, and posed challenges to, processes that dedicated too much time to rhetoric and not enough to action. Moreover, he used his experiences to decouple member empowerment from meeting-centric decision-making processes. Thus, we see in both of the above cases that the organisation's democratic praxis creates opportunities for members to critique, not only dominant capitalist narratives, but cooperative narratives that position empowerment and collective decision-making in the same sphere. Tensions between efficiency and the democratic practice of 'the meeting' were used, in other words, as a means to continuously develop new practices that sought to balance productivity and collective decision-making. Building on the decoupling of collective decision-making and empowerment endorsed by Tim, the following exchange and monologue explore how this balance is achieved.

During one observation session (fieldnote, 16/01/15) Heather and Mark explained:

Heather: There are subdivisions so you don't need to take decisions to everyone all of the time.

Mark: We have subdivisions of one! (Laughs) We don't take every little decision to everyone. I don't know if that doesn't make us a proper coop.

In FG2 Rocky challenges Mark's problematic view of 'sub-divisions' reframing the devolution of decisions as a necessary democratic practice.

And for me, one of the keys is working out at what level things need to be decided. There are only certain things that need to be decided by the whole group coming together and talking about it, and if the seven members here come together to talk about something for an hour that's a day's work taken up. So it's a big investment, one hours meeting for the whole group.

By framing collective decision-making as an 'investment' Rocky introduced a new narrative to the debate, taking discussion beyond the efficient use of members' time, to highlight the financial cost of meetings. In Regather, where the limited capacity to

pay wages places increasing pressure on members to use paid time productively, this narrative was expressed and felt more acutely. As Tim explained (26/06/15): *'We only get paid a certain number of hours. So even an hour in a week is like 1/16th of my time'*. Returning to Rocky's quote, these concerns led him to draw on his wider experience of cooperative working to propose the devolution to decisions to 'sub-groups':

So if you can, in the ideal world, in my opinion and what I have studied, you have sub-groups that work on things [...] What we did at [housing coop] at one point is we divided the running of the coop into seven different areas and allocated two people to each one, so their own little working group that work on it. And then they report back, say what they have been doing to the meeting. If they have anything they are not sure about that can go wider and pose that question but they have already done the research on the question so they will say right, these are the options, we could go with this or this, pros or cons and get everyone to give their voice, rather than having a question of, right, we need to do something about the state of the building and then everyone starting to talk, throw out their ideas and coming up with, 'oh, someone needs to look at this, someone needs to look at that'¹⁹⁸. You would get people to come straight away with it and lay out the option so it's still completely democratic it's just...I mean for me...and this is just repeating a conversation I had over the weekend...part of that is about trusting the people and that can only really work if you trust the people [...] Like I have had it in [cycle coop] that there's people that you know are going to go on that working group just to ensure their best interests are served and then it ruins...it's a waste of every ones time on that working group and it means the thing doesn't get dealt with because they have sort of wrecked it. So you do have to have the right people and trust them. So

¹⁹⁸ Reflecting Rocky's concerns in an earlier observation, Dave (fieldnote, 04/03/15) explained: *'We need to prioritise better [in meetings]. We try to cover everything rather than focusing on a few select things'*. He went on to add *'people tend to try and solve problems in meetings even if they don't have all the information; rather than going away and coming back the next meeting with a solution.'*

yes, the key for me is trying to make each decision with the minimum number of people involved that you need to make them.

Towards the end of this quote Rocky balances the potential temporal and financial benefits of devolved decision-making with the caveat that maintaining democratic praxis relies on the positioning of these processes within a framework of individual-collective interdependence and ‘the right mix of people’ (see sub-section 4.1.5)¹⁹⁹. I similarly observed these frameworks at play in Regather. Here, the infrequency of meetings emphasised the need for a shared understanding of individual and collective aims and needs. In line with Rocky’s negative experience, the rejection of an individualist notion of the self in favour of a ‘more socialised self’ (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 480) formed the basis to trusting relationships that, in turn, enabled project teams to make decisions in the interest of the collective²⁰⁰. In addition to helping Regather to balance their dual-characteristic these practices maintained a desired focus on learning-through-action.

The debates presented here support the interconnection between degeneration and organisational form discussed in sub-section 1.3.2. They do so by highlighting that risks of degeneration, associated with concerns over inefficiency, can be resisted only in the context of democratic *praxis* that enlarges democracy beyond formal structures and practices of collective decision-making. This argument recognises that, when limited to full members’ meetings, collective decision-making can become inefficient. Like Rocky, I observed discussions in Beanies fortnightly meetings going around in circles as members grappled with issues they did not have the required information to resolve. However, within a framework that reflects, and is formed through, the shared ways of thinking, being and acting outlined in chapter 4, what constitutes collective

¹⁹⁹ Reflecting on processes of devolved decision-making in Regather (see chapter 4), and particularly on the interconnection between these processes and the persistent presence of informal hierarchies, I would add to this framework transparency and information sharing. Somewhat paradoxically, as illustrated in sub-section 4.2.1, transparency and information sharing themselves require some degree of meeting practice. However, turning again to Rocky’s experience, when combined with the implementation of ‘sub-groups’ focused on specific business areas, meetings that are deemed necessary become more efficient.

²⁰⁰ To use examples referred to in section 4.2, in Regather the decision to spend money improving the events space was made by the events team on the understanding that all members shared a desire to develop the organisation’s capacity as a social centre. Similarly, in Beanies, Dave’s selection of possible energy suppliers recognised a shared concern for the environment.

and democratic decision-making can be questioned and expanded. A decision can be delegated to members who have access to relevant information or made autonomously without losing the collective ethos.

In and amongst ongoing debates about how to balance democracy and productivity, and the implementation of approaches to achieve greater efficiency, lengthy collective decision-making processes remained highly valued. As Chris explained (FG2):

The other tricky thing which we all know about which can take forever [is making-decisions], but again, I think it's a process that is a valuable process, and it's one that makes you check and double check your decisions all the way through. The fact that you are trying to come to a consensus. So, yes, you end up with a good decision I think...If you get to a decision. But it can take a long time to get there.

Situating this quote in the context of a commitment to organic and incremental change, we see that while striving for efficiency, both organisations value the slowness and process of democracy as a 'materialization of a desire for something better' (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 741; Arthur et al., 2010). As Parker et al. (2014b: 627) explain:

If the intention of the organization's members is to take decisions slowly and democratically, then the very process of organizing in a particular way becomes a reward, as well as a process by which other goals might be achieved.

Through the tension between having time to debate and the need to act, collective decision-making thus maintains an important role. As illustrated in sub-section 4.2.1, the process of reaching an ever-contested consensus was a means of valuing the individual, foregrounding relationships and inter-being, and ultimately giving rise to well thought through decisions. This understanding prioritises member inclusion and consensus over rapid market response (Kokkinidis, 2015: 863), and acknowledges that without consensus 'internal group efficiency would be much worse' (Chatterton and

Pickerill, 2010: 482). As such protracted meetings, while frustrating, are embraced as having multiple ends beyond a decision on a given matter. From this perspective, what is and is not efficient must be re-understood in the context of each organisations' conceptualisation of success, explored further in sub-section 5.3.3.

5.3.2: Without a contract you can't enforce it: reframing hierarchy in a framework of democratic praxis

In addition to the practices established to enable more efficient collective decision-making I observed both organisations developing systems to '*create a hierarchy that is otherwise missing*' (Chris, FG2). These systems acknowledged on the one hand, the challenges inherent to the organisations' flat structure and on the other members desire to move away from working in bureaucratic and hierarchical organisational forms (see section 5.4). As was the case with the conceptualisations of efficiency, these systems reflect and are shaped by the organisations' democratic praxis. I found therefore like Kokkinidis (2015: 848), that democracy was used as a 'platform to critique [...] hierarchical relations of work' and as a means to develop workable alternatives.

As explained in sub-section 4.1.5, the process of becoming a member in both organisations is based on the development of trust and respect, and on ongoing processes of individual-collective alignment. As such it foregrounds human interaction and relationships over more static formal agreements. While this foregrounding is viewed as necessary to finding the right mix of people, the absence of job descriptions and employment contracts in the context of a flat, democratic structure makes it difficult to deal with personnel issues. This is illustrated in the following exchange (26/03/15). The exchange forms part of a wide discussion on the possibility of reducing members required hours from full, to part-time²⁰¹:

²⁰¹ Earlier in the meeting, in response to Heather's concern that if some members worked part-time others would follow, Dave argued that if a reduction in hours was requested this could be refused based on an existing contractual agreement. In response to this argument, the following discussion unfolded: *Evan: But as coop members we don't have a contract. Dave: I had a contract when I started. Heather: You started as a trainee not as a coop member. Then you started as a director...now you don't have a contract. Mark: Do what you bleeding want now. You're off the hook!*

Heather: I do understand that [by requiring members to work full-time] we are missing the opportunity of potentially good people. I do understand all of that. I just don't think...I think we have had so many problems with people saying, I am only working these [hours], I can only do that and I can only do this, and it caused so many problems.

Mark: Yes it did.

Dave: Without a contract you can't enforce [it].

Heather: You can't enforce anything when people have been there and they are then coop members and then they start going I'm not doing it, I'm not doing it, I'm not doing it.

Mark: This is a whole business rethink isn't it?

Heather: We have only just got to that point now where people are actually covering shifts and we have got the right mix of people that are prepared to do extra hours and stuff like that. If we go back to that state again everyone will just go 'well they're not doing it, I'm not doing it'.

Members of Regather similarly found that the absence of formal agreements, *combined* with individual-collective dis-alignments emphasised by Heather above²⁰², limited the capacity to ensure roles and responsibilities were being fulfilled, again with negative consequences in relation to meeting collective needs. Discussing an issue with one member, Gareth explained (17/07/15):

[...] for past few months Nicole has felt directionless and that has been the basis of a negative feedback loop. I have asked her to do something and she has taken that as a top down management issue. Things aren't being done so we are getting the negative aspects of the things that aren't being done.

Wider observations highlighted the complex nature of Nicole's sense of "directionlessness", and specifically its entanglement with the limited availability of

²⁰² This 'combination' was captured in a discussion between myself and Dave (Beanies), through which it emerged that members' job descriptions are not required until the 'spirit or culture of the organisation starts to get lost' (fieldnote, 13/05/15).

paid hours; the organic nature of the organisation; the absence of regular meetings and role-sharing; and (the interrelated) pressures experienced by Gareth²⁰³. In and amongst this complexity, we see a dis-alignment between Nicole's understanding of, and desires in relation to, her role and the organisation's needs. When Gareth sought to address this dis-alignment his requests were perceived as an act of leadership that further reinforced the informal hierarchies discussed in sub-section 4.2.3.

Following these experiences, both organisations have recognised the need for, and started to work towards, job descriptions that reflect the business' needs. However, like Cornwell (2011: 730) I found that contracts were not viewed as means of controlling or owning labour body-time. Rather they were understood as a means of expressing and agreeing individual-collective needs and supporting processes of alignment. As such, members acknowledged that both the act and product of writing contracts must reflect and encompass the organisation's democratic praxis. Contracts were not something to be imposed but something to be collectively constructed. As Fran (Regather, 17/07/15) implored in one members' meeting: '*I think the roles of the workers and the roles of the directors needs to be something that everyone feeds into*' (see sub-section 4.2.3 for full discussion). Moreover, as is the case with the organisations' governing documents, job descriptions were conceived as loose frameworks for action: documents that (when developed) should reflect members' values and how they want to work, and address business needs, without limiting role flexibility and re-definition. The following exchange (FG2) from Beanies highlights the benefits of such an approach.

Chris: Just to go back on the job description again, I think what it does is creates a hierarchy that is otherwise missing [...] The most useful aspect of having a hierarchy is being able to say, 'well this is what it says, this is

²⁰³ This is captured in the following fieldnote extract (11/12/14, meeting between Gareth and Nicole): *Gareth: [Pointing to a job on a list] This is one thing that I would like to you to do? Nicole: And you don't think that I am doing this? (Laughs). Gareth: No not at all. Nicole: I only work 16-hours and I trying to be as reactive to the changing needs of business as possible. As we get more obvious threads developing it will get easier to manage. Gareth expressed concern that Regather was not giving Nicole the support she needed to do 'useful stuff'. In agreement, Nicole explained that she wants to ask Gareth questions he is likely to know answers to but is concerned he is always busy. Gareth: What you have observed there is how I feel.* This extract indicated that, the 'negative feedback loop' described by Gareth includes, not only the cycle of Nicole sense of 'directionlessness' and incomplete tasks, but also the constant reproduction of informal hierarchies underlying the 'management issue'.

what the thing says that you have to be doing' and you don't have that in a coop apart from the rest of the group. And if any one member is not accepting the voice of the rest of the group for any reason then it becomes very difficult. If you have got your tool up there, your instrument saying this is what it says, it gives you something impersonal to battle with, to deal with.

Rocky: And it does that more so as well because it is something that that person has to have signed up to initially, so they made a conscious agreement. So again, it might be very difficult to introduce it when things aren't how you want it because then it is the majority imposing their will on you.

Chris: Which [last time Beanies tried to put a contract in place] was kind of the direction that we were going in. We were moving towards a point where we were going to finalise this thing and everyone would have to sign up to it and there was a member who wouldn't be prepared to sign up to it. And so, in a sense, we were following it in order for that situation [everyone signing up to it] not to come about, which felt unkind and unhealthy and yet, kind of essential at the same time. While we are not in that situation it would be good to get it done.

In Chris' closing reflection and Gareth's experience described above, we see that seeking to resolve individual-collective dis-alignment either through the application of individual leadership or the imposition of new systems of hierarchy by a proportion of the collective, risks creating relations of power and exclusion that undermine democratic praxis. Conversely, if these systems are developed through '*conscious agreement*' to reflect and encompass democratic praxis, they offer a kind of quasi-hierarchy that defers not to individual control but to collective self-rule (Cheney et al., 2014; see also sub-section 4.2.3). In Regather, I saw examples of these quasi-hierarchies in the collective development of a cleaning rota, an events calendar and an online accounts system that supported shared responsibility and transparency. In Beanies, they took the form of a task list (see sub-section 4.1.3) and weekly shift rota. Describing the role played by the latter which is, as far as possible, designed to meet

members preferences and to utilise their willingness to voluntarily cover shifts, Chris explained (FG2):

Nobody just takes time off without it being a major sort of...(Gemma: It's because it's a right old headache when you do!)...well yes. But there's an acceptance of that... There's an agreement that that is the case and that the kind of, rota rules in a sense (Laughs).

Following Kokkinidis (2015: 849 see also Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010) the rotas, calendars and job description discussed in this section offer examples of 'soft infrastructures' that reject 'the creation of hierarchical forms of governance and the exclusion of diversity' while acknowledging the need for 'a repertoire of organizational innovations' that address the challenges of democratic praxis. These soft infrastructures, when developed collectively to reflect the shared ways of thinking and being together discussed in chapter 4, did not mimic bureaucratic structures or detract from a commitment to member equality but rather provided the conditions for shared responsibility, individual-collective alignment and transparency to be maintained. Two arguments can be made from this. First, as was the case with systems developed to balance efficiency and collective decision-making, systems of hierarchy are not counter to democratic praxis but integral to its maintenance. Second, building on arguments made in sub-section 4.2.3 where we saw democratic praxis offering a platform to critique and challenge the formation of informal hierarchies, we see in this section that it offers also a platform from which to critique hierarchical relations of work more broadly. It does so, not by claiming that hierarchy is not necessary, but by utilising shared ways of thinking and being to reframe hierarchy. This reframing sees hierarchy reconceived from an issue of leadership and control grounded in stable individual attributes and charisma, to a collectively negotiated and relationally constructed issue of accountability, care for the other and shared responsibility (Cornwell, 2011; Sutherland et al., 2014; Gibson-Graham, 2003). It became, in Cheney et al's (2014: 596) words, a practice grounded in 'solidarity-based, dialogic, and democratic values where the group is the key level of concern'

5.3.3: Reshaping understandings of success

At the start of the focus groups I asked members where they saw their organisations in 10 years' time. The question was initially designed as an icebreaker but proved particularly revealing in relation to understanding what constitutes 'success' in each organisation. I have included responses from members of Regather and Beanies below.

Tim (Regather): I like the idea of it becoming a real social hub with the all the things going on, it kind of being a place that's constantly in use; a multitude of people using it for different varieties [of things] and then coming together in an evening and stuff like that. I think that that would be really great and obviously with the tentacles reaching out into other events, or the veg box, or any other you know, social conscience kind of activities that we can really. And yes, keeping the ethos really positive on the values that we are already trying to use today, keeping that true. And maybe also getting paid more (laughs), everybody having access to more hours and more wages and things like that.

Similarly focusing on ethos and connection to community, Gemma (FG2) and Heather (FG1) explained:

Gemma: I would like to somehow stay in this community. And yes, still offering fairly unique options for the community, supporting it. But yes, doing it more efficiently would be nice.

Heather: I think I agree with Evan really. I think, I hope anyway, that it will continue in the same sort of ethics and stuff that it always has been for the last 30 years. Which I don't suppose if you ask that question to everybody that started it up 30 years ago and they thought it would still be here, let alone...But I think they probably would have hoped it had the same ethics.

These responses reveal that, for both organisations, success was defined by the maintenance and development of social objectives and ethos rather than in relation to

size or profit. While appearing to align with dominant size/profit narratives Tim's reference to increasing the level and availability of pay and Gemma's desire to see more efficient working practice are, as outlined in previous sections, understood as central to the maintenance of both their democratic praxis and wider social aims. Similarly, references made to the expansion of the services and products were made in the context of aspirations to increase the reach of '*social conscience kind of activities*' and maintain organisational ethos; a desire to promote community economies by example; and a drive to create more opportunities for meaningful work (Cornwell, 2011). As such, in all three cases – improved wages, efficiency, and expansion – the aim was to build on the opportunities democratic praxis creates for cultivating energy, 'connection and mutual support (rather than alienation) among members and the community in which they live' (Cornwell, 2011: 736).

While aligning with Cornwell in relation to the interconnection between success and the enlargement of social aims, Beanies and Regather depart from her observation that this enlargement is synonymous with the expansion of the firm. Cornwell's (2011: 737) research found that cooperative members decided to increase the size of the firm, as a means to social enlargement, despite practices of surplus distribution²⁰⁴ meaning that on an individual level they have 'little to gain' (and, in fact, faced significant short-term costs). While I similarly found that the desire to 'promote worker-ownership by example' (Cornwell, 2011: 737) overrode the disincentive of limited surplus (re)distribution (Gibson-Graham, 2003; section 5.2.1), my research found these desires to surpass increases in firm size. As will emerge over the course of this section, I do not wish to claim here that Beanies and Regather do not want to expand: both discussed moving or altering their premises to create opportunities to increase trade and, with it, member numbers. Rather I claim that the desire to enlarge social aims was played out more prominently through processes that pervade the temporal and spatial boundaries of the firm. Through the following series of quotes, I develop a narrative that illustrates this claim, together with members' commitment to promoting cooperative working and community economies more broadly.

²⁰⁴ In cooperatives, surplus is distributed between members, meaning that the addition of workers will reduce the financial benefit to existing members.

As can be seen in Cornwell's research, by connecting the expansion of success beyond the temporal boundaries of the firm to the rejection of the profit motive the first exchange (FG1) challenges the assumption that individual interests, and specifically the personal financial gain of the self-interested subject, will prevail over the needs and aspirations of the collective (Burkett, 2011; Kokkinidis, 2015).

Heather: I think that the other thing, yes, we are not in it to make a business profit...a profit off a business, selling it and thinking we will be alright. It doesn't work like that.

Researcher: The whole thing of celebrating it being around for 30 years, if those people who had set it up had been in it to make a profit they would have sold it wouldn't they?

Heather: Yes, absolutely. Which is why we are here doing this. Because if we had had to buy our own business and start it up ourselves we probably wouldn't be doing it would we?

Linking back to Heather's 10-year vision, we see in this exchange the interconnection between members' understanding of success, and commitments to individual-collective interdependence, mutuality and the socialised view of the self, inherent to democratic praxis. Building on the opportunities created by these ways of thinking and being together, members recognised the ground laid by former owners and sought to extend this ground to future generations through the maintenance of the organisation's ethos and unique community offering. In doing so, members added a temporal dimension to the expansion of social aims that is resonant with generational encounters discussed in chapter 4. Adding a further spatial dimension, both organisations sought to extend the ground of possibility beyond the bounds of their organisation through acts of information sharing and education. In response to Tim's comments above, Gareth added his 10-year vision (FG3) to develop:

[...] a kind of open source thing (Fran: Yes) so that people could learn from our mistakes and also see what we have done successfully and be able to repeat it.

This vision '*not to expand but to inspire*' (Rocky, FG2), thus further embeds success in the expansion of social aims. It does so by bringing to the fore contextual, local and intersubjective processes of change that recognised the value of resubjectification and the possibility that 'impact can be achieved through an accumulation of small initiatives' (Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 62; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Kokkinidis, 2015). Moreover, the vision reconceptualises profit, success and the idea of the 'franchise' as collectively owned. Again, building on Cornwell's (2011: 735; Miller, 2013b) research, I found surplus, including surpluses of time, skill, knowledge and money, to be understood, not as property or a source of future individual equity, but as collective potentiality that spans time and space. In this reconceptualisation the organisations challenge the definability and non-permeability of the 'boundaries of the firm' (Byrne and Healy, 2006: 250), and reconnect surplus to historic inputs of energy, within and beyond the organisations.

Aspirations for the temporal expansion of social aims, were further illustrated in each organisations' commitment to steady incremental growth over quick wins: a commitment that aligns with, and is supported (and to an extent necessitated) by, their organic nature. As illustrated in the quotes below, members prioritise starting from where they are and engaging in ongoing processes of learning-through-action, over future imagining and the implementation of '*step-changes*', that Dave synonymises with the '*more entrepreneurial approach*'. The following exchange occurred in FG1 in response to members 10-year visions:

Dave: I'm very much a build upwards [kind of person]. Get your foundation right and then build on top of that

Heather: Exactly.

Dave: I'm not one of these visionaries that sees something over here and tries to work backwards.

Heather: No, no. I mean, I know what you mean, in a way it would be nice for us to have, to think that we could be planning for the next thing.

And like we all said, we can't image that we will be here in this exact

building. And I tell you what, it would be nice to have a plan that we were working towards something for the future.

Dave: Yes. Well that's what struck me, if we are really going to expand big style or move, those are things you kind of need to build up to. You can't just decide.

Later, Evan added:

It's easier to look at things that have gone wrong and then know, in hindsight why they have gone wrong (H: Yes), and move on from it rather than kind of like have a concept of something great (Dave: Perfection) that you want to do and how you are going to do it. It's kind of better, kind of easier, to look at mistakes and not do the mistakes again.

In line with the post-fantasmatic position (Glynos, 2011) discussed in chapter 3, these exchanges illustrate the rejection of a fixed or single image of their future form. As we have seen in the loose framing of governing documents, this rejection reflected shared ways of thinking and being underlying democratic praxis²⁰⁵ to embrace uncertainty, experimentation and learning-through-action. As such, while members' aversion to planning and risk taking is recognised as potentially problematic it can also be understood to provide a necessary condition for maintaining spaces of possibility (Cameron, 2009). Reflecting on his recent move from working part-time to working full-time for Regather, Gareth illustrates this point (30/04/15):

It just makes me think that even though it has been more expensive and possibly more time consuming in that it has taken longer, I am really glad that it has not been full time from when it started. Because it would have just gone like this [makes steep slope with his arm], you know, it would have happened and it would have happened at a much faster rate. It's

²⁰⁵ Further reinforcing this link in an e-mail response to the collective findings review (30/06/16), Dave explained: *Whilst we have a great combination [of members] that creates a positive working atmosphere at the moment, it has crossed my mind on more than one occasion that we are all a bit risk averse and have no risk-takers in the make-up of the team. [This] could be part of the reason why growth/development is organic/slow rather than in step-changes and perhaps it is too comfortable so it doesn't drive changes to be made. Also, if there was an owner of the company who had a more entrepreneurial approach, things may have turned out differently!*

the difference between kind of steady growth, that steady state incremental growth and that kind of high growth, accelerated tangent. Really, quite fascinating. Because everything is so geared up around, must happen quickly, fast, accelerated. And actually, having not done it like that, having done it differently, there's just that sort of recognition of it being, of how it's been different as a result of doing it differently. It's been really interesting.

Gareth's quote reveals how the organisations' commitment to learning-through-action and concomitant incremental approach to development challenges the assumed benefits and necessity of rapid growth. In both organisations, this approach created time and space for members to think, reflect, debate and enjoy the process of change. Pondering how human beings might discover 'ways of living differently with the earth' Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2009c: 322; 2009b) capture the openings and opportunities created by such 'slowing down'. Their quote poetically describes the incremental processes of individual-collective alignment and organisational becoming observed and discussed in *Beanies and Regather*. It takes us back to the temporal and spatial expansion of social aims that emphasise the value of resubjectification and small-scale change.

Silence and slowness are openings, of course, opportunities for the body to shift its stance, to meld a little more with its surroundings; chances for the mind to mull over what floats by on the affective tide, or to swerve from its course as momentum decreases. Undoubtedly these are openings for learning. Not learning in the sense of increasing a store of knowledge but in the sense of becoming other, creating connections and encountering possibilities that render us newly constituted beings in a newly constituted world.

In the organisations' commitment to mutuality and social aims, we have seen a move away from concern over immediate rewards and quick wins, and a rejection of clearly and individually defined notions of resource ownership. Framed and supported by the organisations' democratic praxis, these reconceptualisations of success, and how to

achieve it, helped members to challenge the assumed incompatibility of individual and collective needs and resist the 'pull to the self-interested position' (Novkovic, 2012: 293). As Phelan et al. (2012: 15) explain:

Individual citizens stepping outside their own private interests and joining together in projects for collective or public purposes weakens the strength of the individualist assumption of the neoliberal worldview. [...] As such cooperatives may offer the potential for directly transforming economies.

In addition to this challenge, the reframing of success offered new forms of legitimisation, based not on the accumulation of profit or the growth of the bounded firm, but on the interconnection of means and ends; individual, collective and community; and social and economic needs across space and time (Phelan et al., 2012). I found therefore, like Cornwell (2011: 727) that an 'epistemological commitment to performative action [encouraged members] to see and represent difference in economic space' and reconceptualise growth, not as a logic of expansion but as 'an outcome of subjective experiences and desires' (Cornwell, 2011: 727-8). They revealed, in other words, that cooperatives (and community economies more broadly) should be judged on their ability to 'realize wholly different values' (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: 186) that in themselves, challenge dominant capitalocentric notions of what constitutes success.

5.4: Reconceptualisations of work

This final section on everyday practices of re-thinking and re-making the economy explores participants' journeys from capitalist to cooperative work²⁰⁶. It is in these journeys that we see, most strikingly, processes of resubjectification through which participants re-imagined themselves as 'theorising authorising subjects of the economy' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xxvii; 152). This reimagining constitutes, first the exposure of the *living* antagonism between labour abstraction and concrete doing; and

²⁰⁶ For a summary of participants backgrounds see appendix 25.

second, members' struggles to expand and build upon moments of self-valorisation in a move towards self-determination and personal coherence that blur the work-life dichotomy.

5.4.1: Responding to the push of negative work experiences

In FG3 Rocky explained:

I find it very difficult to work not in a coop. And yes, politically I am an anarchist and don't believe in bosses and leaders and stuff like that, and coops are the practical embodiment of anarchism, so that's where I need to be. I don't like people arbitrarily telling me what to do and making stupid decisions. If a group of people think it's something I don't want to do then they are probably right because it's a group of people who decided it.

While Rocky is unique in expressing so in such explicitly anarchist terms, all members revealed a dislike for, and desire to move beyond, hierarchy. Reflecting understandings of democratic praxis as a prefigurative act (see section 1.5), I found like Land and King (2014: 943, original emphasis), that this shared dislike for hierarchical organising:

[...] constituted an empty discursive space in which members could democratically debate the positive content with which they could fill this space, [presenting] an opportunity for a radically democratic process of organisational [development] rather than emphasizing a specific content.

The rejection of hierarchy was not, in other words, met with a fixed or ideal alternative but with collective experimentation enabled by democratic praxis itself. Utilising processes of individual-collective alignment, this experimentation constituted filling negative non-hierarchical space with past experiences of, and beyond, work as a means to negotiate contradictions and generate 'positive content'. Included in these discursive spaces were members' 'ordinary experience[s] of the capitalist labour process, with all its everyday aggravations' (Cohen, 2011: 55; see also Razsa and

Kurnik, 2012). These experiences highlighted the temporal and spatial constraints hierarchical authority imposes on actions and movements, and the forever unfilled promise of a better more balanced work-life to come. They disrupted, in other words, the fantasy of capitalism (Cornwell, 2011; Byrne and Healy, 2006).

Highlighting this disruption, Dave described (written narrative) his experience of working for the directors in a FTSE 100 company in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. His narrative illustrates how redundancy can destroy the promise of 'a fullness-to-come': a 'promise of employment security, progression and increased pay that offered a 'degree of protection from [...] anxiety' (Glynos, 2011: 72-3). In turn, this led to 'a kind of vanishing of the subject as a subject of desire' (Glynos, 2011: 72) and a consequent '*move away from [...] that corporate crap*' (Dave, FG1).

When redundancy came around I thought I wouldn't be affected but my sponsors were also axed and so when it did come around and I was offered a temporary contract I felt hurt and lost trust in the organisation. [...] The circumstances around my redundancy left me disillusioned with big companies and the 'disposable' nature of loyal, hardworking employees (I was working 50+ hours a week on top of travelling to and from York most days).

In FG1, he added:

[...] it feels like a break in a relationship. I feel quite bitter about the whole thing, I must admit. And there was certainly a bit about moving away from...I didn't want to get back into that corporate crap again.

In this description of broken relationships and disposable employees Dave brings the abstract nature of capitalist labour to the fore (see chapter 3). Gemma (FG2) similarly describes emotional experiences of disillusionment, arising from the emergent reality of abstraction, as the basis to her transition from corporate to cooperative work:

The lead up [to the transition] was the increasing pressure my previous employer was putting on me to expand my role [...] This was accompanied by a pay freeze and removal of my company car, travelling around the country the majority of the time, feeling that my opinion did not matter, and a general appalling atmosphere and morale.

The negative experience of working in capitalist organisations, and specifically experiences of redundancy and disillusionment, described by Dave and Gemma were common to participants in both organisations (see Webb and Cheney, 2014). During FG3, Gareth described witnessing extensive and devastating job losses following the failure of a lottery funded cultural centre; Rachel and Nicole reflected on the challenges of graduating amidst financial crisis and high rates of youth unemployment; and Lisa shared multiple experiences of redundancy resulting from reductions in legal aid and the consequent closure of her charitable sector employers. Similarly to Gemma and Rocky, members of Regather also identified experiences of disempowerment arising from work in hierarchical organisations. Talking about his previous job at the Environment Agency, Tim reflected (FG3):

I got involved [with the Environment Agency] because it had a kind of, on the front it, the right values for me. I did a masters in biology and I thought, like, environmental stuff was really important but it actually...I really hated working for the government, not because they were a bad organisation, just because it was very bureaucratic, really low autonomy on my job, like no flexibility.

Tim's experience of working for the Environment Agency revealed that, for him, 'the right values' extend beyond what the organisation does to how it does it: from the ends to the means and their interconnection (Parker et al., 2014a). This extension was founded in Tim's desire for autonomy and flexibility that he experienced to be limited by bureaucracy (see Maravelias, 2007). During one observation session, Gareth brought this means-ends interconnection to the fore, comparing capitalist and cooperative work to highlight the link between disempowerment and the abstraction and commodification of labour. In line with Tim's experience, in this reflection he

recognises like Cornwell (2011: 729), that 'our concepts of and behaviour in work spaces condition and are conditioned by the way we understand ownership of that space', and the interconnected labour body-time that occurs within them. Reflecting the processes described in the previous section, Cornwell (2011: 730, emphasis added) goes on to explain that, in contrast to the capitalist workspace, the cooperative 'worker owner occupies and *produces* the work space as both owner and manager of her thinking, moving, labouring body'. Comparing work in Regather to work in many conventional office jobs, Gareth explained (30/01/15):

I think it's easy in a way to get obsessed by you know, this is a piece of work you know, some payment and it's just another job and all they have to do is just turn up. There's so much of that now-a-days. Just like, you know, the job is just being at a desk. And it's like no, actually, it's a lot more than that. I don't want to create that here. You know, I wouldn't want Nicole to feel like in order to account for her 16 hours she needs to be sat at that desk, because that would just be bad. It really would be quite bad.

What Gareth described here, and what Tim experienced is, in Byrne and Healy's (2006: 249) words:

[...] the fantasy of the waged worker in which his/her responsibility to work is nothing more than a task for which he or she is paid; this is related to the fundamental fantasy of the self-contained subject.

Extending this fantasy beyond the existence of bureaucracy, Kokkinidis (2015: 850; see also Williams, 2007a; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007; Bloom, 2013; Maravelias, 2007) adds to Byrne and Healy's observation, describing a post-bureaucratic fantasy in which self-organisation, initiative and responsibility are reconciled with and limited by:

[...] particular forms of conduct under which the meaning of autonomy [and freedom] is constrained by the logic of competition and profit.

This fantasy and reconciliation speaks to understandings of autonomy and insecurity as necessarily coexistent (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007), and to capitalist notions of 'freedom' as the freedom to dispose of our own labour-power commodity (Sandoval, 2016; section 5.2.1). As illustrated through this chapter, seeking to move beyond these fantasies, the negative discursive spaces created by democratic praxis, and particularly by its underlying commitment to anti-essentialism and a deep recognition of individual-collective interdependence, were utilised to 'refus[e] the logic of competition and profit' (Kokkinidis, 2015: 851; Chatterton, 2005) and meet desires for autonomy, security of work, and horizontality. The next two sections explore how members surpass the fantasy of the waged worker through the weaving together of diverse experiences into new meanings of work.

5.4.2: 'Formation experiences': learning from collective organising, activism and volunteering

Reflecting on members' employment journeys we see that, for many, joining their cooperative was, in the first instance, a response to negative push factors. It was about escaping the competitive nature encouraged by financial and status differentials; responding to the insecurity and uncertainty of work (Heras-Saizaboria, 2014; Meira, 2014); and overcoming feelings of powerlessness arising, not only from bureaucracy and the member's position within a hierarchy but, as I will return to later, from their separation from conscious doing (Holloway, 2010; see also Razsa and Kurnik, 2012). As such, while participants' experiences of the '*treachery of work*' (Rachel, FG3) instilled feelings of anger, disillusionment and disappointment, they were also recognised as '*formation experiences*' that inspired moves towards a '*different way of doing business, a sort of more social and cultural way*' (Gareth). Despite contextual differences we find here similarities to Argentinian worker-recuperated firms (Heras-Saizaboria, 2014; Meira, 2014; Vieta, 2012; Restakis, 2012). Formed out of a 'defensive reaction to the fear of unemployment' these enterprises (Kokkinidis, 2015: 852):

[...] fostered a sense of collective purpose and democratic ethos through a process of experimentation with alternative work practices.

I similarly found the reconceptualisation of work to be a 'collective act of *refusal and creation*' (Kokkinidis, 2015: 848, emphasis added; see also Cleaver, 1993). Capturing this dual refusal-creation, Gareth (FG3) described Regather as a way to '*right the wrong that was the cultural centre*' through a grassroots and collective approach to social change, and the creation of meaningful work. Similarly, Dave explained (FG1):

[After redundancy] I thought I would like to try something really different. I read up a bit on cooperatives. They felt quite nice in terms of the ethic and the fact that you are all equal and there's none of that trying to fight each other for promotions and tit-bits.

These narratives suggest, like Chen et al. (2013) and Atzeni (2012: 12), that experiences of economic crisis create impetus and 'fertile soil for the emergence of workers control' that more closely aligns with members values. However, I would challenge Atzeni's (2012: 13, emphasis added) claim that 'the real alternative to the traditional capitalist organisation is *anchored* in the structure of capitalist relations'. Reflecting on the impact that positive experiences of collective organising had on participants' employment journeys (see also sub-section 3.4.2) I found this claim to over-emphasise refusal and resistance at the expense of inspiration and creation experienced in community festivals, protests and the '*free party, squat party scene*' (Lisa, narrative). It overlooks, in other words, that 'participants embody the everyday social relations of capitalism and anti-capitalism' (Chatterton, 2010b: 1207).

Looking back on her time in London doing a degree in International Development, Lisa explained (FG3):

I became quite politicised. I was introduced to the free party, squat party scene in London and I saw that there was a totally different way of living my life to what I had seen in my school and Yorkshire village of working 9-5.

Lisa's politicisation was further supported by her experience of anti-capitalist protests at the G8 Summit, volunteering and working for the Refugee Council, and getting legal training to work in immigration advice. During the latter, she observed first-hand the hardship brought about by *'the policies of our government'* which finally lead to her redundancy (see also Taylor, 2004). She later turned down a job in a private legal firm, explaining:

I didn't want to be under constant pressure to reach strict financial targets. I feel that there is something wrong about making money out of people's misfortune.

Concluding her journey, Lisa explained:

Working at Regather also appeals to me because I feel that I am involved with something that has the potential to make improvements to my local environment. I feel like I have tried working in a sector where rules are coming from above and I would like to try to make more difference locally.

In this statement Lisa pulls together negative experiences of top-down policies, and associated disillusionment with both for-profit and government led change, with positive experiences of alternative ways of living. From here she creates her own aspirations of work that align local grassroots change with horizontal organising: an alignment that is reflected and enacted in Regather's practice. Reflecting again on the fantasy of the waged worker discussed above, I found therefore, like Restakis (2012: 238) that:

The restorative power of co-operation in the world goes beyond a worker's connection to others, powerful as this is. It can also provide an individual with a coherent sense of what work means beyond a pay check or as a stepping stone to some other end.

We have seen in these examples that this shift was enabled by members 'detect[ing] and delineat[ing] [...] faint signals and distant glimmers of the other worlds that are already present' (Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 56). As illustrated in Lisa's employment journey these glimmers of hope were brought into their organisations from diverse experiences of employment, and from observing '*community spirit*' (Nicole) in music, housing, activism and play. Moving beyond the ethos of hope and building on their shared "do-it-yourself" mentality, members used these experiences as the grounds to build work that they considered to be pleasurable, '*morally just and beneficial to humanity*' (Fran). As such, in the anti-essentialist, democratic space of both Beanies and Regather, experiences of and beyond work were valued and framed as prefigurative acts: acts that brought into being their values in 'everyday organisational practices [in the] here and now' (Land and King, 2014: 926; Graeber, 2013; Young and Schwartz, 2012), and thus simultaneously critiqued capitalist forms of work and proved the potential and possibility of collective organising (Kokkinidis, 2015).

As indicated in this prefigurative politics the end goal of creating socially and environmentally just and meaningful work for themselves and others are recognised as inseparable from how work is organised. Like participants in Land and King's (2014: 935) study of a non-hierarchical voluntary sector organisation, members connected goals of empowerment, mutual aid and autonomy directly to their organisational practices. Hierarchical organising was understood as 'antithetical to their values of egalitarianism and social justice' (Chen et al., 2013: 857). Viewed as 'both a result and a cause of wider problems with the environment and society, [hierarchy] could not be part of the solution' (Land and King, 2014: 935). Describing her vastly different experience of working for a community music festival and a hierarchical profit-making events organisation, Nicole further illustrates the prefigurative role of past experience and supports the means-ends interconnection (FG3).

I was working for Rototom which is Europe's biggest Reggae festival, and their motto is 'another world is possible' and it was totally about community. [The] whole sort of atmosphere of the festival was about kind of education and change, environmentally minded: everything was zero carbon footprint. It had been in the alps for 16 years and it was so

inspiring. And then I finished my Uni degree, got the job at the academy and it was like the polar opposite of what I had just been doing, like literally the polar opposite, and it was just like 'no, make money, make money'. And I thought if I do a good job here [the profit-making venue] I will be able to make little changes in Sheffield and eventually once you have proven to them you are making money, surely then you can have some positive influence. And then after four years I realised that I was flogging a dead horse so, that was very much what inspired me to come to Regather and talk to Gareth about alternative kind of ways of working.

Like Nicole, Jake was attracted to his organisation because it enabled him to reconnect values and action and address feelings of incoherence in and through the reconceptualisation of work. Thinking beyond his own experience of carrying out work dis-aligned from his values, Jake explained (written narrative):

I find it a bit odd that people who work for a big company can be really nice and middle class and go to church and so on, but what the company is doing collectively is actually quite destructive. An odd paradox.

In these narratives, we see Holloway's (2010: 9) claims that:

Ever more people simply do not fit in to the system, or, if we do manage to squeeze ourselves on to capital's ever-tightening Procrustean bed, we do so at the cost of leaving fragments of ourselves behind, to haunt. That is the basis of our cracks and of the growing importance of a dialectic of misfitting.

Illustrating Holloway's closing contention, we see in the following exchange, as we did in section 5.2, that spaces of democracy, while not eliminating these misfittings, creates opportunities for them to be identified and negotiated. Opportunities for deliberation create moments of reconnection, counter to experiences of abstraction that separate ourselves from our conscious doing and underlie the 'trauma of

exploitation' (Cornwell, 2011: 735). Turning back to arguments made in section 3.2.2, these moments expand the cracks created by the co-existence of conscious and abstract doing and through this contribute to the ongoing processes of reconceptualising work toward self-valorisation: a 'self-defining, self-determining process which goes beyond the mere resistance of capitalist valorisation to a positive project of self-constitution' (Cleaver, 1992: 129; for critique see Holloway, 2010b). Members of Beanies reflected this positive project in the exchange below. Discussing their choice of energy supplier (09/05/15), members resisted the push to find the cheapest option by introducing ethical concerns, which as Jake suggested above and Rocky frustratedly expresses below, are often confined to the 'non-(paid)work' sphere.

Mark: I will just put in ethical energy suppliers into google and see what comes up.

Dave: At the end of the day we have to keep the business a float.

Mark: But then if you move away from that you are not...

Rocky: Some of the ethical ones have not so obvious tangible benefits as well. Like I use Good Energy at home...

Mark: Yes, that's it, we use Good Energy.

*Rocky: A lot of people who work here use these ethical things but then through the business, that is **your business** collectively, [you are] using these horrible corporates that build nuclear power stations and destroy the planet.*

Through reflection on participants' journeys to cooperative working this section has shown that by pulling on the fragments of self abandoned in the capitalist workplace, members began to engage playfully with social-economic contradictions. As illustrated in the previous sections and theoretically explored in sub-section 3.4.2, the organisation's culture of democracy opened space for members to adopt the role of active bricoleur, refusing a core essence of the self to draw instead on multiple experiences of (capitalist and non-capitalist) work and organising (Chen et al., 2013). The next section shows that, through processes of individual-collective alignment, members wove their experiences together to create forms of work that suited their own and their organisation's needs.

5.4.3: The act of bricolage: weaving new meanings of [coherent] work and work-life balance

I explained above that following redundancy from his previous corporate job Dave wanted to move away from 'the corporate crap': '*all the back-biting*' and inter-employee competition that 'divided labor and pitted workers against each other' (Cleaver, 1993: 11). In his desire to move away from this aspect of corporate life, Dave gradually aligned with Beansies individual-collective ways of thinking and being together (sub-section 4.1.4). Alongside this alignment, he continued to recognise and draw upon skills and experiences from his corporate background. He explained (FG1):

Hopefully I add a bit of balance to [the] equation...Being a bit of a bread head²⁰⁷ as Mark likes to call me. But I guess that's my strength and that's what I will chuck into the pot.

Gemma similarly wanted to move away from her role in a small business where she felt that her opinion was being ignored. Like Dave, these negative experiences attracted Gemma to cooperative working but did not negate positive experiences and skills gained through former employment²⁰⁸. We see in these examples that the organisations' democratic praxis, and specifically understanding of the organisation as a conversation (sub-section 4.1.3), concomitantly enables members to 'explore the edge of [their] competencies [...] and expand [their] horizons' (Wenger, 2000: 233), and utilise the competencies that they carry with them from one community of practice to another. As illustrated in the development of 'soft infrastructures' discussed in section 5.3, the meeting of varying competencies created new practices that 'encompass multiple [and even competing] perspectives' (Wenger, 1998: 161; Childs 2000; Chen et al., 2013). Chen et al. (2013: 859) similarly explain that the culture of family, community, democracy and capitalism offer a 'tool kit' of habits, skills and styles' from which people can selectively draw to 'enable change, including new ways of organising that combine previously unconnected practices'. These new

²⁰⁷ A person concerned with making money.

²⁰⁸ Gemma described being '*pleasantly surprised*' by the transferability of skills and learnings between small business and cooperatives, specifically skills in multi-tasking and a belief that you shouldn't '*ask anyone to do anything that you are not willing to do yourself*' (FG2).

perspectives, and the reconceptualisations of work discussed here, thus recognise that 'multi-membership is an inherent aspect of our [individual and collective] identity' (Wenger, 2000: 239; see also Chatterton, 2010b).

In Regather, I saw this multi-membership played out as members combining positive aspects self-employment with a collective and democratic approach to business. For Rachel, becoming a member of Regather was about moving away from her hates of 'poor management' and 'people who stifle creativity' and embracing her motivations of 'working with passionate, inspiring and like-minded people, empowering others, and having autonomy in my work'. Similarly to one of Kokkinidis' (2015: 858; see also Young and Schwartz, 2012; Holloway, 2005; Atzeni and Vieta, 2014) participants, Rachel recognised that:

[...] in self-directed projects it is much easier to integrate much more of one's creative capacities and abilities than normally one would if it were directed by someone else.

Drawing on both negative and positive experiences of working for a large organic box scheme, Fran similarly describes her aspiration to (FG3):

[...] always feel as though I'm in control of my present situation and have a say, to work on a project I believe to be morally just and beneficial to humanity and the planet, and to have a diverse work life with variety, so involving a variety of work environments and tasks and situations, so both working in an office and outdoors, and also to feel as though I get a chance to work alone and in a team and with members of the public.

Through their involvement in Regather, members were able to meet these aspirations, creating work that maximised the autonomy, control and creativity afforded by self-employment (see sections 4.1.3 and 4.2.1) while encompassing beliefs in grassroots change, a commitment to volunteering and collaborative working, and a desire for a more secure and supportive work environment (see section 5.2). This combination of factors saw members defining and redefining their relationship with Regather, with

many members moving from a relationship of self-employment to one of employment, and constantly moving between volunteering and paid work. In both organisations, it meant collectively agreeing role descriptions, working hour, holiday allowance and pay, and understanding these agreements as always open for negotiation (see sub-section 5.3.2).

These examples show that concomitantly to members shaping their organic organisations their organisations' democratic form enabled them to define both their work practices and their employment relations. In this process of individual-collective alignment, members creatively used their misfittings to negotiate their own contradictions and '[re]invest their identities into their work' (Restakis, 2012: 238). Again quoting from Restakis' (2012: 237) chapter on 'the meaning of work':

Their experience of creating a co-operative enterprise recast their understanding of themselves and their relation with others in two fundamental ways. First it revealed their connection to others through bonds of mutual interest; second it enlarged their sense of personal power and personal worth. They saw that they were capable of controlling their own fates, not being mere instruments in the hands of others.

Bringing together the two elements of 'recasting', members forced open the cracks between abstract and concrete doing, forging a renewed sense of personal coherence. As the above aspirations began to show, for members of Beanies, this sense of personal coherence was found through '*working with like-minded people*' (Gemma, FG2); becoming a more active part of their community; and selling products that aligned with their beliefs and lifestyle. Members described being attracted to their role '*politically from an animal rights / vegan / vegetarian / ecological perspective*' (Evan, narrative) and by the social and equal nature of the business. Reflecting on why he joined Beanies, Evan (FG1) highlights the importance of both what the organisation does and how it feels to be a member of it.

Evan: It was great, because it just fitted straight into my vegetarian beliefs and all that kind of stuff, and working in a workers coop was GREAT...I thought, how fantastic to do that rather than...going from a load of shitty jobs to doing that (Heather: Yes, yes). That's why I am still here now. Things have changed over the years. I have changed quite a lot [...] but to me the core ethical and vegetarian nature of the business is still there for me²⁰⁹.

As illustrated in Nicole's, Tim's, and Rachel's narratives included in this and the previous section, for members of Regather coherence arose from incorporating beliefs of self-help, mutual support, grassroots change and empowerment into conceptualisations of work.

The development of these coherences saw members engage in ethical practices of re-thinking the economy, putting principles and values into action through work and, through this, challenging the perceived inevitability of the work-life dichotomy. In addition to supporting the departure from fantasies of the 'wageworker', members reconceptualisation of work challenged 'employee subjectivities' that position dedication to work at the core of workers lives (Kokkinidis, 2015: 850; Gibson-Graham, 1994; Taylor, 2004). While this work 'essence' appears to be being challenged by wider narratives of work-life balance, Bloom (2015: 4) highlights the role these narratives play in:

[...] reinforcing established capitalist and quite managerialist assumptions about what constitutes work, on the one hand, and what is the appropriate relationship between 'work' and 'life', on the other.

Crucially these narratives serve to shore up neoliberal ideals of freedom, self-organising, individualism and flexibility, each structured around goals of 'organisational

²⁰⁹ Gemma similarly explained (FG2): *[...] it is doing something of value and being valued, so as part of the business...I think it is a valuable business for the community, and what it sells is something that I can have pride in where as in previous... I have had reservations in the past [referring to previous employment] in the kind of things I have done in the past and I don't have to worry about that here.*

efficiency rather than upholding members' equality or values' (Chen et al., 2013: 864; Atzeni and Vieta, 2014). Framed as such work-life balance becomes a fantasy: a fantasy that sees identity structured around an elusive search for balance, meaning and purpose within and outside of work (Bloom, 2015). In the exchanges (FG3) below we see a departure from this fantasy, not through the closure of what work-life balance is but through a departure from their dichotic relation and the construction of identity around the unachievable promise of balance.

Tim: I think I have got a good balance between [work and life] and that's really essential, and you know, it's one of the most fundamental reasons why I enjoy working for Regather, because there is a lot of flexibility and I think like, it's close to home and I want, kind of, my values and my life to be centred around here. I want to be close to it, I want to be close to the action, I want to know the traders that we are working with, I want them to be local as well. I just like, when I am on the way to work and seeing them out and about and going to a night out and seeing everybody. That kind of community then, that's a community isn't it? And that's quite a cool thing to have in your life, so, I'm certainly addicted to that now and I certainly don't want to change that. So that's key.

While starting with reference to distinct, and delicately balanced, 'work' and 'life' and appearing to support ideals of the flexible worker (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007), Tim's quote progresses to reveal the blurring of the work-life dichotomy. At the centre of this blurring is his desire for personal coherence: for '*my values and my life to be centred around here [...] to be close to the action*'. Fran similarly expressed a commitment to blurring the work-life divide. Again, while appearing to align with the new spirit of capitalism, and specifically the hope 'that the excitement generated by greater autonomy will prove stronger than fears for the morrow' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 93), the extract below also expresses Fran's rejection of the 'live to work' philosophy. This philosophy sees personal qualities and private life appropriated as *properties* of labour power and life sacrificed in the name of maximising profit (Du Gay and Morgan, 2013: 32).

My hours and work at Regather give me enough money to survive but very little extra. [This] can leave me in a tough position sometimes, but my decision to continue with this life is reflective of my desire to see work as a part of my life, rather than creating a work-life divide, and trying to ensure I enjoy my work life as much as my downtime²¹⁰.

As we have already seen, personal coherence is understood as inseparable from organisational form. The move towards personal coherence started with a move away from corporate life: a move that created an empty discursive space of non-hierarchy, and challenged the fear that to 'conceive of an existence outside a capitalist system, to realize this impossibility, would be to invite [members'] disintegration' (Bloom, 2015: 12). In making this move, members ceased to be 'subjects of desire' and became instead subjects of becoming, inhabiting the negative space of work-life balance with collective and reflexive expressions of coherence.

5.5: Acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy

Section 5.2-5.4 explored how members of Beansies and Regather utilised the praxis of democracy to negotiate contradictions; problematise and reframe concepts of hierarchy, efficiency and success; and reconceptualise the meaning and practice of work. In doing so it has brought to the fore everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy, summarised in tables 5.1-5.3. Focusing on the first act, section 5.1 revealed the challenge of living within and between an actually existing and hoped-for world (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). On the one hand members recognised the need to earn and pay a living wage, '*compete with supermarkets*' (Gemma), and cover their expenses. On the other, they acknowledged their roles as cooperatives and socially responsible employers, and their commitment to certain social aims. The weighing up of these hands generated contradictions and risks of degeneration. However, in the context of democratic praxis, characterised by anti-essentialism and an openness to the other, it also created opportunities for members to build an ethical economy

²¹⁰ Kokkinidis (2015: 859) similarly found members to be motivated by 'political aspirations and [the] determination to create a project that will allow them to cover their basics and at the same time do something that they will enjoy and find politically satisfying'

(Cameron and Hicks, 2014): an economy that reflects a shared ethic of care towards the community, service users, members and workers, and conceives surpluses of time, money and energy as collectively owned conditions of (social) possibility (Cameron, 2009; Miller, 2013b). The key processes contributing to this remaking are summarised in table 5.1.

	Contribution to re-thinking	Contribution to re-making
Negotiation of paid and unpaid work	Challenged the dichotic and hierarchical relation between paid and unpaid labour and the conceptualisation of money as a 'timeless thing that holds our minds in captivity' (Holloway, 2010: 110); rejection of the privileged model of waged labour. Volunteering as activism.	Paid and unpaid work used interchangeably; equal responsibility given to paid and unpaid workers → conceptual boundaries of work extended to 'account for volunteering as a form of [unpaid] work'; move towards an economy based on interdependence, mutuality and solidarity.
	Decoupling of autonomy and insecurity; understanding of autonomy as an individual-collective project.	Sharing of skills and responsibility, and utilisation of project-interdependence to support member autonomy.
Negotiation of wages	Commodification and quantification of labour resisted; labour not reduced to socially necessary labour time.	Foregrounding of fluctuating and interdependent needs of both members and the collective over sector norms, market logics and minimum requirements.
	Wages viewed not as an expense that should be minimised for the sake of profit but as a beneficial outcome of financial surplus and a social aim in themselves. Challenge to redundancy as an inevitable consequence of financial hardship.	Direction of surplus towards the maintenance and creation of jobs and the achievement of fair wages; collectivisation of risk and reward.
Negotiation of social and economic aims and needs	Shared rejection of the profit motive; surpluses of time, money and energy reconceived as collectively owned conditions of social possibility.	Decisions about supplying, purchasing and pricing products and services defied the limits of rationale economic acts, and considerations of income verses expenditure in the here and now; incorporation of social aim into negotiations.
	Challenge to the logics of competition.	Support for/partnerships with local businesses and aligned social movements

Table 5.1: Re-thinking and re-making the economy through the negotiation of contradictions

Turning again to the risk of degeneration, and specifically to Harnecker's (2012: 121) claim that tensions between democracy and productivity are key drivers towards

‘specialized and autonomous management’, section 5.3 explored how efficiency, hierarchy and understandings of success were reframed in the context of democratic praxis. While pressures of market competition are not comparable to those experienced by worker-recuperated firms, in line with Atzeni and Ghigliani (2007) and Atzeni and Vieta (2014), observations revealed these tensions to place concrete barriers to practices of democracy. Adding to the claims made through section 5.2, encounters with these barriers created opportunities for members to engage critically with both capitalist and cooperative narratives of what constitutes ‘best practice’, and consequently create and recreate approaches to balancing efficiency, collective decision-making, horizontality and role-sharing. These ongoing processes are performed in the context of a particular understanding of success that foregrounds social aims, including the praxis of democracy itself, over the generation of profit or organisational expansion. The acts of re-thinking and re-making arising from the reframing of efficiency, hierarchy and success are outlined in table 5.2.

	Contribution to re-thinking	Contribution to re-making
Efficiency	Decoupling of efficiency from democracy-in-general by highlighting it, instead, as the consequence of certain practices that contribute to, but never fully constitute, democratic praxis.	Decision-making overflows the formal and potentially inefficient space of meetings, embedding itself also in ongoing processes of learning-through-action.
Hierarchy	Hierarchy reconceived from an issue of leadership and control grounded in stable individual attributes, to a collectively negotiated and relationally constructed issue of accountability, care for the other and shared responsibility.	Naming and situating power and control in and through democratic processes and practices; collective development of soft infrastructures.
Success	Success defined by the maintenance and development of social objectives and ethos rather than in relation to size or profit; democratic praxis seen as a prefigurative act and an end in itself.	Slow, incremental growth focused on the development of economically sustainable, social conscience activities; democratic praxis and collective decision-making prioritised as a beneficial in the long-term
	Success understood to surpass spatial and temporal bounds of the organisation.	Processes of shared learning focused on the aim ‘not to expand but to inspire’; promoting community economies by example; maintenance of cooperative (and its ethos) for future generations.

Table 5.2: Re-thinking and re-making the economy through the practices of reframing

Act of re-thinking and re-making the economy performed through the reconceptualisation of work are summarised in table 5.3 below.

	Contribution to re-thinking	Contribution to re-making
Responding to negative experiences	Naming of negative experiences including: the temporal and spatial constraints hierarchical authority imposes on actions and movements; the unfulfilled promise of employment security, and progression; and the abstraction of labour and suppression of conscious doing.	Shared dislike for hierarchy created an 'empty discursive space' that, through processes of contestation, was filled with 'positive content' (Land and King, 2014: 943); moves to occupy and produce spaces of work and reclaim ownership over as the labouring body (Cornwell, 2011); refusal of logics of profit and competition.
Building on formative experiences	Negative experiences and economic crises framed as grounds of possibility.	Active moves towards a ' <i>different way of doing business</i> ' (Gareth).
	Recognition of embodied, post-capitalist social relations; framing of everyday experiences of collective organising as prefigurative acts. Recognition of mean-ends interconnection; hierarchy framed as 'cause of wider problems with the environment and society' (Land and King, 2014: 935).	Experiences of collective organising in family, play, activism and community allowed to shape organisational praxis.
	Identification of misfittings and the cracks created by the co-existence of, and tension between, conscious and abstract doing.	Expansion and connection of multiple cracks and contradictions; reintroduction of values previously excluded from the workplace.
Creating meaningful work	Recognition of our irreducibility to a single (worker) identity; recognition of our multi-membership.	Acts of bricolage: Positive experiences of family, community, democracy and capitalism used as a 'tool kit' of habits, skills and styles' from which to develop personal coherence in work (Chen et al., 2013).
	Naming of negative experiences including the forever unfilled promise of a better more balanced work-life to come; challenge to the work-life dichotomy; re-understanding of work as part of life.	Reconnection of work and community; collectively agreement of role descriptions, working hour and pay, and understanding of these agreements as always open for negotiation; equal respect for different forms of work including the work of family care, animal care and activism.

Table 5.3: Re-thinking and re-making the economy through the reconceptualization of work.

Identified using analysis of participants journeys to cooperative working, these acts support Restakis (2012: 238) claims that, beyond the development of connections with others, cooperation can 'provide an individual with a coherent sense of what work means beyond a pay check or as a stepping stone to some other end'. Building on this claim, I found a sense of coherence to emerge through simultaneous acts of refusal and creation (Kokkinidis, 2015, Cleaver, 1993). As is evident in research into Argentinian worker-recuperated firms, the former embraces economic crises as 'fertile

soil for the emergence of workers control' (Atzeni, 2012: 12). Moving beyond Atzeni's (2012) contention that alternative organisations are, therefore, anchored in capitalist relations, I argue that they are instead grounded in members misfittings²¹¹ and sense of incoherence. Moreover, I contend that democratic praxis creates space for these misfittings to be identified and expanded. Alongside engagement with their misfittings I observed members drawing on diverse experiences of organising in family life, play, activism and work. When incorporated into processes of individual-collective alignment, these experiences gained new meaning and salience as glimmers of a post-capitalist world and prefigurative acts of possibility (Cameron and Hicks, 2014; Graeber, 2013; Young and Schwartz, 2012). Together with members negative experiences of the capitalist economy and their misfittings, these experiences of possibility became part of a 'tool kit' (Chen et al., 2013) used by members to build work that they considered to be pleasurable, '*morally just and beneficial to humanity*' (Fran).

Combined the three sections argue that the praxis of democracy supports the (Healy, 2011: 366):

[...] emergence of economic [practices and] subjects that are not defined by the passivity, perceived powerlessness, and resentment that exploitative class processes, such as capitalism, engender.

This claim is further explored in the next section.

²¹¹ The parts of ourselves that are 'not (yet) entirely absorbed into the capitalist forms; not entirely monetised, stified, [or] commodified' (Holloway, 2010: 170).

5.6: Moving from dominant narratives to post-capitalist relations and subjectivities

The previous four sections explored everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy through their manifestation in the negotiation of contradictions, the reframing of efficiency, hierarchy and success, and the reconceptualisation of work. This final section links back to theoretical discussions played out in chapter 3 to explore how these everyday acts, and the democratic praxis that enables them, are used by members to deconstruct the hegemony of capitalism, foster a language of economic diversity and interdependence, and cultivate post-capitalist subjectivities.

5.6.1: Deconstructing the hegemony of capitalism

Section 3.1 painted a bleak image of neoliberal-capitalism as a powerful crisis-ridden force that adapts and mutates to colonise not only processes of production but our imagination (Parker et al., 2014a; Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Miller, 2013b). In light of this image, the deconstruction of capitalist hegemony is an act of refusal: refusal to accept economic power as already and irreversibly distributed and cemented in capitalist social relations; and refusal to accept the captivity of our minds (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Holloway, 2010a). Through exploration of members' journeys to cooperative working, and the ongoing negotiation of contradictions inherent to their position within, against and beyond capitalism, I identified three main acts of refusal: (1) the identification, and pushing back against, negative experiences of the capitalist economy; (2) the unveiling and utilisation of the *living* antagonism between abstraction and concrete doing; and (3) the rejection of capitalist socio-economic relations as the sole determinant of the economy.

Collective analysis of participants' narratives revealed members' moves into the Beanies and Regather sphere to be a response, not to neoliberal-capitalism as a whole, but to experientially determined elements of neoliberal-capitalism (Sekler, 2009; Meira, 2014). By focusing on these lived experiences participants acknowledged first, that neoliberal-capitalism is unlikely to 'fail in a totalising moment of collapse' (Peck et al., 2009: 101), pinning hopes instead on the expansion and connection of multiple cracks and contradictions (Holloway, 2007; Chatterton, 2010b). Second, they

acknowledged that freeing themselves from the 'logic of the cohesion of capitalism' (Holloway, 2010: 165) requires recognition of the interconnected nature of thinking and being, and our place within the intersubjective production of economic 'reality' (Cuncliffe, 2003; Rhodes, 2009). This recognition emerged as members reflected on negative experiences of redundancy, unemployment, loss of autonomy and disempowerment that brought the abstraction of labour to the fore. Far from reinforcing primitive accumulation and abstract labour as closed episodes of the past, these experiences revealed them to be performative reiterations, 'constantly active and constantly at issue' (Holloway, 2010: 168). They did so by unveiling *living* antagonisms between the drive of abstraction towards money and the drive of concrete labour towards self-determination (Holloway, 2010: 173; Atzeni, 2012). These antagonisms constituted members persistent desire to conduct tasks well, to be creative, to do something that they believe in, and to perform other than the competitive individualism of the capitalist subject. As will be explored further in section 5.6.3, when incorporated into ongoing processes of individual-collective alignment, members' misfittings took on new meaning and salience as 'formative experiences' which proved, not only that we are never 'entirely monetised, statified, [or] commodified' (Holloway, 2010: 170), but that we have the capacity to both make and unmake the world that entraps us (Holloway, 2010).

The living antagonisms that emerged through participants' narratives extended to inform ways of working that further destabilised capitalist dominance. Exploring Beanies' and Regather's working practices revealed efforts to deconstruct the paid/unpaid work dichotomy. The deconstruction of this dichotomy challenged the positioning of paid work as 'the most credible, necessary and desirable' option (Diprose, 2015: 18) and our reduction to 'employee subjectivities' that position dedication to work at the core of workers' lives (Kokkinidis, 2015: 850). I found dominant capital-labour relations to be further challenged through practices of wage setting that reframed wages as a collective rather than an individual resource, and the prioritisation of job maintenance and members' needs over profit (Cheney et al., 2014; Carlone, 2013; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014). Enabled by collective ownership and the praxis of democracy, the rejection of market norms and minimum requirements in favour of individual-collective practices of wage negotiation has three effects. First, it

questions the perceived necessity of individualised and competitive practices of wage maximisation that serve to reinforce both labour-power's (fictitious) commodity form, and the reification of money as a 'timeless thing that holds our minds in captivity' and channels our doing along certain (economised) trajectories (Holloway, 2010a: 110). Second and interrelatedly, it serves to highlight, contra to Dave's experience of 'back-biting' and inter-labour competition, that 'each worker can make a living and have their needs met without harming other workers' (Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 65). Third, it acts to re-couple profit-labour relations such that the latter is conceived as a positive outcome of, rather negative impact on, the former.

I found similarly, through investigation into the negotiation of social and economic aims and needs, that decisions about supplying, purchasing and pricing products and services defied the limits of rationale economic acts, and considerations of income verses expenditure in the here and now. Played out through processes of consensus decision-making, these negotiations see the organisations 'consider[ing] their needs in relation to the needs of [current and future, human and non-human] others' (Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 67); and taking decisions that reflect a shared ethic of care towards the community, service users, members and workers. Through this they challenge the conflation of the market with individualism and self-interest, re-appropriating it as a space of mutuality and interdependence (Cameron and Hicks, 2014; Miller, 2011), and reconceptualise profit as a condition of social possibility (Cameron, 2009: 102; Miller, 2013b).

Continuing to focus on the three practices discussed above, we come to the third point of refusal: the refusal of capitalist socio-economic relations as the sole determinant of the economy. The ongoing struggle of doing against abstract labour, and social against economic aims and needs, revealed that dominance never constitutes a 'one-sided relation [...] where one system unilaterally imposes its will on others' (Jessop, 2002: 26). Linking this refusal to the praxis of democracy Atzeni and Vieta (2014: 52), following Marx, argue that:

[...] eliminating managerial control of the labour process and giving to each worker equal representation and rights in the decision-making process, represent[s] practical examples of the unnecessary role of capital in organizing production and work.

In the refusal to assign precedence to any single (and monetary based) socio-economic relation (Gibson-Graham et al., 2001: 4) members re-read both the economy and themselves as irreducible, incomplete and contingent on cultural, political and natural as well as economic forces. As will be explored in the next section, adopting this anti-essentialist and overdetermined position opens space for already existing alternative essences and sources of our misfitting to be identified and woven into a language of diversity and interdependence.

5.6.2: Foster a language of economic diversity and interdependence

Utilising and moving beyond the spaces created by acts of refusal, I observed members engaging in concomitant processes of blurring alternative/mainstream dichotomies, and fostering economic diversity and interdependence. These interconnected processes of articulation, expansion and connection reflected members' weak theoretical and post-fantasmatic position: a position that understands quests for purity to limit curiosity and experimentation, and strengthen risks of degeneration (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xxxi). As will be revealed in the coming discussion, the processes demonstrated, not only that another world is possible, but that it already exists and is open to being formed and (re)formed by performative economic subjects (Tonkiss, 2008).

Returning to, and reframing Beanies' and Regather's working practices through the lens of the total social organisation of labour (White and Williams, 2014; Williams, 2009; Glucksmann, 2005; Parry et al., 2005) brought to light the positioning of paid and unpaid work as interdependent and 'equivalent rather than hierarchically arranged' (Healy, 2008: 9). In both organisations, members drew on the ethic of care and sense of mutuality underlying democratic praxis to negotiate and balance desires to engage

in, and commit to, different forms of work, including volunteering, self-employment, and the work of activism, and animal, family and environmental care. In doing so, they deconstruct the (good/bad) dichotic relationship of paid and unpaid work, situating them instead on a fluid continuum from abstraction to liberation: a continuum that, at once, acknowledges the necessity of waged work and pushed in the direction of autonomy and self-determination (Young and Schwartz, 2012; Bohm et al., 2009). Thus, by problematising, not the concept of work itself, but its positioning *within*, and reduction to, the domain of capital the organisations open opportunities for a plurality of work practices that seek to meet individual and collective needs while allowing for the expansion of concrete doing. As such, the persistent use of voluntary labour in Regather, and the fluctuation of wages in Beanies, can be understood, not as evidence of market failure, but as an expression of their desire to move towards an economy based on interdependence, mutuality and solidarity (see also Chatterton, 2010b). This claim serves to support Kokkinidis' (2015: 848) contention that cooperatives 'offer a platform to question existing capital-labour relations'.

The challenge posed to alternative/mainstream dichotomies is seen further in the blurring of activist/non-activist identities. While some members had prior experience of activism, protest and cooperative working, within their organisations they did not position themselves as detached militant figures activated by idealism (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). Harnessing instead the everyday activist, I observed members building on stories of cooperation from work, play, family life and community organising as a means to 'demonstrate the possibility for communal production, appropriation and distribution' (Carlone, 2012: 550), and pull collective organising away from the inaccessible 'political fringe' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 480; see also Ward, 1982). This blurring was enabled by, and achieved through, the rejection of 'the perfect collective' (Parker et al., 2014b: 631) in favour of an understanding of the organisation as a conversation and product of ongoing individual-collective alignment. Through the latter, members build upon an orientation toward cooperation while accepting themselves, their organisations and the wider economy as decentred, unbounded and always in transition (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: 28; Graham, 1992).

Further building on the deconstruction of mainstream (bad)/alternative (good) dichotomies, and the anti-essentialist recognition that 'multi-membership is an inherent aspect of our [individual and collective] identity' (Wenger, 2000: 239), members went on to utilise knowledges, attitudes and skills from within and beyond the (non)capitalist economy to negotiate social and economic aims and needs, hierarchy and horizontality, and efficiency and democracy. As environmental concerns normally confined to the home were introduced into the workplace; as the need for structures and ground rules pushed against a commitment to horizontality; and as efficient practices of task allocation met with a desire to implement and maintain role-sharing, new practices and soft infrastructures emerged. While these practices and soft infrastructures could be perceived as mimicking bureaucratic structures and offering evidence of degeneration (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 482) I found them being developed and utilised as points of 'deviant mainstreaming' (Arthur et al., 2010). Supporting this claim, research revealed that the expansion of decision-making beyond the formal and potentially inefficient space of meetings served, not to strengthen risks of degeneration, but to deconstruct the connection between democracy, (in)efficiency, and degeneration. It did so by decoupling efficiency from democracy-in-general and highlighting it instead as the consequence of certain practices that contribute to, but never fully constitute, democratic praxis. Similarly, the development of temporary leadership positions may be seen to indicate degeneration towards a hierarchical organisational form. Again, this was challenged as I observed members reconceptualising leadership, from a position 'permanently stabilized in particular individuals' (Sutherland et al., 2014: 767), to a collectively negotiated issue of accountability and care for the other (Cornwell, 2011; Sutherland et al., 2014; Gibson-Graham, 2003). In both cases workers' praxis is exposed as 'situated and constrained but also rebel and insurgent' (Meira, 2014: 714; see also Vieta, 2012; Arthur et al., 2004). These praxes see the capitalist system unpicked from within to create 'workable alternatives' (Chatterton, 2006: 272) that are at once within, against and beyond capitalism (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Featherstone et al., 2015; Cameron and Hicks, 2014).

Adopting such a position of economic bricoleur has two implications. First it recognises the persistent, and yet always partial and incomplete existence of

hegemony that makes autonomy at once possible and impossible, and itself always incomplete (Bohm et al., 2009). From this perspective, following Hardt and Negri (2000), the search for autonomy is not a search for a fictitious space outside of capitalism but for innovative practices and positive projects of self-valorisation that point to 'a 'beyond' capital[ism]' (Bohm et al., 2009: 13). Second, and interrelatedly, it transforms the risk of degeneration into an opportunity to weave together multiple experiences, knowledges, and skills, from within and beyond capitalism, to form new socio-economic relations and modes of organising. These relations and modes of organising brought to light, utilised and celebrated economic diversity as a tool to create multiple and temporal post-capitalist practices that were at once a means and an ends.

As already indicated through analysis of Beanies' and Regather's working practices, alongside the fostering of economic diversity, I observed each organisation recognising and harnessing economic interdependence. In line with the findings of Gibson-Graham (2006b), this became evident in acts of inter-organisational collaboration, processes of price setting that moved beyond economic rationality, and conceptualisations of success that defied both the temporal and spatial bounds of the organisation (Cornwell, 2012). In each of these acts members build upon ontologies of learning to be affected, recognising themselves and their organisations as connected to the economy through multiple intermediaries and relationships (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c; Latour, 2004). As was foregrounded in the organisations' conceptualisation of success, by extending a commitment to individual-collective interdependence to those outside of the organisation, they allow themselves to be put into motion by their concerns and care for a community of socially minded organisations, customers, the environment and future (human and non-human) actors (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Latour, 2004). Supported by the organisations' praxis of democracy, and specifically by the understanding of the organisation as conversation and the loose framing of governing documents, these acts of interdependence bring the overdetermined nature and 'sociality of the economy to the fore' (Gibson-Graham, 2003: 156); and serve to highlight each organisations' place in a wider socio-economic and environmental context.

Following diverse economies theory this sub-section has shown that it is through concomitant processes of moving beyond mainstream/alternative dichotomies and recognising and building upon our multi-membership and interdependences that we create opportunities to recognise and expand upon already existing economic diversity. Moreover, it contends that these processes both build upon and reinforce the epistemological and ontological grounds of anti-essentialism, weak theory and learning to be affected laid by the praxis of democracy. The next and final sub-section, explores how these praxes support the cultivation of post-capitalist subjectivities.

5.6.3: Cultivating post-capitalist subjectivities.

Interwoven into the deconstruction of hegemony, and the fostering of economic diversity and interdependence is the third element required in the move to post-capitalist worlds: the cultivation of post-capitalist subjectivities. This element recognises that a significant barrier to reimagining the economy resides in ourselves. More specifically it recognises barriers posed by our deeply embedded assumptions about what is, and what is not possible; our expectations; and our feelings of hopelessness (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; White and Williams, 2016). This final sub-section focuses on two constituent processes of 'the [everyday] revolutionary art of self-cultivation' (Gibson-Graham, 2006a xvii). First, it explores how members re-appropriate thinking as an act of resubjectification. This finding reveals that it is through these radically reflexive processes that members challenge perceived barriers and inevitabilities, and engage in creative thinking-actions that utilise plurality and difference as a source of new economic practice (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 625; Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Gibson-Graham, 2009). Second, it describes how members utilise ontologies of 'learning to be affected'. In support of the first process, these ontologies reconnect thinking and action, mind and world and, as illustrated in the previous sub-section, create conditions for the fostering of economic interdependence.

The re-appropriation of thinking emerged most prominently in participants' journeys to cooperative working. As outlined in section 5.6.1, these journeys encompassed the reframing of redundancy, worklessness, and disempowerment, arising from engagement in the capitalist economy, as 'formative experiences' (Gareth): experiences that brought members' misfittings to light, and revealed that conscious

doing is never fully subordinated to abstract labour (Holloway 2010a; 2010b). In this reframing, negative experiences became, not points of defeat or resistance, but points of departure and the grounds for experimentation (Razsa and Kurnik, 2012).

Observation of ongoing processes of individual-collective alignment unveiled members concomitantly re-thinking positive experiences of cooperation as prefigurative acts. Non-hierarchical and non-monetised approaches to organising and exchange, experienced in family life, play, activism and community, gained new meaning and salience as glimmers of a post-capitalist world (Cameron and Hicks, 2014; Graeber, 2013; Young and Schwartz, 2012). Through these observations I found that, while the organisations' democratic praxis does not eliminate misfittings or pave a smooth road towards a prefigured post-capitalist economy, it does create opportunities for members to identify, reclaim, expand and connect the actions and elements of their being not subsumed in capitalism. As will be explored in more detail below, it enables members to interweave multiple experiences, knowledges and skills into new economic practices and understandings of work that allowed for a greater sense of personal coherence.

Beyond these personal journeys, I observed democratic praxis opening opportunities for collective acts of rethinking. First, it creates space for ongoing deliberations and acts of 'constitutive antagonism' (Bryne and Healy, 2006: 251), that enabled contradictions and risks of degeneration to be re-thought as creative moments of vigilant self-scrutiny, self-cultivation and economic self-determination (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p.xxvi; 2006a: xxvi Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). As indicated in the previous sub-section, these moments constitute the weaving together of members' positive and negative experiences of organising and exchange, and the consequent fostering of economic diversity. Their development within a praxis of democracy that promotes egalitarianism and horizontality grounds these practices of interweaving and economic bricolage in 'a different set of values from those offered by competition and the capitalist market' (Kokkinidis, 2015: 868). Drawing on these values, 'the material and discursive battles' occurring at points of contradiction [are] re-understood as a source of momentum for change (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 486), and the 'ethical values and relations' of democracy as a 'resource for questioning and critiquing existing economic relations' (Carlone, 2013: 529).

Second, collective ownership and the power to determine the use of financial surplus enables members to rethink surpluses of times, money and skills as collective potentiality that span space and time (Cornwell, 2012). This reframing is expressed in each organisation's understanding of success and practices of wage setting. In relation to the former, I observed members linking success, not to the accumulation of capital, but to the expansion of social aims. Extending the organisations deeply embedded sense of individual-collective interdependence beyond the temporal and physical boundaries of firm, this expansion constituted maintaining the cooperative in the interest of future members, and inspiring wider practices of cooperation. Turning to the latter, this thesis corroborates and adds to Cheney et al's (2014), Carlone's (2013) and Heras-Saizarbitoria's (2014) findings that collective ownership and democratic praxis support the direction of surplus towards the maintenance and creation of jobs rather than the maximisation of wages and/or profit. Combined with approaches to wage setting that foreground the fluctuating and interdependent needs of both members and the collective over sector norms and minimum requirements, we see labour reconceptualised, not as a means to the valorisation of capital, but as a beneficial outcome of financial surplus, and a social end in itself. Coming back to my contribution to knowledge, I argue through reflection on these examples, that democratic praxis enables members to re-think certain assumptions and sources of hopelessness as the grounds for post-capitalist possibility. Through this, members reimagined themselves as 'theorising authorising subjects of the economy' capable of innovating 'with a diversity of economic practices to [...] enact their ethical commitments' (Cameron, 2009: 107), and constituting their own economic lives (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xxvii; 152).

Underpinning these interconnected processes of 'changing ourselves/changing our thinking/changing the world' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 618) is the reconnection of thinking and action, mind and world. This reconnection was harnessed and enacted in ongoing cycles of learning-through-action, and processes of individual-collective alignment that emulated the extended epistemology of the participatory worldview (Heron and Reason, 1997). Constant moves between experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing characteristic of this worldview revealed

understanding, knowledge and their narratives to be performative, grounded in experience, and consummated in action. These processes of grounding and consummation are important in two ways. First, they enable members to develop a sense of personal coherence. This serves to reinforce their role as theorising authorising subjects of the economy, and to give salience and credibility to both cooperative practice in general and their organisations' praxis of democracy in particular. Members' sense of personal coherence found expression in the reconceptualisation of work as a site for both expanded conscious doing, and the enactment of values through the means and ends of organising (Parker et al., 2014a). Second, they support the development and utilisation of ontologies of learning to be affected. Following Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2009; see also Latour, 2004), these ontologies include 'constitutive processes of living and learning' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 325), acts of being open to the 'other as a communicative being' (ibid.: 324), and allowing ourselves to be 'animated by care for the world and its inhabitants' (ibid.: 324). These practices enabled members to draw on feelings of disenfranchisement, empathetic resonance with others experiencing economic hardship, the expression of economic decline in music, and experiences of non-capitalist practices to build propositional, presentational and practical knowing. Again, in line with the work of Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2009) I argue that members engagement with the economy through such varied and multiple intermediaries, that connect the mind and world, subject and object in diverse ways, support the re-imagining of the economy as plural and interdependent.

This sub-section has used examples to show how an understanding of the organisation as conversation, processes of individual-collective alignment, and ongoing acts of 'constitutive antagonism' (Bryne and Healy, 2006) enable members to re-appropriate thinking as an act of resubjectification and develop and utilise ontologies of learning to be affected. In more general terms, I found the slowness and organic nature of democratic praxis to create openings for the body and mind to think in new ways, adopt a new stance, and embody new relations (Graham and Roelvink, 2009). Through these shifts members recast themselves as 'capable of controlling their own fates, not being mere instruments in the hands of others' (Restakis, 2012, 237). As illustrated in section 5.6.1, this new stance encompasses pushing back against negative experiences

of redundancy, precarity and disempowerment; deconstructing the dichotic and hierarchical positioning of paid and unpaid work; challenging the reduction of labour to quantitative, abstract labour time; and refusing to assign precedence to economic rationales or monetised socio-economic relations. It encompasses also the development of working practices that move beyond mainstream/alternative dichotomies, embrace the interdependence of multiple forms work and consequently support acts of economic bricolage. As illustrated in sub-section 5.6.2 these acts fostered economic diversity as a means to balance social and economic aims and needs, hierarchy and horizontality, and efficiency and democracy. Combined, the findings presented in this section respond to research question three. A more comprehensive summary of this response, and my response to questions one and two, is given in section 6.1.

6: Reflections on researching with worker cooperatives

In light of the constitutional crisis that recently struck the Cooperative Bank, and personal experience as a cooperative practitioner, this thesis started from the challenge posed by degeneration thesis: that co-operatives will inevitably 'adopt the same organisational forms and priorities as capitalist business in order to survive' (Cornforth, 1995: 1). Recognising that this sense of inevitability is founded on the perceived dominance and homogeneity of capitalism, I argued for a need to move beyond practices of resistance to engage instead in a more fundamental process of reconceptualising the economy as already heterogeneous, and irreducible to purely capitalist socio-economic relations. Recognising also the interconnection between degeneration and organisational form (Parker et al., 2014a; Cornforth, 1995), this thesis used data collected through an 18-month ethnographic study with two small UK worker cooperatives to explore the role of democracy in supporting this reconceptualisation. In doing so it has added a UK perspective to narrow body of empirical literature investigating the purpose and practices of democracy in small worker cooperatives (Cornwall, 2012; Kokkinidis, 2012; 2014; Jaumier, 2017). Adopting the lens of diverse economies theory, it has advanced understanding by responding to three research questions:

1. How is democracy understood and performed in small worker cooperatives?
2. What role does democratic praxis play in laying the necessary grounds for members to break away from capitalist hegemony and open spaces for post-capitalist possibilities?
3. How do cooperative members use democratic praxis, and the everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making that it enables, to deconstruct the hegemony of capitalism, foster economic diversity and interdependence, and cultivate post-capitalist subjectivities?

Section 6.1 addresses these research questions in turn²¹². In doing so, it lays out the three key contributions to knowledge made through this thesis. Section 6.2 outlines a fourth, methodological contribution that brings to the fore the role of both research practice, and the researcher, in the process of knowledge construction. The chapter goes on to outline the practical implications of the research findings in section 6.3. The final three sections explore limitations, unanswered questions and key learnings that I will carry forward to inform future research.

6.1: Exploring performances of democracy and economic diversity in worker cooperatives

Responding to the first research question, analysis presented in chapter 4 corroborated Kokkinidis' (2012; 2014), Beeman et al's (2009) and Land and King's (2014) contention that democracy cannot be reduced to participation in formal structures or a set of practices alone. Starting from an understanding of democracy as an ever-becoming praxis (Springer, 2010; Barnett and Bridge, 2012; Rasza and Kurnik, 2012), the chapter pushes this argument forwards by developing a narrative that outlines the benefits, challenges and modes of maintaining such a fluid approach to organising. Central to this narrative, and to my contribution to knowledge, is the (re)conceptualisation of the organisation as a conversation and product of individual-collective alignment. Most significantly I found that these conceptualisations, and their manifestation in practices of consensus decision-making, role-sharing, and the framing of governing documents as loose frameworks for action, acted to maintain spaces of negativity necessary for constitutive acts of dissent and contestation (Byrne and Healy, 2006). These ongoing acts, and the concomitant meeting of different ways of seeing and being in the world, opened opportunities for assumptions and perceived inevitabilities to be challenged, and the rationale underlying adopted positions and practices to be scrutinised and truly understood. As such they created conditions for growth, change and creative input from both current and future members (Chen et al., 2013; Webb and Cheney, 2014) and enabled them to move beyond engagement in

²¹² Present tense is used throughout the sections. My rationale for doing so is to emphasise the existence of post-capitalist worlds in the here and now, and through this, end the thesis with a sense of hope and possibility.

decision-making to become involved in 'shap[ing] the very future of the participative system itself' (Webb and Cheney, 2014: 77).

Building on these understandings, chapter 5 focused on the role of democratic praxis in supporting a shift from the perceived dominance and homogeneity of capitalism towards performative post-capitalist praxes of economic diversity and interdependence (Gibson-Graham, 2006b). Coming to my second contribution to knowledge, and in response to research question two, the chapter first argued that the praxis of democracy lays the epistemological and ontological grounds necessary for the ongoing emergence of post-capitalist worlds. Starting from the recognition that these acts necessitate a struggle against ourselves and a culture of capitalocentric thinking, I make three claims.

First, that an understanding of the organisation as a conversation and product of individual-collective alignment challenges notions of fixed identities and pushes members towards an anti-essentialist position. This position sits counter to the reductionist thinking of capitalocentrism, supporting instead an overdetermined understanding that expands the economy beyond purely capitalist socio-economic relations (Diamantopoulos, 2012; Gibson-Graham, 2006b). Second, and interrelatedly, I argue that through the embrace of an ever-becoming and organic organisation form and function, and the concomitant rejection of a 'pre-existing, necessary or transhistorical shape' (Bryne and Healy, 2006: 250), the cooperatives adopt a post-fantasmatic and weak-theoretical stance. This stance rejects mainstream/alternative dichotomies and the promise of unified utopian ideal to come. Recognising that such thinking acts to reinforce the homogeneity of neoliberalism-capitalism and limit the space of possibility, it advocates instead performative praxes of experimentation, ongoing contestation and bricolage. Finally, a focus on learning-through-action reframed knowledge as intersubjectively produced, grounded in experience and consummated in action. Combined with practices of decision-making and role share that foreground mutuality and an ethic of care, these 'constitutive processes of living and learning' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 324) challenge the separation of mind and world, thinking and action. Their reconnection through multiple intermediaries of imagination, empathy, desire, worries and stories (Graham, 1990;

1992) gave rise to ontologies of 'learning to be affected' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2010; Latour, 2004). In addition to reinforcing an overdetermined understanding of the economy, these ontologies open opportunities for us to be put into motion by a plurality of experiences and relationships, and to be (re)animated by our 'care for the world and its inhabitants' (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c: 324). In doing so, they create the conditions for fostering economic diversity and interdependence. Through these three claims, I contribute to a narrow body of literature that empirically explores the role of democracy through the lens of diverse economies theory (Cornwell, 2011; Gibson-Graham, 2003; Healy, 2010; Bryne and Healy, 2006)

Further adding to this literature, and to debates on what it means to be, at once, within, against and beyond capitalism (Chatterton, 2006; 2010b; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006), chapter 5 goes on to explore how cooperative members use democratic praxis, and the everyday acts of re-thinking and re-making the economy it enables, to deconstruct the hegemony of capitalism, foster economic diversity and interdependence, and cultivate post-capitalist subjectivities. Focusing on processes of deconstruction, analysis revealed three main acts through which participants refused to accept economic power as already and irreversibly cemented in capitalist social relations. First, through exploration into participants' journeys to cooperative working I observed members pushing back against experiences of redundancy, unemployment, disempowerment and precarity. Collective reflection on these negative experiences unveiled the abstraction of labour, and economic 'reality' more broadly, not as closed episodes of the past, but as intersubjectively and performatively (re)produced and 'constantly at issue' (Holloway, 2010: 168). Second, I saw members utilising the living antagonism between abstract labour and concrete doing, and their consequent desire to expand the latter towards self-determination, to inform the practice and valuing of work. Utilising collective ownership and a shared commitment to mutuality and an ethic of care, members rejected the hierarchical positioning of paid and unpaid work, and the use of market norms and minimum requirements as the sole determinant of wages. I found similar moves beyond the limits of rationale economic acts in the negotiation of social and economic needs. Here, I observed processes of consensus decision-making opening spaces for the organisations to 'consider their [economic] needs in relation to the needs of [current and future, human and non-human] others'

(Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 67). Running throughout the struggle of doing against abstract labour, and social against economic aims and needs, I found the third act of refusal: the refusal of capitalist socio-economic relations as the sole determinant of the economy. By creating space for multiple relations, experiences and priorities to shape decisions and practices, and recognising that dominance never constitutes a 'one-sided relation [...] where one system unilaterally imposes its will on others' (Jessop, 2002: 26), members re-read both the economy and themselves as overdetermined.

Building on these foundations, together with the grounds laid by the adoption of a post-fantasmatic and weak theoretical stance, I observed members blurring alternative/mainstream dichotomies, and fostering economic diversity and interdependence. Reframing the non-hierarchical positioning of paid and unpaid work through the lens of the total social organisation of labour (White and Williams, 2014; Williams, 2009; Glucksmann, 2005; Parry et al., 2005), revealed processes of balancing and interweaving different forms of work. Drawing again on the ethic of care, sense of mutuality and ontologies of learning to be affected underlying democratic praxis, these processes situated the work of volunteering, self-employment, activism and care on a fluid and interconnected continuum. While acknowledging the necessity of waged work, this continuum challenges the reduction of work to the domain of capital; recognises and expands the multiple intermediaries and relationships that connect us to, and constitute the economy; and harnesses interdependencies between working practices, members and the collective. The fostering of languages of diversity and interdependence are further enabled by ongoing processes of individual-collective alignment, an understanding of the organisation as a conversation, and the framing of governing documents as loose frameworks for action. The spaces of negativity created by this approach to democratic praxis open opportunities for members to utilise everyday experiences of cooperation, together with competencies brought from self-employment and work in the public, private and charitable sector, in the negotiate contradictions. By recognising the plurality of both capitalist and non-capitalist practices, and concomitantly challenging the good/bad positioning of social and economic aims and needs, hierarchy and horizontality, and efficiency and democracy, members developed soft infrastructures and 'workable alternatives' (Chatterton, 2006:

272) that were at once 'situated and constrained but also rebel and insurgent' (Meira, 2014: 714). As such, I found these acts of bricolage to transform the negotiation of contradictions, and associated risks of degeneration, into moments of autonomy. Moving from acts of refusal to acts of creation, these moments are characterised by innovative practices and positive projects of self-valorisation that both demonstrate an already existing post-capitalist world and point to 'a 'beyond' capital[ism]' (Bohm et al., 2009: 13).

Woven through the deconstruction of hegemony, and the fostering of languages of economic diversity and interdependence, is the cultivation of post-capitalist subjectivities. Recognising that a significant barrier to reimagining the economy resides in ourselves, these subjectivities seek to overcome feelings of hopelessness and associated assumptions about what is, and what is not possible (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; White and Williams, 2016). Following Gibson-Graham, I understand the cultivation of these subjectivities to constitute the re-appropriation of thinking as an act of resubjectification, and the concomitant utilisation of ontologies of learning to be affected. These acts of re-thinking emerged most prominently through analysis of participants' journeys to cooperative working. Observation of ongoing processes of individual-collective alignment unveiled how members re-understood negative experiences of work, not as points of defeat, but as points of departure and the grounds for experimentation. Concomitantly I saw these processes opening opportunities for members to identify, reclaim, expand and connect the actions and elements of themselves excluded from the capitalist workplace. Through this, positive experiences of cooperation were given new meaning and salience as glimmers of post-capitalist worlds (Cameron and Hicks, 2014; Graeber, 2013; Young and Schwartz, 2012). This reframing of personal experience extended through ongoing cycles of learning-through-action and 'constitutive antagonism' (Bryne and Healy, 2006: 251) to inform further, collective acts of re-thinking. As seen above, the development of soft infrastructures and 'workable alternatives' that utilised members diverse experiences, enabled risks of degeneration to be re-thought as creative moments of 'vigilant self-scrutiny, self-cultivation and economic self-determination' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p.xxvi; 2006a: xxvi Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). Similarly, I saw members drawing on experiences of redundancy, precarity, and the negative consequences of the profit

motive to inform understandings of success, and practices of wage settings. Here, collective ownership was used as a means to re-think surpluses of time, money and skills, not as property or a source of future individual equity, but as collective potentiality that span space and time (Cornwell, 2012). In addition to enabling these collective acts of re-thinking, the grounding of knowledge in experience and its consummation in action, supported members in developing a sense of personal coherence. This sense of coherence found expression in the reconceptualisation of work as a site for both expanded conscious doing, and the realignment of the means and ends of organising (Parker et al., 2014a). It was expressed also in the reclaiming of social and environmental values, previously excluded from the workplace, to inform collective decisions and animate actions. Common to all the processes described here, we see members using the values, ontologies and relations of democracy as a 'resource for questioning and critiquing existing economic relations' and challenging perceived barriers and inevitabilities (Carlone, 2013: 529). Moreover, we see the praxis of democracy used to support interconnected processes of 'changing our thinking/changing the world' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 618) and the consequent re-positioning ourselves as 'theorising authorising subjects of the economy' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xxvii; 152).

In addition to the literature identified above, arguments made in response to my third research question contribute to literature that empirically counters the degeneration thesis (Bakikoa et al., 2004; Storey et al., 2014; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014; Meira, 2014; Vieta, 2012; Harnecker, 2012). They do so by bringing perspectives from small UK worker cooperatives on 'what it actually means to be simultaneously [within,] against and beyond the capitalist present' (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2010: 475). More specifically, they show how a democratic praxis was used to transform the contradictions inherent to this position, and the associated risks of degeneration, into opportunities to engage critically and creatively with both capitalist and cooperative practice. This was achieved, not through acts of resistance, but through more fundamental process of reconceptualising the economy as already heterogeneous and performatively produced: a reconceptualisation that undermines the foundations of the degeneration thesis and opens opportunities for us to prefigure a post-capitalist world in the here and now.

6.2: Insights from a messy research process

In addition to the contributions outlined in sections 6.1, this thesis makes two contributions in relation to research methodology. The contributions respond to calls for researchers to move beyond epistemic-reflexivity (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015; Cunliffe, 2003a), and for a greater engagement with emotional and relational experiences of research (Kenny, 2008; Turner and Norwood, 2013; Gilmore and Kenny, 2015). Situated as both an ethical and analytical imperative, the aim of these responses was to increase transparency over the process of knowledge construction, and develop a more in-depth understanding of democratic praxis.

Reflecting on my thesis as a whole, I argue first that understandings of democratic praxis are enhanced through the epistemological and ontological congruence of research methodology, theoretical framework and organisational practice. In this case, congruence is characterised by a commitment to learning-through-action and reflection, a shared participatory worldview and weak theoretical position, and an acceptance of anti-essentialism in relation to both individual and collective identity. As demonstrated empirically by Ridley-Duff and Ponton (2013), this shared orientation fostered self-reflection, continuous learning, curiosity and collective problem solving; and brought principles, theory and actions into the same space where their performative affect could be explored. More specifically I found that by bringing to consciousness the relationship between thinking and action, mind and body (Graham, 1992; Routledge, 1996; White et al., 2016), the process of research encouraged critical reflection on the ways in which experiences, preconceptions, actions and theories shape my ways of thinking and being in the world, including my perceptions of, and approaches to, performing democratic praxis as both a researcher and practitioner. The theoretical and practical alignment of solidarity action research (Chatterton et al., 2007) and the organisations' democratic praxis enabled me to utilise these critical reflections, to explore the challenges, anxieties and disappointments experienced in research, and from here develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the organisations' praxes of democracy.

Analysis of the anxieties and disappointments that emerged, first from my attempts to implement participatory action research, and later through my role as participant-

observer, gave rise to my second contribution to knowledge. Adding to the work of Kenny (2008), Garthwaite (2016), Warren (2012) and Donnelly et al. (2013), I argue that exploring, and subsequently writing about, my experience of an emotionally-laden and relationally-embedded research process (Koning and Ooi, 2013) informed me not only of the 'lived reality' of organisational research but the lived reality of the organisations themselves. Following Gilmore and Kenny's (2015: 57) call to break the 'silence surrounding ethnographers' emotional experiences', feelings of anxiety, frustration and contradiction were not avoided or suppressed but rather were viewed as productive moments. Steering me away from the murky waters of narcissism, emotional and relational experience thus became analytical starting points from which I interrogated 'the mutual meaning *emerging within* the research relationship' (Finlay, 2002: 215) and constructed new knowledge (Koning and Ooi, 2013).

This thesis focused on productive moments that emerged as I flitted between "field"/"non-field" and insider/outsider (Rose, 1997: 313). Experiences of belonging and otherness emerging from this flitting gave rise to empathetic resonance through which I was able to "feel into" the challenges and joys of democratic praxis (Finlay, 2005). More specifically, feelings of resonance brought to the fore mutuality and individual-collective interdependence as central democratic ways of being; revealed the necessity of finding the 'right mix of people' and engaging in ongoing processes of individual-collective alignment; and reframed democracy as a site of ongoing struggle. My understanding of democratic praxis was further developed through the negotiation of access to each organisation (see Langmead, 2017b; appendix 7) and my failed attempts to implement participatory action research. Utilising both the research-theory-practice congruence discussed above and my relational experience of being a practitioner-researcher these processes challenged my positioning of structured decision-making and full member engagement as the basis to meaningful, democratic participation. As I was pushed to 'see outside the bounds of [my] own perspective' and the limits of my assumptions (Takacs, 2003: 27), I gained new insights into both my own processes of knowledge construction, and the purpose and practice of meetings and governing documents. Over the course of the research these democratic practices emerged, not as central to democracy in and of themselves, but as a means of

supporting more fundamental and empowering processes of individual-collective alignment and learning-through-action.



 Consummating: celebration of being-values.	Practical knowing: Role of formal structures in democracy; importance of processes of individual-collective alignment and learning-through-action; commitment to mutuality and interdependence.	 Grounding: validation of truth-values.
	Propositional knowing: Democracy as praxis; solidarity action research; ethnography as a performative world-making processes	
	Presentational knowing: Expressed resonance with participants experience; being-as practitioner-researcher/spect-actor; expression of plurivocality.	
	Experiential knowing: Negotiating access; experiences of being an insider; experiences of otherness; tensions emerging from practitioner-researcher role/observing and participating; empathetic resonance.	

Figure 6.1: Researcher experiences of the extended epistemology (adapted from Heron and Reason, 1997: 281-2)

As illustrated in figure 6.1, in each of these productive moments, my ways of seeing and understanding democratic praxis were challenged, re-formed and consummated in practice; and emerging competencies and tacit ways of knowing were grounded in experience, including direct encounters, emotional response and empathetic resonance. Here reflexivity became a research tool. Exploration into the changing and overdetermined self, meeting with and listening to the multiple voices of self and other, and temporarily performing and re-performing more certain subjectivities served as a means to frame and understand similar processes occurring in practice. Through both contributions to knowledge, I claim therefore, that a more nuanced and complex understanding of democratic praxis emerges when we learn, not only from the research findings, but also through the research process that became itself, an object of study (Castañeda, 2006).

6.3: Implications for practice

Amongst cooperative practitioners, discourse on the varying practices of, and challenges associated with, direct democracy are well rehearsed. Specific points of concern include the challenge of addressing internal conflict and emergent informal hierarchies, creating inclusive spaces that allow cooperatives to move beyond “preaching to the converted”, and developing efficient practices of decision-making that have the potential to be “scaled up”. I do not claim to offer solutions to these concerns; indeed, the anti-essentialist and relationally embedded nature of democracy limits the potential for, and effectiveness of, single solutions. Through the in-depth study and comparison of two worker cooperatives this thesis does however offer new and critical insights into the day-to-day praxis of democracy. Again, reflecting the nature of democracy, the significance and implications of these insights will depend upon the reader, and the extent to which the narratives presented here ‘ring true’ (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 8) with their own experiences or understandings. The paragraphs that follow bring to light specific points that I hope will offer sources of shared learning.

Perhaps most importantly, this thesis provides an account of imperfection: it shows that conflicts are not always resolved; that informal hierarchies emerge; that the need to achieve ‘the right mix of people’ (inevitably) excludes; and that conflicts between efficiency and collective decision-making are, at times, irreconcilable. Contrary to how they may sound, these are not stories of hopelessness. As Fran (findings review, 07/06/16) pointed out, the thesis shows that *‘everything isn’t perfect but we are ok anyway’*. My hope therefore is three-fold. First, I hope that the findings presented here bring comfort and a sense of shared struggle that goes beyond the bounds of individual cooperatives. Second, I hope to contribute to a move beyond the search for an ideal democracy-to-come, to encourage instead an understanding of democracy as a an ongoing struggle and site of (necessary) contestation. Finally, I hope that my analysis has reframed mistakes, imperfections and contradictions, not as issues to be eliminated, but as creative moments that help cooperatives to constantly reassess their practice, and their place within (outside and beyond) the capitalist economy.

Expanding on these hopes, and returning to the origins of this research, this thesis offers three key learnings in relation to the role of democracy in countering risks of degeneration. First it has shown how democratic praxis can create opportunities to deconstruct the hegemony of capitalism that, as outlined in chapter 1, underpins claims made by the degeneration thesis. Most significantly analysis revealed that, when understood as a process of individual-collective becoming, democratic praxis can challenge the inevitability and totality of labour abstraction. It does so by enabling the identification and expansion of both conscious doing, and the non-monetised, non-commodified elements of the self (Holloway, 2010: 170). As illustrated through reflection on the process and benefits of my research, utilising this potential requires cooperatives to make time and space to explore members' motivations and journeys to cooperative working, not only during periods of probation but throughout their membership.

Second, it has highlighted the value of maintaining connections between the means and ends of organising. Again, looking back to arguments made in chapter 1, this interconnection is crucial to countering risks of degeneration. Shedding light on the practical implications of this claim, chapter 4 revealed the importance of balancing tensions between the work of running a business and the work of democracy; and in ensuring ongoing and meaningful member engagement, constituting participation in shaping both the organisation's focus (its ends) and its democratic praxis (its means). Further expanding on this latter point, I found that extending contestation from specific issues to the praxis of democracy itself enabled members to challenge informal hierarchies and points of inefficiency. In practice, this requires cooperatives to remain responsive to (both current and future) individual-collective needs, and to understand governing documents, not as rules to be followed, but contestable frameworks for action. Moreover, it requires co-operators to understand democratic praxis as, at once, a means and an end: an empowering and transgressive act through which cooperatives engage in ongoing work of negotiating contradictions inherent to their dual characteristic (Langer, 2008; Novkovic, 2012).

Finally, this thesis has unveiled the potential of democratic praxis to transform contradictions and risks of degeneration into creative moments of possibility.

Reflecting on what it means to be simultaneously within, against and beyond capitalism revealed an ongoing struggle between members 'political ideals', and 'a pragmatic desire to maintain and build alternative projects and see a return on emotions and time invested' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 480). This struggle constitutes acts of border crossing that see members travel repeatedly between hoped-for-futures and the challenges and limitations of the presents. Performed most prominently in and through deliberation, contestation and the search for consensus, these journeys give rise to temporal solutions that are neither (mainstream) capitalist or (alternative) non-capitalist: solutions that rejected this binary and embraced acts of economic bricolage that, again, undermined the foundations of the degeneration thesis. Reflecting the epistemological and ontological work outlined in section 5.1, achieving this transformation requires cooperatives to not only accept, but embrace, the incompleteness of democratic praxis, consensus and autonomy. Consonant with the role of emotion in ethnographic research, I suggest also that it requires cooperatives to use feelings of discomfort and dis-alignment as sources of learning. Linking back to the first learning, these emotions tell us not of the inevitability of degeneration, but of the living antagonism between capitalist and post-capitalist worlds.

6.4: Limitations: impact for what and for whom?

My PhD provided a creative and playful space within which to explore, not only the purpose and praxis of democracy, but the processes, challenges and joys of research. Given the rarity of such spaces in the world of funded academic research (Campbell and Vanderhoven, 2016; David, 2002), I sought to use my time to explore emergent and unexpected paths, encounter dead-ends, and come to know myself as a researcher, academic, practitioner and activist. This gave rise to some uncomfortable experiences that, while offering fruitful sources of learning (see section 6.2), spoke also of the studies limitations.

Reflecting on my move from participatory action research (Askins, 2017; Kidd and Kral, 2005; Reason and Bradbury, 2008) to solidarity action research (Chatterton et al., 2007), brought the missed opportunity of greater levels participant involvement to the

fore. If I were to repeat this research, I would spend more time developing research-based relationships with each organisation, with the view to co-constructing research questions and methods. While this would have led to very different empirical outcomes (and perhaps ones less aligned with my own curiosity), it would also have afforded greater emphasis on the A of SAR (Chatterton et al., 2007), and consequently increased the impact of the research on each organisation. Extending this participatory process (Pain and Kindon, 2007), I would also have liked to develop a more inclusive approach to writing and analysis. I went as far as I felt able here, creating space for the collective analysis of participants narratives, and taking draft findings chapters back to participants for comments. While offering some interesting additional insights, potential benefits to both myself and the organisations, were limited by the availability of participants' time. Rather than creating a greater inclusivity the process, in reality, served to highlight my own ownership over, and personal benefit from, the research. This latter experience speaks to the wider challenge of engaging organisations, who's primary concern lies with their own day-to-day practice, in the process and dissemination of research. SAR holds much promise here, but more work is needed to deconstruct the academia-activism/researcher-researched dichotomies, and to develop forms of engagement that are feasible, meaningful and transformative. This work extends beyond to practices of SAR itself, to (potentially prefigurative) acts of teaching, publishing and organising within and against the neoliberal university (The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010).

Similarly linked to the issue of research participation, the comparability of the two case study organisations may have been limited by discrepancies in my own involvement. As outlined in sub-section 2.2.1, in Beanies, my offers to contribute to the revision of governing documents were refused due to my non-member status. As a result, my (outsider) researcher role took greater prevalence, and with it, my reliance on observations and conversations over direct experience. When contrasted to my more active role in Regather, it is possible that I developed a more in-depth and critical understanding of the latter than the former. Conversely, it is likely that both my presence and my embeddedness had more of an impact on the collection and analysis of data in Regather than Beanies. I sought to address these concerns by exploring both my experience of being a member (Regather)/worker (Beanies), and the emotionally

laden experience of being an ethnographer. In addition to offering insight into the praxis of democracy in each organisation, these acts of reflexivity created transparency over my role in the process of knowledge construction (Koning and Ooi, 2013). I will thus leave it to the reader to decide what was lost and what was gained through my differing roles (Luttrell, 2000).

Taking this issue beyond my own level of involvement, research findings may also have been affected by informal hierarchies that became apparent through the analysis of observations and focus groups. Reflecting an issue present in cooperative practices, I found that *'there are [always] people that can speak louder and for longer and sometimes get listened to more'* (Roy, member of a UK cooperative). This was mirrored in the varying quantity of data I had from each participant. While trying to balance this through my own choice of observations, discussions and analysis, I did not wish to disguise the issue. Revealing the prevalence of certain member's voices over others was both an ethical and an empirical decision. In relation to the former I felt transparency improved the validity of my research. In relation to the latter, it offered additional insights into the relations present in each organisation. Notwithstanding this decision, this thesis will have given prevalence to the words and stories of some members over others.

6.5: Un-done work and future research

As I entered the last month of my PhD the unfulfilled intentions and questions left unanswered loomed large. Through the struggle to let go of the product of four years' work I have truly come to realise that this is, and always will be, an unfinished project. So where do I go from here?

In order to address research question three, this thesis necessarily investigated multiple acts of re-thinking and re-making. This came at the expense of more in-depth investigation into each of the practices discussed in chapter 5. As such, in the immediate future, there is work to be done delving deeper into these issues, in both my own data and academic literature. In relation to the latter, theoretical and empirical literature on autonomous activism (Chatterton 2010a; 2010b; Pickerill and

Chatterton, 2006; Note from Nowhere, 2003), and the theoretical lens of anarchism (White and Williams, 2013; Chomsky, 2013; Kropotkin, 1987), could be used more intensively to offer new insights, specifically into the interconnection between radical democracy, self-valorisation (Cleaver, 2000; 1993) and ‘the art of living in between’ existing and hoped-for worlds (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 484). Assuming the role of academic-activist, drawing on this literature would further support my explicit aim to foreground certain ways of thinking and being and make ‘post-capitalist worlds more real and apparent’ (Cameron and Hicks, 2014: 54; Gibson-Graham, 2008).

Beyond this work, the thesis has raised issues that warrant future research. First, the concept of the ‘right mix of people’, discussed in sub-section 4.1.5, raises questions over the in/exclusivity (and therefore truly democratic nature) of cooperatives. This concern is captured by Dave (Beanies, FG1) in the following extract:

I don't see myself as a typical Beanie type. That's not kind of my background or where I have come from. I am a bit of a corporate bastard (Laughs) and things like hobbies...not hobbies exactly...but things like Hunt Sabbing, everyone does that sort of thing...I think we are all into animal rights (H: Yes) but my kind of hobbies are golf and cricket and the sporty type stuff that don't quite match with Beanies either.

Further reflecting on Dave’s experience, we saw that in both Beanies and Regather the rejection of activist/non-activist binaries and processes of individual-collective alignment, that not only welcomed but thrived upon diversity, went some way to open-up the closed space of each community of practice. Crucially, these practices foregrounded the contestable nature of democratic praxis, and the values that constitute its underlying “thin consensus”. Following the radical democracy of agonistic pluralism, this served to ensure that ‘the “them” is not a permanent outsider’ (Rummens, 2009: 379). Nonetheless, through observations in both my case study organisations and at wider cooperative events I found, like Chatterton (2010b: 1215) that ‘radical spaces do remain predominantly [radical] white and middle class’. Thus, the question remains: how can cooperatives tap into and build upon everyday experience of cooperation, self-determination and collectivity, and open opportunities

for people to 'experience directly the feasibility of self-organising' (ibid., 1216; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006)?

Second, exploration into the negotiation of wages, and paid and unpaid labour, revealed working practices that simultaneously reduced and increased risks of self-exploitation and precarity. In line with research into Argentinian worker-recuperated firms (Atzeni and Vieta, 2010; Chatterton, 2005; Vieta, 2012), and creative and cultural cooperatives (Sandoval, 2016), members described joining their organisations in response to experiences of work insecurity. The cooperatives consequently became sites of interwoven resilience, resistance, and reworking (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 487). As Ruccio (2011) and Cheney et al. (2014) recognise, this interweaving is embedded in cooperative forms of ownership and control that, as illustrated in section 5.2, mean that 'those who perform necessary and surplus labor appropriate and distribute the surplus they create' (Ruccio, 2011: 336). In addition to enabling self-determination over how labour is valued, and the consequent foregrounding of practices of mutuality and an ethic of care, the appropriation of surplus by workers (rather than capitalists) constitutes an act of nonexploitation (Ruccio, 2011). Sitting uncomfortably alongside this, and in line with Sandoval's (2016), Vieta's, (2012), and Shukaitis' (2010) findings, my research revealed challenges of self-exploitation and precarity in the form of 'forced' voluntary labour and fluctuating wages. These practices occurred in part from the organisations' ongoing position within the capitalist economy. They were further cemented by a level of acceptance, arising from the interconnection of autonomy, creativity and flexibility; and the desire to see projects succeed, and receive a return on time and emotion invested. Reflecting on these points I found that the re-framing of autonomy as a collective project, supported by individual-collective interdependence, and the interweaving of different forms of work (paid/unpaid; formal/informal), offered a potential source of hope. These, and other practices, that both support members in meeting their needs in nonexploitative ways, and address the issue of precarity, warrant further investigation.

In addition to the areas of future research outlined above, further insights into the role of cooperative democratic praxis, and what it means to be at once, within, against and beyond capitalism, could be gained by reframing my research through the theoretical

lens of the commons. The potential for this reframing arises when we re-understand ‘the commons’, not as a noun, but as verb: an ongoing process of commoning (Linebaugh, 2008; Chatterton, 2010a; Esteva, 2014). This re-understanding has three main implications that resonate with my own research, as outlined below.

First it recognises and reflects the ongoing nature of primitive accumulation. Expanding on arguments made in sub-section 3.1.3, if we understand capital as a social relation rather than as stock, the process of enclosure must be viewed instead as ‘a permanent feature of capitalist accumulation’: a means of ‘subsuming [and homogenizing] non-capitalist social spaces under the value practices of capital’ (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015: 3; De Angelis and Harvie, 2014). Illustrating the role of primitive accumulation in offering a fix to the crises of capitalism, and reasserting links between enclosure and the abstraction of labour, Caffentzis and Federici (2014: 94; see also De Angelis, 2010) explain:

‘Primitive accumulation’ is the strategy to which the capitalist class always resorts in times of crisis when it needs to reassert its command over labour, and with the advent of neo-liberalism this strategy has been extremized, so that privatization extends to every aspect of our existence.

Adding to Nicole’s recollection of the enclosure of land formerly owned by the Briganti (see section 3.1.3), Federici (1990), Caffentzis and Federici (2014), and Bresnihan and Byrne (2015) draw attention to the ‘new enclosures’ that have emerged in response to the international debt crisis in Africa and Latin America; the application of ‘laws of scarcity’ to, and subsequent enclosure of, non-rivalrous goods (Esteva, 2014: 149); and the financialisation and commodification of urban space (see also Hodkinson, 2012; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). Expanding this fix beyond acts of privatisation, and adding to claims made in sub-section 3.2.3, we see also that neoliberal-capitalism exist in ‘parasitical relationship’ with the commons (Peck et al., 2009). This relationship sees the commons utilised as a means to address the crisis of social and ecological reproduction, thereby maintaining spaces for capitalist subjectification²¹³; and to

²¹³ For example, Cameron’s Big Society proposed to address cuts in public spending following the 2008 financial crisis (see De Angelis and Harvie, 2014; De Angelis, 2012; 2013; Caffentzis and Federici, 2014).

enable increased productivity, specifically in relation to the networked information economy²¹⁴ (Hardt, 2010; see also De Angelis, 2010). On the one hand I agree with Gibson-Graham et al. (2016: 4) that these narratives maintain capital's place at the 'gravitational centre of meaning making'. On the other I contend, like Hardt (2010) and De Angelis and Harvie (2014), that highlighting the centrality of the commons to the production of capitalist commodities and, more importantly, capitalist subjectivities, exposes cracks in capitalist enclosures and provides the conditions through which capital creates its own gravediggers. As I have argued with regards the coexistence of concrete doing and abstract labour (see sub-section 3.2.3), cooperatives could therefore be viewed as a way of responding to the push towards enclosure by strengthening the push towards commoning. As outlined below, this is achieved through processes that both defend existing commons and continually 'shape new commons' that surpass public/private/commoned dichotomies.

Second, it emphasises that commons do not exist but rather are created through relational praxis (Linebaugh, 2008; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). Here, concern is shifted away from utopian visions, the materiality of the commons, and interrelated issues of resource management and legal ownership (Bollier, 2011; De Angelis, 2010; Federici and Caffentzis, 2014; Esteva, 2014; Jeppesen et al., 2014). As Gibson-Graham et al. (2016) argue, to conceive of commons as a form of property is to adopt and reinforce a capitalocentric position that circumvents more pressing questions over the means, purpose and beneficiaries of ownership (Bresnihan and Byrne, 2015; De Angelis and Harvie, 2014; Esteva, 2014). Reflecting Beanies' and Regather's loose and organic understanding of their governing documents, proponents of post-capitalist commons encourage us to focus instead on how commons, and the 'new systems of values' (De Angelis, 2010: 958) that underlay them, are produced in practice. This brings to the fore the diverse communities engaged in, and created through, processes of commoning and the relations, vocabularies and praxes through which these communities reconnect the means and ends of organising (Chatterton et al., 2013; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). Through this, the relational praxis of 'being-in-common'

²¹⁴ From this latter perspective the commons is understood as a (per)mutation of capitalism and a constituent element of the cycle of creative destruction.

(Gibson-Graham et al., 2016: 6) is reconceived as a prefigurative act that expresses how we might live and relate differently with the world in the here and now (Bresnihan and Byrne, 2015; Jeppesen et al., 2014).

Third and interrelatedly, it opens the possibility that (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016: 6; see also Turner, 2017; Lebowitz and Trudeau, 2017):

commoning can take place with any form of property, from privately own property to open access property [...] enclosed and unmanaged resources can be commoned not by changing ownership but by changing how access, use, benefit, care and responsibility occur.

While recognising the aspiration to act autonomously from both the market and the state, this approach allows us to start from where we are: (re)claiming private space as commons on both a long and short-term basis (De Angelis and Harvie, 2014; see for example Chatterton et al.; 2013); creating struggle out of everyday resources (Chatterton, 2010a); and re-appropriating and co-opting capitalist and state activities as a means to achieving a 'commons' end (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). Such practices were observed in Regather where private and state-owned spaces were commoned through street parties, community food-growing projects, and the non-monetary exchange of skills, tools and materials to transform a private rented building for consensually-determined social and cultural use. Like Bresnihan and Byrne (2015: 49) I found that operating at once within and against enclosure brought challenges and limitations that push against 'common value practices'. However, as indicated above, I observed also that it creates opportunities to identify and expand the cracks in ongoing processes of primitive accumulation. Following Gibson-Graham et al's (2016) quote above, and returning to my second point, this expansion is achieved through acts of producing and organising in common. In line with the praxis of democracy described in chapter 4, these praxes acknowledge and build upon the work of previous generations²¹⁵; allow for a focus on long-term sustainability and the reproduction and

²¹⁵ In Regather, this constituted acknowledging and celebrating past acts of commoning both within the local area and the building they inhabit. In Beanies, it meant respecting and building upon the work of past members through acts that ensured they could similarly pass the cooperative on to the next generation.

expansion of the commons; and harness mutuality and horizontality (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016; Jeppesen et al., 2014). Such approaches at once ‘destabilize and delegitimize the current socio-political order’ (Jeppesen et al., 2014: 889), prefigure alternative ways of living in and relating to the world, and support the development of post-capitalist, ‘commoner’ subjectivities (see also De Angelis, 2010)²¹⁶.

6.6: I wish I had...: A closing thought and learning

I have learnt much through the process of researching and writing-up this PhD. I have learnt about what participatory action research could look like; about my position as an academic-activist and what this means in relation to what, and how I research; about the central role of writing in the process of analysis, and the joys and frustrations of publishing research; about the challenges and potential of ethnography, and particularly the use of my own emotional and relational experience of research as a site of reflexivity; and, most prominently (and painfully) about the ethical challenges of researching with a close-knit community. To bring this thesis to a close, I reflect on these latter two learnings by identifying a regret that I attempted to deal with in the final weeks of writing; and exploring what I (and other researchers) might learn from my oversight.

I outlined in sub-section 2.4.2 my decision not to default to the use of pseudonyms but rather to take initial findings back to participants so they could decide for themselves whether their own, and their organisations’, names should be included. I described also in Langmead (2017b; appendix 7) concerns that the process of negotiating access at Regather did not take into account the impact that my research could have on individual members emotionally and physically invested in the organisation. What I failed to do was to connect these two issues. Reflecting on my research with critical distance I realised that, as a consequence of this, the second ethical concern was not

²¹⁶ As we saw in section 3.4, these process of resubjectification require epistemological and ontological work, including the work of ‘leaning to be affected’ (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009c; Latour, 2004). Through their analysis of the production of air, ozone and solar commons, Gibson-Graham et al. (2016) illustrate the role of this ontological work, and specifically the acknowledgment of the embodied experience of climate change, in creating the impetus and context for common action by a diverse ‘affinity community’. A similar argument could be made in relation to worker cooperatives, for whom the embodied experience of hierarchical working, insecurity of employment and a sense of misfitting propel the commoning of labour, skills, knowledge and financial surplus.

fully resolved. I had taken initial findings back to research participants but not the organisations' wider membership. Moreover, despite learning from Ellis' (1986) experiences of researching in a close-knit fishing community, in the case of ex-members, who were referred to but did not themselves participate in the research, I had defaulted to the use of pseudonyms. In both cases, I applied 'ethics in practice' (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010) to participants but not to the wider cooperative community. As I reached the point of being able to imagine proudly giving each organisation a beautifully bound copy of my thesis I was confronted with the ethical implications of this oversight. I realised, not only that the narratives shared in my thesis may misrepresent the lived experiences of ex-members, but that by using pseudonyms I was effectively writing them out of the organisations' past. These sinking realisations drove me to contact three ex-members, with whom I was still in touch, and share with them the findings summaries. This act brought with it additional ethical challenges. Further reinforcing the insufficiencies of using pseudonyms, it revealed that neither changing names, nor taking findings back to participants removed the pain experienced by non-participating, ex-members when they read my account²¹⁷. Rather too late, I removed and reworded select quotes and added narratives that highlighted the nuanced and contested nature of the organisations' turbulent periods.

While my actions went some way to addressing the issues identified I was left perplexed as to how and why, despite thinking and writing about these very concerns, I had failed to address them sooner. In part, my oversight arose from the temporal binding of my research. This research is about current praxes of democracy as experienced and described by the members who were most involved in the organisations during the 18-month ethnography. This offers rationale for not including the voices of past, and less involved, members but it does not fully explain the ethical

²¹⁷ Further highlighting the complexity of ethical issues discussed here, one of the ex-members I contacted expressed regret at reading the findings summary, explaining that it had brought up difficult memories that they would '*rather have left in a box*'. While participating members were happy for the information they shared to be in the public domain, and to be read by other ex-members, this did not mean that that those they were referring to were not going to experience hurt: a risk that, as the ex-member's comment shows, I was insufficiently sensitive to. I questioned whether I should have excluded the hurtful quote, but doing so would (in Mark's words) have been like presenting the highlights of a football match. Rather I decided to stress, following guidance from participants, that the account presented in this thesis is one of many possible narratives, based upon the words and actions of those presented at the time of the research.

oversight. Delving deeper I identified four further interconnected explanations, and it is in these that I find valuable points of learning. First, taking findings back to ex-members highlighted that, in the same way that formal ethics procedures can blunt a researcher's ethical sensibilities, so too can getting ethical 'approval' from participants. Second, my default to the use of pseudonyms can be traced in part to the deep acceptance of this approach in academia. As I have explored in relation to capitalism, narratives of acceptable ethical practice shaped my perception of what was possible, necessary and viable, limiting space for the full imagination of alternative ethical praxis. Third, and interrelatedly, I failed to re-appropriate my thinking about ethics as an act of (academic) resubjectification, and subsequently to connect my thinking-theorising to action. Finally, pressures of time and the conflicting demands of being both an (aspiring) academic and a practitioner-researcher left little opportunity to create the critical distance I now understand as necessary to reflexive ethical research praxis. Learning from both Gibson-Graham and Roelvink's (2009c) exploration into how we might come to live differently with the earth, and the processes of consensus decision-making observed in each organisation, these four points bring to the fore the importance of slowness and silence in the research process. Returning to a quote presented in sub-section 5.3.3, Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2009c: 322) remind us that:

*Silence and slowness are openings, of course, opportunities for the body to shift its stance, to meld a little more with its surroundings [...]
Undoubtedly these are openings for learning. Not learning in the sense of increasing a store of knowledge but in the sense of becoming other.*

In future research, I will make more effort to create time and space for 'silence and slowness' and would encourage others to do the same.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Expanded critique of hybridisation

In their work on social enterprise Teasdale (2009), Dey et al. (2014) and Pache and Santos (2010; 2013a; 2013b) conceptualise the irreducibility of social enterprise to a single economic form as a process of hybridisation. Dey et al. (2014: 418) define hybrid organisational forms as:

[...] structures and practices that allow the coexistence of values and artefacts from two or more categories. Hybrid organizational forms therefore draw on at least two different sectoral paradigms, logics and value systems, and in the case of [Social Enterprise], relate to the emergence of novel institutional forms that challenge traditional conceptions of economic organizing.

During the early stages of my PhD I found this concept useful in bringing to light the challenges and tensions inherent to cooperatives, and the ways in which these informed and enabled the emergence of new organisational forms. However, as I engaged in the work of Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2006b; 2003) I began to see how the concept continues to position social enterprise in relation to capitalism: as ‘caught *between* the competing demands of the market logic and the social welfare logic that they combine’ (Pache and Santos, 2013a: 972, emphasis added). Highlighting this positioning of ‘hybrid organisation’ as ‘a compliment of, or contained within capitalism’ (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 23) Pache and Santos (2013a: 973) go on to explain:

[Hybrid organisations] are exposed over lengthy periods of time to multiple institutional logics that prescribe what constitutes legitimate behavior and provide taken-for-granted conceptions of what goals are appropriate and what means are legitimate to achieve these goals. Hybrid organizations are likely to emerge and do well in these complex environments because they incorporate elements prescribed by various logics and are therefore likely to project at least partial appropriateness to a wider set of institutional referents.

While recognising that organisational categories are 'idealised forms' (Dey et al., 2014) and challenging the 'conceptualization of organizations as entities reproducing a single coherent institutional template' (Pache and Santos, 2013a: 273), the concept maintains notions of organisational core essence (public, private, not-for-profit or hybrid; see also van Oorschot et al., 2013), and continues to connect legitimacy to these essences. This connection is illustrated most strikingly in claims that, by adopting a more business-like form, social enterprises gain legitimacy (Cameron, 2010; Dart, 2004; sub-section 3.1.1). As one participant of Pache and Santos's (2013a: 994) study explained:

A nonprofit can be really professional, but, in people's mind, a non-profit is not-for-profit, it is not professional, it is not strong, financially. We wanted to enter this competitive space with a business image... So we chose a for-profit status.

Furthermore, we see in Pache and Santos' quote that the concept remains concerned with the competitive advantage offered by hybridisation and the risks of degeneration associated with it. As such, the concept limits 'our capacity to create and exemplify new worlds by thinking, speaking, acting and associating differently' (Davies, 2013: 498). I found that using instead the framework of 'community economies' re-opened these spaces by foregrounding economic diversity in both the 'capitalist' and 'non-capitalist' sphere, and emphasising the interdependence of economic practices (Graham and Cornwell, 2009). In doing so it helped me to understand the balancing of contradictions, not as processes of 'trading-off' (Dey et al., 2014: 427) one option against another or but as creative moments of re-thinking the economy and re-imagining ourselves as 'theorising authorising subjects of the economy' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b: xxvii: 152).

Appendix 2: Cooperative values and principles

Co-operative Values

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Cooperative principles

Voluntary and open membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

Democratic member control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote), and cooperatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

Member economic participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

Autonomy and independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

Education, training and information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public – particularly young people and opinion leaders – about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

Cooperation amongst cooperatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the Co-operative Movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

Concern for community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

(The Hive, 2017)

Appendix 3: Building blocks for cooperative governance

Novkovic and Miner (2015: 11) identify the following at the building block of coop governance:

1. Humanism (people-centred approach). Humanistic understanding of management and the firm assumes people are intrinsically motivated social beings, balancing their personal and group interests in accordance with general moral principles.

Organizations, in this view, embrace a balance of objectives, including financial, and tend to involve key stakeholders in their decision-making process.

2. Joint (distributed) ownership and control. Joint ownership is a hallmark of co-operative organizations, and it is coupled with member control. Although typically operating under private property regimes, co-operatives distribute ownership rights equally among their members and hold a part of their assets in non-divisible reserves.

3. Democracy (self-governance). Self-governance is the underlying engine of autonomous co-operative enterprises, with democratic decision-making by their members as its vital component.

Appendix 4: Worker cooperative governance and management structures

The Worker Cooperative Code (Banton et al., 2012: 2) identifies three governance and management structures:

The collective:

When people first come together to form a small worker co-operative, they often work as a collective, so that governance, management and operations are not separate spheres. Members are at the same formal level as directors, or they act as if directors, using a flat structure where everyone has an equal say. Some people may take the lead in particular areas or activities, but roles can be changed depending on circumstances.

Self-managing work teams:

As they grow, co-operatives often develop into semi-autonomous teams running different areas of the business: cafe/shop, sales/designers/ printers, warehouse/drivers/ buyers etc. These become self-managing, and nominate representatives from their own team to the elected body.

Hierarchy system:

Usually this means a general manager or managers are chosen; sometimes elected or specifically recruited/selected by the elected body. They are accountable to the elected body, and have been given authority to manage the organisation. In larger cooperatives there may be multiple levels of management. A phrase used to describe this relationship is 'management is not a status, but a process'.

Appendix 5: The prominence of representational democracy



Figure 7.1: Cover image of 'Co-operative Governance Fit to Build Resilience in the Face of Complexity' (International Cooperative Alliance, 2015)

Appendix 6: Rationale for using two case studies

	1 case study	2 case studies	3 case studies
Generalisability	Generalisability is not the core aim of this study. Rather, the aim is to develop 'concrete, context-dependent knowledge' (Flyvbjerg, 2011: 302) that may reinforce or challenge previously held assumptions/understandings through readers' experiences of resonance (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). This may be generalisable to the extent that it contributes to a 'collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field' (Flyvbjerg, 2011:305).		
Breadth	Limited illustration of varying factors shaping democratic practice.	Considered to offer a good balance of breadth and depth within the time period.	Increased variety of cases would help to illuminate the diversity of democratic practices.
Depth	Enables more intensive study. May however limit critique, particularly if data confirms preconceptions or assumptions.		Limited due to time pressures. This may impact on the quality of data, when considered in the context of ethnographic methodology.
Comparability	Possibility of comparison with cases discussed in literature. Variation in context and methodology would however need to be taken into account. Limited UK case studies or studies of small worker cooperatives for comparison.	Considered selection of cases will enable comparison. Engagement in/knowledge of the wider movement will also help with comparison.	Greater breadth in comparability and possibility of triangulation. Anomalies more likely to be highlighted.
Scope and shared learning	May be considered to be a unique case. Shared learning would be possible although to a lesser extent than with 2 or more cases.	Increases scope and opportunities for shared learning due to variance in cases. Increased chance of resonance.	Greater quantity of data may be considered to improve scope. This would however be at the cost of 'detail, richness (and) completeness' (Flyvbjerg, 2011: 302) due to the time-limited depth of study.

Table 7.1: Rationale for two case studies

Having completed the research, I found the use of two case studies to allow enough time for participant observation in each organisation while also offering valuable opportunities for comparison. With regard the latter, comparison specifically brought to light the interconnected nature of thinking, being and acting that constitute democratic praxis.

Appendix 7: Negotiating access

The extract below describes the process of negotiating access to Beanies and Regather and what is revealed in relation to the praxis of democracy.

How do you get ethical approval from a group of, as yet undefined, people who make up a non-hierarchical organisation? Who do you approach in the first instance; and is it the researcher's responsibility to ensure that this individual passes information on to, and gets the approval from, all other members? In addition to answering these questions, the following paragraphs reflect on how confronting them, through the process of negotiating access, gave insights into the nature of democracy in each organisation.

In Beanies, the process was relatively straight forward. I hand delivered an invite letter to the shop, outlining the purpose of the research and what participation would involve (see appendix 8a), and followed this with an e-mail to a group e-mail address (see appendix 8b).

The e-mail was printed out and posted on a notice board, in clear view of all staff, with the question 'Should we participate in this research?' Below the question was a 'yes'/'no' tick box table with a list of coop members in the first column. This list included 'ex'-coop members and the trainee coop member (Jake). All future e-mail correspondences we printed out and put up in the staff room²¹⁸. (Fieldnote, 4/11/14²¹⁹).

One week after the notice was put up I received the following e-mail (30/10/14) from Chris, who had become my main point of contact:

²¹⁸ See appendix 10

²¹⁹ It wasn't until after I received the e-mail from Chris confirming Beanies' willingness participate that the significance of the notice and sharing of correspondences became clear. It is for this reason that the fieldnote was made after agreement to participate had been formally expressed.

We've just had a meeting and we are all agreed that it would be great to have you here doing your research thing. We have signed up myself, Heather, Gemma and Dave as people who would be happy to take part individually but I would not be surprised if Evan and perhaps Mark would be happy to take part if they can work it into their schedules. What would you like us to do next?

This process introduced me to the nature of democracy in Beanies. It revealed clarity over who should be asked and how their views should be sought. It reminded me also that those with the most knowledge, passion or time, or simply those with whom you connect, inevitably become informal gatekeepers. I initially worried about the ethical implications and undemocratic nature of utilising these gatekeepers. However, as research progressed, the process was re-understood as examples of members utilising a deep understanding of their organisation and other members, together with their creativity, knowledge and expertise, to make decisions and perform tasks in the interest of the collective. They revealed, in other words, an understanding of autonomy as an individual-collective project.

Negotiating access to Regather was a far more cumbersome and angst-ridden process. I was in contact with Regather throughout the first year of my PhD. I had left my former role as kitchen manager and adopted instead the informal and voluntary position of 'research and governance assistant' (e-mail from Gareth, 14/02/14). Between my acceptance of this role and the start of my fieldwork, membership of Regather had changed dramatically. With limited knowledge of who now constituted the organisations' core members, I hand delivered an invite letter (see appendix 8a) to Gareth – the one remaining founder member - who two weeks later agreed to the research on behalf of the organisation. This initial agreement was followed by a meeting on 7th November in which myself and Gareth discussed my role as researcher and the practical outcomes he hoped to see. Having identified, in this meeting, Fran and Nicole as potential research participants, I contacted them directly with

information and a formal invite. Rachel, Lisa and Tim joined the research later as they emerged, through observation, as key players²²⁰.

As was the case with Beanies, lessons about myself, the organisation and our interconnection emerged from this process. First, reaching consent confirmed the organic nature of Regather's membership and democratic structure, and Gareth's informal role as manager (see chapter 4). Second, it challenged my understanding of structured processes of communication as a necessary foundation to democracy. In contrast to Beanies, and to my own aspirations for democracy in research and practice, the absence of consultation with members seemed undemocratic. While I knew that members could decide individually not to be involved, this process did not take into account the positive and negative impact that the research could have on individuals *as members* of the organisation. In addition to raising ethical questions, this concern highlighted my own 'sense of being part of something more than oneself' (Kenny, 2008: 376), and awareness that what was said about the collective affected me personally. Again, this experience gave early insights into what constitutes democratic praxis. Specifically, it brought to fore processes of individual-collective alignment through which a sense of unity developed and redeveloped over time. Interrelatedly it highlighted the importance of achieving the 'right mix of people', based on relationships of trust, mutual support, shared commitment and respect. Moreover, the absence of full member consultation introduced me to practices of individual-collective autonomy that, as identified in the case of Beanies, emerged as central to Regather's democratic praxis (see sub-section 4.2.1). Combined, the absence of formal processes of communication and the sense of being part of something greater than oneself reframed democracy, not as a formal structure or approach to decision-making, or as something that can be measured in terms of level of involvement, but as interconnected ways of thinking, being and acting together.

²²⁰ In both Beanies and Regather initial e-mail (Beanies)/ verbal (Regather) consent was followed up with formal organisation (see appendix 11) and individual (see appendix 12) information and consent forms. This process is problematised in section 2.4.

Appendix 8a: Participant invite letter, Beanies/Regather

The letter below was hand delivered to Beanies on 30/09/14. The same letter (with names and details amended) was hand delivered to Regather on the same day.

Dear Beanies members.

I am writing to ask whether Beanies and its members would consider participating in research that I am conducting for my PhD at Sheffield Hallam University. The research will explore the organisational structures used in cooperatives, focusing specifically on the benefits and challenges of democratic practice and worker involvement.

All worker members will be invited to participate in the research. Each member will be invited individually and will be free to choose whether to accept the invite and whether they wish to participate in all or some of the research activities outlined below. Individual members and Beanies as a whole will be free to withdraw from the research up until data collection is complete and will be offered full anonymity.

What will the participation involve?

I would like to spend 6-8 months observing Beanies' day-to-day practices. How and when this observation would be carried out will be arranged with yourselves to avoid disruption or inconvenience.

In addition, participating members will be asked to:

- Share, in writing or through interviews, their motivations for and experiences of working in a cooperative
- Attend one or more group discussions on the potential and challenges of democratic practice

These activities will be carried out between November and July 2014/15.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

Any information shared will be treated confidentially. Your organisation will be offered full anonymity, including a change of organisation name and location, and data will be stored on a password protected computer.

What if I have a problem?

If you have a question or problem that you do not feel able to discuss with the researcher you can contact Richard White on:

Richard White
Faculty of Development and Society
Sheffield Hallam University City Campus, Howard Street,
Sheffield, S1 1WB

0114 225 2899
Richard.White@shu.ac.uk

What now?

If you think Beanies and its members may be interested in participating in this research please contact me on:

E-mail: kiri.n.langmead@student.shu.ac.uk

Tel: 07947764610

If you would like me to e-mail a copy of this letter to Beanies for circulation to members I would be happy to do this. Where possible I would like to receive expressions of interest by 20th October 2014. Please note that I will be on annual leave 10-19th October.

Following initial expression of interest I will contact individual members with further information and to answer any questions that you may have.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards

Kiri Langmead

Appendix 8b: E-mail to Beanies following-up on initial invite letter

The following e-mail was sent on 23/10/14. Chris responded the same day.

Hi Chris

Following our conversation yesterday I thought it might be helpful if I sent you the participant information and consent form so people know what they will be asked to do.

I estimate that the research will take 3-5 hours of participants time spread over the course of 6 months (November-April). I will do what I can to minimise disruption to both Beanies and individual participants. The time that I spend at Beanies and when interviews and focus groups are conducted will be decided in consultation with yourselves. Members can decide for themselves whether they wish to be involved and the extent of this involvement, and I do not need all members to participate for Beanies to be a case study organisation. The main thing is that members are happy for Beanies to be case study organisation and for me to spend some time in the shop observing day to day activities.

If you have any questions or would like me to pop in for chat (I would be happy to explain my research at the next meeting if that would be helpful) please do let me know.

Best wishes.

Response:

That's great, Kiri. I've just stuck up a notice so that people can respond straight away without having to wait for a meeting. I'm sure that information will be helpful too.

Chris

Appendix 9: Linking back to the cooperative history of Little Sheffield.

Below are two extracts describing the Little Sheffield Feast. The extracts inspired a street party held by Regather each September. Figure 7.4 is an advert for the 2017 Little Sheffield Feast.

In recent times the phrase Little Sheffield has generally meant either the closely-knit community of small cutlers and manufacturers of cutlery auxiliaries in the streets between The Moor and Button Lane, or the streets of little houses round Brunswick Chapel and St. Mary's Church. To the latter neighbourhood belonged Little Sheffield Feast.

The Feast was always held on the nearest Monday to 29th September - clearly it was a Michaelmas Fair - and had the usual fairground attractions of booths and stalls of goods for sale, side shows, swings and so on; but its own particular attractions were climbing a greasy pole for a leg of mutton and donkey races from the Hermitage to the top of Brammall Lane. Even in those days the buildings were not entirely close-packed and there was space for the donkeys to run off the main road. The centre of serious drinking, and of the prize giving ceremonies, was the Woodman Inn on the Moor. The Feast was patronised by all the cutlers of the neighbourhood and their families and by the children from St. Mary's National Schools, and was an occasion of much comparatively innocent jollity and a great spending spree - a cheerful and welcome break in the long monotony of the working year.

Figure 7.2: Extract from 'A Brief Account of Little Sheffield' (Walton, 1963)

The Feasts, or Fairs were the highlight of the year for the working-class people and in Sheffield two large feast grounds existed [...] the other was at the bottom of the Moor, near the cluster of cottages known as Little Sheffield. In a book called the Shevild Chap's Song Book, the feast at Little Sheffield is described thus:

*A few months since on frolic bent,
On a journey to Little Sheffield Feast I went,
And being as all of you know quite green,
I was mortally pleased with the sigts I'd seen:
There was Betty and Jenny and Factory Nan,
And twenty more girls and they each had a man,
And Sally and Sukey, and Bandy-leg'd Jack,
And the chap that sold pies with his can on his back,
There were donkeys and dog-carts, and lots of fine folks,
With their jaws all a cracking their nuts and their jokes,
As hungry as hunters from biggest to least,
All right for a blow out at Little Sheffield Feast*

Figure 7.3: Extract from 'A Popular History of Sheffield' (Vickers, 1976)



Figure 7.4: Advert for Regather's 'Little Sheffield Feast'



Figure 7.5: Regather's 'Little Sheffield Feast', 24th September 2017

Appendix 10: Sharing of correspondence, Beanies

All e-mails and letter sent to Beanies were shared with member on a noticeboard in the office. If a member response was required (as was the case with e-mail inviting members to participate in this research; see appendix 7 and 8b) notices were placed at the bottom of the steps leading into the shop.

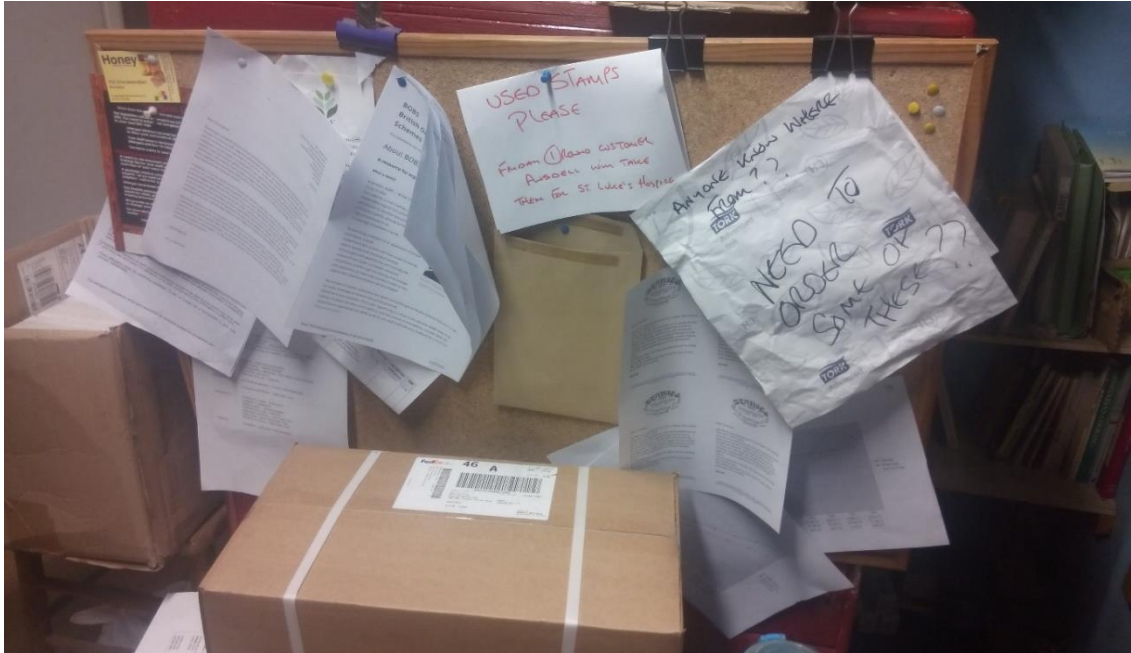


Figure 7.6: Method of information sharing (Beanies)

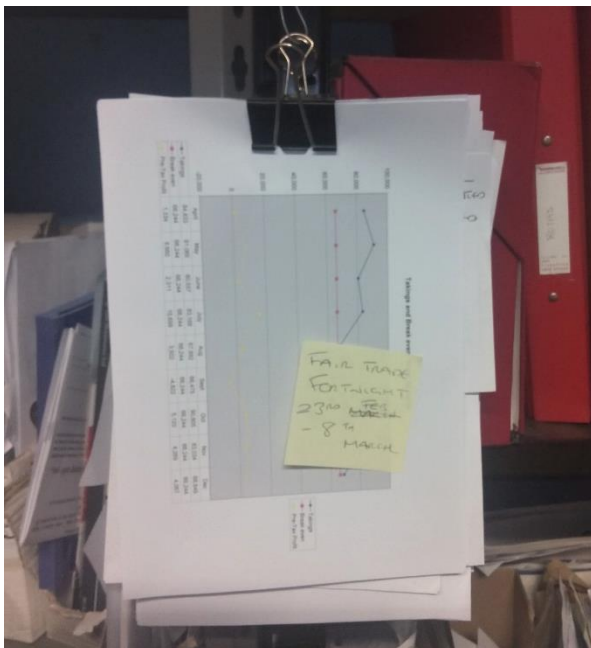


Figure 7.7: Sharing of financial information

Appendix 11: Organisation information and consent form, Beanies/Regather

The letter and consent form below was hand delivered to Beanies, and signed, on 04/11/14. The same letter and consent form (with names and details amended) was hand delivered to Regather, and signed, on the same day.

Dear Beanies members.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my PhD research. The research will explore the organisational structures used in cooperatives, focusing specifically on the benefits and challenges of democratic practice and worker involvement.

Four individual members have agreed to participate the full research process, including interviews and focus groups. I will inform all Beanies members of research activities and you will be free to participate in each individual activity if you would like and when your time allows. If you decide to be involved you will be given an additional information sheet and consent form.

In addition, during a period of observation (4-6month between November and June) I may ask questions and make notes on activities undertaken in the shop. If you do not wish to answer a question please feel free to say so. If you have any questions about my note taking please do ask.

Individual members and Beanies as a whole will be free to withdraw from the research up until data collection is complete. In line with university practice, the desire to withdraw must be made in writing, by one of the participants who has signed this form, within two-week of your last participation. At this point you can request that information gathered during the *last* research activity you participated in be withdrawn. Information from previous stages of the research will be retained as part of the study.

What will the participation involve?

I would like to spend 4-6 months observing Beanies' day-to-day practices. How and when this observation would be carried out will be arranged with yourselves to avoid disruption or inconvenience.

In addition, participating members will be asked to:

- Share, in writing or through interviews, their motivations for and experiences of working in a cooperative
- Attend one or more group discussions on the potential and challenges of democratic practice

These activities will be carried out between November and June 2014/15.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

Any information shared will be treated confidentially. Your organisation will be offered anonymity, including a change of organisation name and location, and data will be stored on a password protected computer.

Due to the unique nature of your organisation, your connection to the researcher and the nature of the research process, full anonymity of individual participants or Beanies as a whole cannot be guaranteed. You will however have the opportunity to review data prior to publication and withdraw any information that you do not wish to be included.

What if I have a problem?

If you have a question or problem that you do not feel able to discuss with the researcher you can contact Richard White on:

Richard White
Faculty of Development and Society
Sheffield Hallam University City Campus, Howard Street,
Sheffield, S1 1WB

0114 225 2899

Richard.White@shu.ac.uk

ORGANISATION CONSENT FORM - to be signed by participant members on behalf of the organisation

Title of Project:

Challenges and benefits of democratic practice in worker cooperatives

Name of Researcher: Kiri Langmead

Thank you for considering participating in this research project.

Please read this consent form carefully. If you understand and are happy with the 7 statements please initial in the space provided and sign the consent form.

		Your initials
1	I confirm that concerned members have read and understand the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
2	I understand that participation is voluntary and that Beanies is free to withdraw without giving any reason. If Beanies decides to withdraw any reference to the organisation will be removed from the research.	
3	I understand that Beanies' withdrawal does not prevent individual participants from continuing with the research project.	
4	I understand that individual member responses will not be taken as representative of the organisation.	
5	I understand that Beanies will be anonymised subject to discussion with all participants.	
6	I understand that anonymity cannot be guaranteed and that there will be an opportunity for data to be removed or amended prior to publication.	
7	I understand that findings from this research project will be made available to the public through presentations, journal publications and a PhD thesis.	

Signed on behalf of:

Name Organisation

By:

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

In both Beanies and Regather space was left for four members' signatures and my own signature.

Appendix 12: Individual information and consent form, Beanies/Regather

The letter and consent form below was hand delivered to, and signed by, each participating member of Regather. The same letter and consent form (with names and details amended) was hand delivered to participating members of Beanies. Delivery of the letters was accompanied by a brief discussion and opportunity for members to ask questions.

Dear Regather cooperative member

Regather has provisionally agreed to be involved in my PhD research project that will explore organisational structures used in cooperatives, focusing specifically on the benefits and challenges of democratic practice. I am contacting you now as a member of Regather to invite you to participate.

I have enclosed information about the project and what you will be asked to do as a participant. In addition, I have enclosed a consent form that, if you decide to participate, will need to be completed before research commences.

Kind Regards

Kiri Langmead

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Project: Challenges and benefits of democratic practice in worker cooperatives

Name of Researcher: Kiri Langmead

The aim of this research is to explore the organisational structures used in cooperatives, focusing specifically on the benefits and challenges of democratic practice. The aims are purposefully loose so that you and Regather have to opportunity to discuss issues of particular concern and relevance.

You have been invited to participate because of your experience of cooperative working at Regather. I understand that any information you share will be personal and will not be understood as representative of the organisation as a whole.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

Any information you share will be treated confidentially and will not be shared with others inside or outside of your organisation without your consent. You will be offered anonymity and data will be stored on a password protected computer.

Due to the unique nature of your organisation, your connection to the researcher and the nature of the research process, full anonymity of individual participants or Regather as a whole cannot be guaranteed. You will however have the opportunity to review data prior to publication and withdraw any information that you do not wish to be included.

Right to withdraw:

You will be free to withdraw from the research at any point up until data collection is complete. I will inform you of when this will be at the earliest possible opportunity.

In line with university practice, the desire to withdraw must be made in writing within two weeks of your last participation. At this point you can request that information gathered during the *last* research activity you participated in can be withdrawn. Information from previous stages of the research will be retained as part of the study.

If Regather decides to withdraw from the research you will be free to decide whether to continue. At this point all reference to Regather will be removed from the research.

You will be given the opportunity to read and comment on initial analysis of the data. You will be free at this time to request the removal or amendment of specific data or quotes.

What will the participation involve?

I would like to spend 4-6 months observing Regather day-to-day practices. How and when this observation will be carried out will be arranged with yourselves to avoid disruption or inconvenience.

In addition, you will be invited to:

Share, in writing or through interviews, your motivations for and experiences of working in a cooperative.

- Attend between one and two group discussions (as your time allows) lasting 1-2hours on the potential and challenges of democratic practice.
- Participate in a one-to-one discussion, lasting no more than 1 hour.

These activities will be carried out between November and June 2014/15.

What if I have a problem?

If you have a question or problem that you do not feel able to discuss with the researcher you can contact Richard White on:

Richard White
Faculty of Development and Society
Sheffield Hallam University City Campus, Howard Street,
Sheffield, S1 1WB

0114 225 2899

Richard.White@shu.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:

Challenges and benefits of democratic practice in worker cooperatives

Name of Researcher: Kiri Langmead

Thank you for considering participating in this research project.

Please read this consent form carefully. If you understand and are happy with the 8 statements please initial in the space provided and sign the consent form.

		Your initials
1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving any reason.	
3	I understand that data will be anonymised subject to discussion with all participants and give permission for my responses (including direct quotations) to be used in this research project.	
4	I understand that anonymity cannot be guaranteed and that I will have the opportunity to remove or amend data prior to publication.	
5	I understand that findings from this research project will be made available to the public through presentations, journal publications and a PhD thesis.	
6	I understand that I am under no obligation to answer questions that arise in group discussions or interviews and that I can leave at any time without reason.	
7	I agree to the group discussions being recorded and transcribed. If you would rather these discussions were not recorded please do not initial this box. This will not prevent you from participating.	
8	I agree to interviews being recorded and transcribed. If you would rather interviews were not recorded please do not initial this box. This will not prevent you from participating.	

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Appendix 13: Notes for members' meeting (Beanies)

Below are notes made in preparation for a members' meeting at Beanies (21/05/15). I used time in the meeting to report findings from the Worker Cooperative Away Weekend (specifically those relating to required working hours for members and member/job descriptions), and from my own research into the recent revision of model articles following the Cooperative and Community Benefit Society Act (2014). Combined with the focus groups carried out as part of the research, this led to ongoing discussions on the revision of governing documents. Extracts from these discussions are explored in chapter 4.

Thanks those that attended group session on Tuesday. I plan to have another session this coming Tuesday, 10-12.

After Tuesday's session a few people commented that it would be good to hear what the other group said. For my research it would be great to get you all together to discuss the session and what came out of it. So I was wondering, if you think it would be a good use of time, if I could use 30-40 minutes in the next meeting so the two groups can share what they have discussed and some of the key points that came out of it.

Things that you could potentially include in your articles of association:

22 Because this is a Workers' Coop only people working for the coop can be members of the coop. If you work for the coop you don't have to be a member since this would be against the cooperative principle of voluntary membership. On the other hand if you don't work for the coop you can't be a member.

The exceptions are during probation period and for those working less than a certain number of hours per month (the exact number of hours should be decided and put into your secondary rules). Workers falling into either (or both) of these categories may not be members.

The criteria of a minimum number of hours work per month is a traditional way of defining which workers are eligible for membership of a workers' coop.

You could set the minimum number of hour worked per month as low as 1, although 16, 24 or 32 hours per week are common.

23 Members are expected to actively participate in the running of the coop.

24 Membership can be ended by a decision at a general meeting. Although minimum standards for ending membership are stated here you should consider that ending membership means ending employment too – so any termination of membership should be done fairly so that there is no unfair dismissal.

(c) Says that the procedure is "subject to any disciplinary procedure" which means that if you have a disciplinary procedure (and you should!) then that takes precedence over what is written here.

Appendix 14: Proposed revision to meet procedures and schedule

(Regather)

The following e-mails were sent to all active Regather members in my capacity as cooperative secretary.

Hi All

As some of you know Regather has started to review its membership and governance structure. As part of this review we have set up members' meetings so that we can share our successes, discuss issues and plan projects with the resources available to us. These meetings will be held on the third Friday of the month at Regather from 9:30 (breakfast from 9am). For those not able to attend, the meeting agenda and project reports will be available prior to the meeting for comment.

The first meeting will be on the 17th July, 9:30-11:30 and will focus on issues of membership and governance. This will be a great opportunity for us to start to discuss what being a member of Regather means and how we want the governance structure to operate. Meetings thereafter will focus on project based issues.

I am sharing a folder 'Regather members meeting 2015' with you. To access it, click on 'Regather members meetings 2015'. Click 'add to drive' in the top right-hand corner and then click 'open in drive', also in the top right-hand corner. The folders will be added to your drive and you will be able to edit them.

In the members' meetings folder there is:

Folder: '01_meeting agendas and minutes 2015' containing:

- 'minutes and comments_260615' - Minutes from a meeting held on 26/06/15. Please do read through these minutes and amend and comment on them as you see fit. The minutes will update you on how we decided to have monthly meetings, who these might involve and what the proposed purpose of the meetings is. Apologies to those who did not know about this meeting. The issues covered will be discussed in more detail on the 17th so everyone will have the opportunity to contribute.
- 'agenda_170715' - Agenda for the meeting on the 17th July. This agenda was developed following a group session conducted as part of my PhD research and the meeting on 26th June and focuses on issues of membership and governance structure. Please feel free to add to and comment on the agenda.
- 'making agendas, minutes and comments' – Document offering guidelines about how to use the members' meeting folder. Please read through these guideline before adding documents or comments.
- 'agenda template' – Proposed agenda template for monthly meeting from August 2015.

Folders for each of the items on the 'agenda template' – These folders are for project reports that will be prepared for each members' meeting. Instruction on how to use the folders can be found in 'making agendas, minutes and comments'

A copy of Regather's rules.

I look forward to seeing those who can make it on the 17th July. If you are not able to make please do take the time to read and comment on the agenda and last meeting's minutes.

Hi All

I think the suggestion to have more project focused regular meeting with a monthly social makes sense. Together with this update e-mail address I think that will make sure people maintain regular contact, know what's going on and get to know each other better.

In terms of members' meetings, our current rules do not specify the number of general meetings we should have per year – they simply say: 'A General Meeting shall be convened either upon an order of the Committee or at the request of three members of the Co-operative or ten per cent of the membership'. However, the model rules brought out following the changes to the cooperative act in 2014, state 'In accordance with the Co-operative Principle of democratic member control, the Co-operative shall ensure that, in addition to the annual general meeting, **at least four other general meetings** are held annually.' While we do not need to do this my feeling is that there is an appetite for members' meetings that will offer a more general oversight of Regather's work and give members the opportunity to review and discuss Regathers objects, ethos and practice.

In light of this, my proposal is to hold members' meetings on the first Tuesday of the month (after or in place of the social) as follows:

- February – General meeting (updating on previous three months project progression and issues arising) followed by AGM (reporting on accounts)
- May – General meeting (updating on previous three months project progression)
- July – Circulation of projects reports via e-mail and opportunity to raise/respond to issues.
- October – General meeting (reporting on previous 6 months and issues arising)

Bearing in mind that governance needs to work for Regather and not the other way round, the meeting schedule has been structured to take into account the deadline for submitting accounts to the FCA and busy project periods (with meetings top and tailing the summer period and no physical meeting during this time). If people are keen to have a meeting before Christmas I would be happy to arrange something. As per Rachel's suggestion, maybe just an update on how we are doing.

How does this sound? Do the proposed dates make sense? Would you like more/less members' meetings? Would you like a meeting before the February AGM?

The aim for the February AGM is to (at least) start the process of updating Regather's rules in line with changes made following the 2014 act and to deal with concerns raised at previous meetings. I would much appreciate your input on these as they are developed. For the changes to be passed at the AGM, we will require 'a majority of no less than 75% of the vote cast at a general meeting' (according to the new rules – our rules don't specify explicitly although rule 15 on expelling a member suggests it might be 'at least two-third'). It is also worth bearing in mind that a general meeting can only go ahead if the quorum – one third of members – is present. So **please do put the dates in your diary** (time to be confirmed). For those not able to attend, there will be an alternative method by which to have your say.

Finally, according to our rule, 'Notices of meetings shall either be given to members personally or posted to them at their registered address or alternatively, if so agreed by the Co-operative in General Meeting, notices of General Meetings may be displayed conspicuously at the registered office.' The new model rules also say that communication can be conducted by email if members consent. Are you happy for meeting dates and times to be communicated via the update@regather.net address and displayed in the office? I will ensure that members currently not on the update list are contacted separately.

Appendix 15: Extract from meeting minutes (Regather)

Below is an extract of minutes taken at one of Regather's members' meetings

(26/06/15)

Attendees: Tim, Nicole, Rachel, Gareth, Kiri

Apologies: Lisa, Fran

Next meeting: 17th July 2015, 9:30 – to further discuss issues of membership and governance

MINUTE SUMMARY

The following items were on the meeting agenda:

1. Work out a more efficient/effecting way of communicating and planning meetings

Meeting communication will be conducted via a group mailing system similar to the one currently used for updates.

Agendas, project reports, comments and minutes will be shared via google drive.

2. Organise a meeting schedule

*Meetings to be held on the **third Friday of the month at 9:30**. The first meeting on the **17th July** will focus on membership and governance issues. Meeting thereafter will be structured around projects*

3. Think about who should be invited to meetings.

Initial membership focus should be on regular volunteers and paid staff who are contributing to concrete projects. Active engagement and project involvement should be the basis to membership.

Kitchen user and community member should be viewed as an aspiration.

There needs to be clear way of communicating with potential members – including volunteers, kitchen users and the community – that may open routes to increased involvement and membership

In addition to these points, we also discussed:

4. The purpose of meetings

Meetings are not necessarily about attendance. They are about creating a structure and deadlines for collating and reporting information and a means through which members (including those who can't attend) can feed into what's going on.

5. The meeting process – agendas, reporting and minutes

Meeting agendas will be available on google drive for all members to contribute to.

The agenda will be finalised and project reports made available on google drive prior to the meeting for members to comment on.

6. Membership and governance structure.

The existing management committee is a formality and doesn't function in reality. Paid workers and regular project volunteers function well as a management team but not as a membership.

Governance structure and membership need to be revised, with a focus on improved communication and reporting, in order to shift Regather from a dysfunctional to a functional cooperative.

DETAILED MINUTES

1. Work out a more efficient/effecting way of communicating and planning meetings

K requested a system for communicating with members as a group i.e. similar system used for updates.

This was agreed.

The use of google drive for collectively developing meeting agendas and sharing reports and minutes for comment was also discussed (see 5.)

ACTION: Set up group e-mail address

2. Organise a meeting schedule

The challenge of organising the first members' meeting highlighted the need for a meeting schedule accompanied by a clear agenda that people can contribute to, and project reports that people can comment on when meeting attendance is not possible.

After some discussion it was agreed that members' meetings will be scheduled for the **3rd Friday of every month**. Meetings will start 9:30am with optional breakfast available from 9am

17 th July, 9:30-11:30	Focused on issues of membership and governance (see agenda)
21 st August	Focused on Regather projects (see agenda template)
18 th September	
16 th October	
20 th November	
18 th December	

ACTION: Add meeting schedule to the Regather Works calendar

3. Think about who should be invited to meetings.

K feels that there is a lack of understanding about who can and can't be a member and what membership means. There has been talk about the community being members but what would that mean?

N doesn't think that community or kitchen user membership is very tangible offering. This has resulted in reluctance to recruit new members.

G suggested that community and kitchen user membership should be viewed as an aspiration. The focus now should be on developing a functioning membership between paid staff and regular volunteers.

T explained that historically, Regather started by trying to recruit members when what it needed was to start a dialogue and develop active engagement. This active engagement should be the basis to membership. He suggested drawing up a list of paid workers and volunteer - anyone who is actively involved in concrete projects, rather than a service user of one specific thing. If kitchen users were to become involved in other aspects of the coop they should be invited to meetings.

R suggested that it should come down to the points on the meeting agenda and who can contribute to these - this should be where you draw the line re. who should/shouldn't be at a meeting.

Appendix 16: Proposed meeting agenda for 17th July 2015 (Regather)

Review of minutes from 26/06/15

Actions; questions and points of clarification; comments

Reflection on group session

The group session was undertaken as part of my PhD research. Participants shared with the group how they got involved in Regather and then identified (on post-it notes) and discussed shared experiences, values, beliefs aims etc. The bullet points in 2a summarise the key points identified. A summary of the discussion can be found in agenda point 2b.

2a. Discussion around post-it notes from group session

Discussion around each of the post-it note groupings, reflecting on why these are important and starting to think about how they might inform ideas on membership and what a 'functioning cooperative' might look like.

- *Autonomy, flexibility and variety of work; enabling creativity*
- *Work-life balance; a way of life not a lifestyle*
- *Importance of community; working for change within the community; Regather as community hub*
- *Localism/horizontal management*
- *Dislike for top down management/change*
- *Grassroots change, DIY, taking responsibility, empowering others*
- *Dealing with external change; financial crisis*
- *Ethics/values; taking action to reject the system; struggling with a righteous cause; working with passionate people*
- *Food, politics, events, community, environment*
- *Educational experience and life-long learning*
- *Knowing what we don't know*

Would it be helpful to share stories? Would you mind doing this?

2b. Points from group discussion

I have made and shared notes on some of the points that were discussed in the group session. It may be helpful to look back at these and think about how they might inform ideas on membership and what a 'functioning cooperative' might look like.

Members and membership

Who should Regather engage as members and why – short and long-term aspirations; what mutual benefits membership brings – what is the tangible offering; member expectations – their roles and responsibilities; members' relationship to Regather; how someone will become a member – how can someone move from volunteer to member.

Governance structure

What is the purpose of efficient coop governance; how can the governance and membership structure help the business – what is its role.

Who/what is the management committee; what is its role; how does it engage/interact with a wider membership; what role do non-committee members play in decision-making/how do they engage in democratic processes

Appendix 17: The challenges and anxieties of taking fieldnotes

The following three fieldnote extracts illustrate my approach to taking fieldnotes; the tensions between simultaneously participating, observing and note-taking; and the challenge of being present/absent and insider/outsider.

Approaches to taking fieldnotes:

Recognising my impact on the process of knowledge construction I developed a 'formula' for fieldnotes that constituted making jot notes of 'to-be-remembered' (Emerson et al., 2001: 356) observations, hurriedly writing-up and expanding on these notes in a named and dated word file, and emptying my head of questions and reflections in a bold and grey italicised text (respectively). As time went on I began to find this formula limiting and embraced instead a more responsive approach, captured in the extract below (Beanies, 09/12/14). This approach recognised the importance of context in determining fieldnote practice and the inexplicable difficulty of distinguishing between what was said, seen and felt, what was observed and what was a reflection.

Key observations noted quickly on scrap paper while at Beanies; transferred into fieldnote book with additional notes at university on 9/12/14; written into this document on 22/12/14.

Decided to focus on participating and not worry about making notes. I wanted to really focus on seeing and experiencing things that I may otherwise take for granted.

{(22/12/14) Does note taking act as a distraction from participating or does it act as a reminder that I am in the researcher not worker role and therefore help me to see things that I might otherwise miss?}

I had a scrap of paper (rather than my note book) and did not stop to make notes or capture specific quotes. It was hard to find a quiet space to do this – i.e. space that I could make notes without getting more information at the same time.

Finally, I decided when doing the #1 of writing notes/reflection up in field book that I did not need to worry about putting them into chronological order. It is as interesting to see what I prioritised noting down and what connections/links I made.

Over the course of the research focus shifted increasingly to what was being said, rather than what was being done. This was primarily because of the repetitive nature of the tasks carried out in each organisation. In practice this shift meant attending, recording and transcribing formal and informal meetings and discussions.

The challenge of balancing participation and observation:

[Making notes was hard today. A lot was said/observed of relevance. I wanted to note some of it down at the time but was reluctant to break a conversation or leave what I was doing to make notes. How would this impact on my capacity to listen or on what was being said/done? The tension between observing and participating really came through.]

What do I gain from participation?

Being accepted as a member; being less visible (practice going on as normal); experiencing what jobs are like.

Fran asked me after box packing, how I found it being a volunteer; 'did it seem straight forward?' [(06/01/15) *Interesting that Fran sees me as a volunteer*]. I explained that I had found it easy to pick up but was unsure about the ordering of the boxes – what order to take them off Fran's pile and put them on Lisa's. [*I had been worried that I was messing up Fran and Lisa's system but also felt confident that they would pick up on any mistakes. Lisa checked each box as it went through her section*]. Fran said this was a new system and they were only just getting used it. She added that it is different with three people. She would normally have done the job I was doing and felt like a spare part on occasions today. She commented that she would have to think about how to make better use of a third person, not only for when I was helping but for when a new volunteer started.

What do I lose from participation?

- *Some accuracy in recording information. I forgot sections of conversations which I found frustrating afterwards and felt worried that I had missed things. However, it was hard to fully observe and listen when taking notes so maybe you miss things either way.*

I have been worried about doing half days at each case study but I don't think my brain would cope with more than 4-5 hours at a time!

(Fieldnote extract, Regather, 04/12/14)

The challenge of being present/absent; insider/outsider:

Meeting Gareth with Nicole. (recorded). *[Should this recording be transcribed? It will take a lot of time. May be worth transcribing sections that I found particularly relevant – I have highlighted some possible sections to find and expand on but there may have been points that I have missed in note taking.]*

(12/12. I sat quietly at one corner of the table. I had my laptop open and was making notes prior to the meeting and, when the meeting started, continued to do so. I was mostly ignored during the meeting. Nicole occasionally looked at me when she said things but I resisted urge to input. I reminded myself of the value of being a silent observer, not interrupting the flow of conversation with my input. I did however make notes of things I would have added in my role as a member. These are pasted at the end of my fieldnotes.

I started the recording *[Going through the notes taken the day after the meeting it is clear that recording is essential if I want to get more than a general overview of the discussion]* shortly after the conversation started. I felt that I would not be able to capture all the points I wanted to without recording. I was aware that I had not asked permission but did not want to disrupt the meeting to do so, and did know that neither Gareth nor Nicole had raised objection to interviews and focus groups being recorded. The ethics of this was on my mind throughout the meeting – was recording the meeting really any different from me being there and taking notes? The issue was 'addressed' at the end of the meeting (see notes below).

In case the recording failed to work I tried to take down some key points. This was challenging for 3 reasons:

1. Parts of the conversation were hard to follow without historical information that only Gareth and Nicole were party to. This will not be resolved by the recording but was more challenging at time due to the speed of the conversation.
2. I sometimes felt reluctant to ask for background information – I felt as a member that I should already know and didn't want to probe if I wasn't party to the information in my member role.
3. The conversation quickly jumped between topics. Again, following these 'jumps' was difficultly due to my lack of historical context.
4. The meeting was over 2 hours long. I found it challenging to maintain the level of concentration required to make notes and listen simultaneously

Reflection on the ethics of recording:

I checked in retrospect that it was ok for me to record.

Gareth and Nicole both looked a bit concerned. Gareth said he rather I asked in advance. Nicole said that would have changed how she would have acted. Gareth agreed and decided he would rather assume I was recording and then forget about it. Nicole then asked what I was looking for '*How me and Gareth interact and communicate?*'

I explained that I was interested in how they interact and how decisions are being made. * This led on to a conversation about how Gareth and Nicole interact and communicate. She explained that she thought her and Gareth communicated well when Gareth was not in a bad mood like he was on Friday (recorded conversation from here).

Key points were:

- 'Management meetings' were not held very often (this was first since Adam left). A lot of communication is done via e-mail.
- Nicole said Gareth seems to like just answering short questions. Nicole preferred having half an hour to sit and brain storm. Both agreed that weekly half hour meeting would be helpful. Nicole joked that Gareth probably thought that this meeting would be half hour (it was actually over 2 hours).
- It was also mentioned that it would be good to have more committee members. Gareth explained (to Nicole) that Fran is now a committee member [*that has happened recently*] but at moment her work is very focused and full on when she is here.
- Nicole looked at me when discussing need for new members. Clear indication was made that I could be committee member and would be welcomed as one. This was then vocalised by Nicole. Gareth said it would be conflict of interest and I agreed, explaining that I would love to be more involved but it would be unethical, a conflict in interest and unfair as I don't have the time.

* I also explained during this exchange that I would delete it if they were not happy. They agreed this was not necessary. Nicole said it was fine so long as she didn't have to listen to it! Gareth commented that it would probably help me with research.

(Fieldnote, Regather, 11/12/14)

Appendix 18: Invite to share narratives

The letter below was hand delivered to Beanies members 24/03/15. The same letter (with names and details amended) was hand delivered to Regather members.

Dear Beanies Member

Thank you for your support with my research to date. At this stage, it would be really helpful for me know a bit more about you - your hobbies, passions, motivations and experiences - in order to build a picture of how and why you came to be involved in Beanies.

I am inviting you now to share in writing the journey you have taken to your current job at Beanies. Your story can be written in whatever style you feel most comfortable with and it can be as long or short as you like. When I have done this in the past people have written between 2/3 and 2 pages of A4 using a variety of styles, including bullet points, questions and answers and story-style writing. If you would rather share your story verbally I would be happy to lend you a voice recorder to do this. Don't worry if you can't remember exact dates or order of events/experience, it doesn't need to be in chronological order.

Below I have written down a few things that you might like to think about. Please don't feel restricted by these or that you have to cover all of the points. They are just there for guidance.

I would like to hear your thoughts and reflections on:

- Any experiences that have influenced your current and past decisions around work and employment
- People, relationships, events or circumstances that have impacted on the choices you have made.
- Any interests, passions, beliefs or values and the bearing these have had on your employment journey.
- Any external influences such as political and economic climate, local and community context.
- Your past and present aspirations; what has motivated and discouraged you.
- Any positive or negative experiences - your own and others - that have guided the choice you have made.
- Any factors that have attracted you to or put you off past or present jobs.
- Other influencing or limiting factors, such as, family commitments, connection/attraction to a specific geographical location and financial needs that have impacted on your choices.
- Any unexpected or unintended twists and turns in your career path and what might have caused these.
- Any positive or negative experiences of your current role and how this role has changed and developed over time.

I would like you to share your story with me by 26th April. If you cannot do this please let me know and we can arrange a suitable date. I would be happy to receive your story either by e-mail to the address above or in person.

Once I have collected your stories I would like to share and discuss them in a group, including myself and other Beanies members who have shared their story. I hope to hold the session towards the end of May. It will last around 2 hours. The date, time and location of the session can be decided together closer to the time. If more than 5 Beanies members would like to participate I will run more than one session. There will also be an opportunity for you to discuss your story with me on a one-to-one basis.

For those of you who have not signed a consent form I would welcome your participation in some or all of this task. I am keen to collect as many stories as possible so please do feel free to share your story even if you are not able to attend the group session. If you do decide to share your story with me I will ask you to sign a consent form for this stage of the research. If you do this you will not be required to participate in any other stage of the research.

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to get in touch. I look forward to receiving your stories.

Many thanks

Appendix 19: Learning from missed opportunities and the balancing of multiple roles

The extract below is taken from Langmead (2017b). Due to limits of space in the thesis I did not include it in chapter 2. It did however offer me an early an important insight in to the challenges of self-exploitation at Regather, explored further in section 5.2.

A recurrent anxiety throughout my research was deciding what to observe and when. This anxiety was founded in a recognition that ‘things, acts [and] events *might* be meaningful, depending on circumstances’ (Ybema et al., 2009: 15, my emphasis). Furthermore, I was aware that in each decision to include some voices and experiences at the expense of others shaped the direction of the research, often in unknowable ways. The following fieldnote extract captures my frustration at missed opportunities and its interconnection with the conflicting demands facing practitioner-researchers. Experiencing these conflicts heightened my awareness of the challenges Lisa was facing in balancing multiple jobs, aspirations and financial needs.

After helping Lisa and Fran to pack the vegetable box in the storeroom I went into the office to catch up on writing up fieldnotes.

In hindsight, I should have stayed in the storeroom to help Lisa pack the boxes into the van ready for delivery. However, at the time I felt anxious about the growing pile of fieldnotes that needed writing up.

This ‘hindsight’ arose when I discovered I had missed a conversation between Gareth, the one remaining founder member who had adopted the role of HR manager, and Lisa, who Regather employed for 8 hours a week to pack and deliver vegetable boxes. The conversation centred around the opening of a new job focused on expanding and marketing the box scheme.

After 15 minutes Gareth joined me and Fran in the office and told Fran that he had spoken to Lisa about her role at Regather. Lisa had expressed concern that Gareth didn't seem to think she was committed to Regather. Gareth discussed this with her, explaining to Lisa that if she wants to get more involved she needs to find the time to do so and needs to develop new skills in marketing and other 'veg box' skills. Fran said that it was good that the conversation had been started and that it was food for thought.

After Gareth left Fran commented to me 'better write that down.'

'Why do you say that?' I asked. 'I don't know. It just seems like something important' replied Fran.

Of course, she was right and I was berating myself for not hearing the conversation.

Reflecting on this relayed conversation and on other observations made during my time as an observing participant I noted:

There is an interesting and challenging 'confrontation' at Regather between the need and expectation placed on members to put in extra time, an awareness of self-exploitation and its problems/un-sustainability, a desire to reward people for their time and effort, a recognition that people need to make a living and a desire to break away from the straight monetary valuation of work.

My own experience of the conflicting demands of participating, observing and keeping on top of writing up and analysing observations helped me to "feel into" Lisa's experience of balancing the demands of volunteering at Regather (as a means of developing a more secure paid role) with multiple part-time jobs and the need to make a living (see also Taylor, 2004). In the first instance, my empathetic response made me question my desire to probe Lisa about the conversation she just had. Consequently, the event itself was left out of my analysis. Subsequent reflection on the fieldnotes above, through the lens of my own experience, brought to my attention the demands placed on those working in a young, democratically run organisation, including requirements to volunteer that called upon members' passions and values. I became sensitive to other members' experiences of self-exploitation and expressions of resentment towards demands on their time.

Appendix 20: Invite to collective findings review (Beansies and Regather)

The following e-mails were sent to members of Beansies (10/05/16) and Regather (12/05/16) with summaries of key findings attached. Collective findings review meeting were held on 19/05/16 and 07/06/16 respectively.

Hi All

I have attached the documents ready for the meeting on 19th May.

1. The first (case study info) introduces Beansies and identifies some of the challenges and tensions you have faced in recent years.
2. The second (practices of democracy) is a summary of my findings relating to your day-to-day practices of democracy.
3. The third (democracy and economy) discusses how your practices of democracy help you to balance social and economic aims and needs.

I have tried to make the documents as concise as possible but there is still a lot to read (when you open the documents bear in mind that they are 1.5 spaced and contain a lot of long quote so appear longer than they really are!). If you have time to read it all that's great. If not, prioritise reading the quotes. I will give a verbal summary of the rest in the meeting. I have highlighted in bold some of the key point so you may like to read through these too. In 'case study info.doc' you may want to focus on the section 'challenges and tensions'.

I have free printing and I am happy to deliver hard copies to the shop so please do let me know.

Apologies for sending through so much reading. I hope that you find it interesting and I look forward to hearing your thoughts and feedback on the 19th. Any questions before then feel free to e-mail.

Best
Kiri

Hi All

I have attached a shortened version of my findings chapters that I would like your feedback on. There are 3 documents:

1. The first (case study info) introduces Regather and identifies some of the challenges and tensions you have faced in recent years.
2. The second (practices of democracy) is a summary of my findings relating to your day-to-day practices of democracy.
3. The third (democracy and economy) discusses how your practices of democracy help you to balance social and economic aims and needs.

I have tried to make the documents as concise as possible but there is still a lot to read (when you open the documents bear in mind that they are 1.5 spaced and contain a lot of long quote

so appear longer than they really are!). If you have time to read it all that's great. If not, prioritise reading the quotes. I will give a verbal summary of the rest when we meet. I have highlighted in bold some of the key point so you may like to read through these too. In 'case study info.doc' you may want to focus on the section 'challenges and tensions'.

I have free printing and I am happy to deliver hard copies so please do let me know. If you feel it is appropriate to forward this e-mail (plus documents) on to other members/directors please do feel free (or let me know who and I can e-mail them)²²¹.

There are three options for discussing documents (I envision it taking an hour to an hour and a half depending on how much you have had time to read):

1. organise another focus group (I should be able to use some of my research funding to pay for some food, possibly from the Regather kitchen)
2. meet each of you individually
3. do it via e-mail.

In any case I am hoping to have all feedback by 5th June (NB. I am away 21st-29th May). If you could let me know your preference that would be great.

Apologies for sending through so much reading. I hope that you find it interesting and I look forward to hearing your thoughts and feedback. Any questions before then feel free to e-mail.

Best

Kiri

²²¹ This was another example of my continued struggle, in light of Regathers' fluid membership, to work out who should and shouldn't be involved in the research process. Due to the difficulty of arranging a meeting with the members most involved in my research and the limited time available to me I decided to share the documents with, and get feedback from, research participants. In hindsight, (and this is a reflection that applies throughout my research) I feel I should have been more proactive in contacting Regathers' wider membership. Taking this approach would have aligned with experiences presented in appendix 7 as well as broadening research findings (for further discussion see section 6.10).

Appendix 21: The Moore development, Sheffield



Figure 7.8: Sheffield Moore Development



Figure 7.9: Sheffield Moore Market

Appendix 22: Beanies business plan and task chart

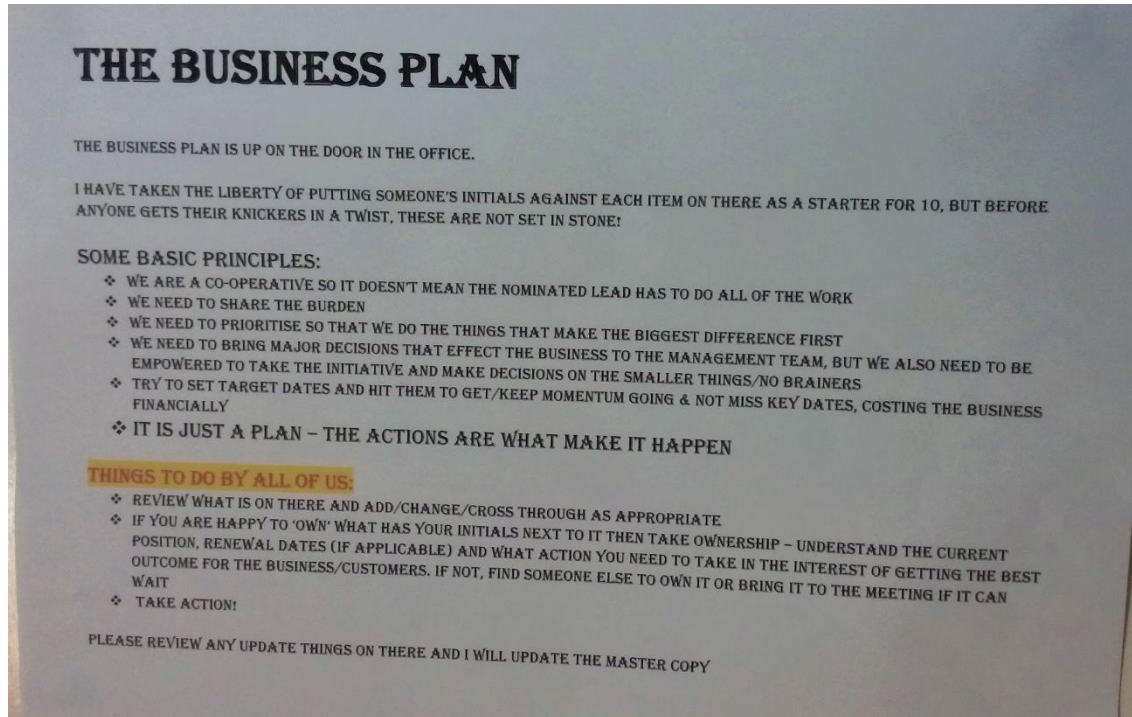


Figure 7.10: Beanies business plan

BEANIES BUSINESS PLAN 2015				Actual	Target Date	Feb-15	Mar-15	Apr-15	May-15	Jun-15	Jul-15	Aug-15	Sep-15	Oct-15	Nov-15	Dec-15	Jan-16	Feb-16	Mar-16	
Category	Item	OWNER	Action	Jan-15	Target Date	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	Exxx	
Target Income	Base on 2014	Exxx																		
	Activities to drive up	Exxx	increase box prices(?) less fines?																	
		Exxx	More different boxes?																	
		Exxx																		
Target Expenses	Wages	Heather/ Dave/ Jake	EPOS - explore options and recommend																	
	Electric	Mark	Monitor metre readings																	
	Gas	Mark	Look into bulk/ monitor																	
	Water	Mark																		
	Telecoms	Jake	Review and re-tender																End of contract	
	Banking	Gemma/ Rocky	Interest free overdraft																	
	Cleaning/hygiene services	Chris	Review & re-tender																	
	Rates review/rebate	Heather	Complete return to Council																	
	Insurance vehicles/property/liability																			
	Packaging																			
	Printing/stationery		Review as part of EPOS initiative																	
	Plant/lease		Anything else?																	
	Vehicles		Review lease																	
	Accountancy & professional fees		Maintain/repair vans																	
Recycling/waste disposal	Jake	Wood disposal																		
Wastage	Reduce chilled waste		Review & ?																	
	Reduce produce waste		Mark/Gemma take over ordering so someone is also has spot of stock?																	
	Reduce ambient waste																			
	Reintroduce Waste Book for all		Does it add value???																	
Calendar driven events	Accounts		Monthly review																	
	Accounts		Review & understand all 2013-14 account entries																	
	Accounts		Monthly review																	
Misc	Accounts		Review Fuel Cards & re-tender (DR)																	
	Accounts		Review Fuel Cards & re-tender (DR)																	
Other activities	Recruitment		1 x co-op member (MPEG)?																	
	Misc		Pay rise (?)																	
Business Plan	Trading standards - any action required?																			
	Health & Safety																			
	Business Plan		Review & update																	

Figure 7.11: Beanies task chart

Appendix 23: Member recruitment process

I have included below of key recruitment 'events' (from fieldnotes and meeting transcripts) that highlight the informality and the length of the process, and the importance of finding the 'right person'.

Date	Recruitment 'event'
19/12/14 (observation)	I asked about the progression of finding a new member. Chris said: ' <i>That a good point. I'm not sure.</i> ' He confirmed that they were still looking but had had poor applications. There is one long-running application that they are still considering so are holding off re-advertising until they have decided on that.
19/02/15 (members' meeting)	<p>Mark: Before we go round and round on this again, so, this [applicant]... you lost me about an hour and a half ago to be honest... as I am walking up the hill do I ring him and say 'are you still interested, can you come in Tuesday?'</p> <p>All agree.</p> <p>Mark: And that's a done job...</p> <p>Dave: And if he is good...</p> <p>Mark: And he is only good if...? How do you know he is good?</p> <p>Dave: Well, have a chat with him first and then possibly...</p> <p>Gemma: Well lets start with, 'could you work with him?'</p> <p>Mark: Are we interviewing him or...</p> <p>Gemma: No.</p> <p>Evan: I think we need to meet him and have a chat with him and think 'is this someone we want to work with?'</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Chris: Well the other option is to take him on on a trial basis.</p> <p>Mark: And then we all get to chat and see what he is like at his work. And that is all I am saying. Why is my opinion any different from Heathers?</p> <p>Heather: I've only...it's only instinct. I've only chatted to him.</p> <p>Mark: But then this is what I am saying, if it is your instinct that's good enough for me.</p> <p>Gemma: What if you find out he gets your back up and then have to work with him?</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Dave: So, are we bypassing an interview?</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Chris: It's a bit... (Heather: Have we finished?) I agree...I can sense your uncomfortableness, because it is a bit of an odd situation. We don't normally do it like this do we, we don't normally...</p> <p>Heather: So just interview him then.</p>

	<p>Mark: Just ring him up and say come in for an interview then.</p> <p>Chris: Yes. We are not sure when a job will be available but we would like to interview you, in a fairly formal way, I would suggest, because it will make it easier for you to either give him something or not give him something, do you see what I mean?</p>
No new member was taken on	
13/04/15 (observation)	A job vacancy advert had been put up in the window for a 40-hour post.
14/04/15 (observation)	<p>When I arrived Chris was reading a letter. I asked him if it was a CV.</p> <p>He said it was, from a customer and friend of his who I might recognise – he showed me the picture.</p> <p>He then told me that the cover letter had revealed that it was not the police but this customer who had made efforts to get in touch with Matt after the car drove into the shop window. He had been passing the scene after the police had arrived. The letter explained this and the writer added that he could not help but notice the job advert.</p> <p>The writer had considered the role in the past and had discussed it with Chris. He was honest that he had not considered the job because it would be a significant pay cut from his professional salary and he did not feel that he could live on this. However, he would be interested in a job share and felt that, at the age of 50, he would like to get off the ‘hamster wheel’.</p> <p>In addition to knowing Chris, the writer’s partner had been a coop member so he felt he had insight into what the role would involve.</p> <p><i>It will be interesting to see how this applicant is considered if at all.</i></p>
No new member was taken on	
13/05/15 (observation)	<p>I asked Chris and Dave how recruitment was going and if they had a lot of applicants. Both said that they didn’t know – Evan and Mark were dealing with it.</p> <p>I asked Chris if there was a time scale.</p> <p>He laughed sarcastically.</p> <p>I joke that that was probably a stupid question. Chris said that it wasn’t a stupid question – it was a very good question. The application deadline was the 8th May so they should probably be shortlisting new week.</p> <p>I said that given the time scale I should tell them now what I was going to discuss at the meeting so they could pass that on if necessary.</p> <p>I explained what I had found out about employment law and job sharing and about membership hours.</p> <p>Chris and Dave agreed that these things could be an issue for them – There are part-time workers that would like to become members and have applied for the membership position.</p>
26/06/15 (members’ meeting)	<p>Following a lengthy discussion on working hours and whether coop members could/should be able to work part-time hours:</p> <p>Dave: What’s the conclusion?</p> <p>Laughs</p> <p>Jake: Lets advertise for the 40 hours...</p>

	<p>Gemma: And see what we get and if we are not happy with what we have got, then we can...</p> <p>Dave: I would suggest we advertise and say part-timers may apply and then we don't even need to reply to any of them if we chose to do something else.</p> <p>Evan: Yes</p> <p>Dave: There is no harm in getting the part-timer applications in.</p> <p>Evan: You can say full-time, part-time applicant will be considered.</p> <p>Heather: Flexible</p> <p>Dave: Flexible part-timers</p> <p>Gemma: And please state how many hours you are able to do...</p> <p>Dave: It's not just the number of hours, it's the when as well.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Dave: To a minimum of 24 hours, 3 days a week, 21 hours at 7 hours a day.</p> <p>Heather: I don't know...</p> <p>Dave: Anything less than that and it will just be diminishing returns I think.</p> <p>Pause</p> <p>Dave: Are you not happy with this Heather</p> <p>Heather: No. But it doesn't matter.</p> <p>Dave: It does...</p> <p>Heather: Well it doesn't...</p> <p>Evan: Well, all that we have decided on is that we are going to advertise.</p> <p>Mark: Lets not...Lets just advertise for a coop member and then see what we get in.</p>
<p>19/05/15 (observation)</p>	<p>In office Mark was going through job applications while Evan was going through the post. Evan had already looked through the applications and noted down ones he thought might be options.</p> <p>Mark was critical of some of the applicants.</p> <p>Evan made the point that you have to look at applications through blinkers bearing in mind that people are going to write what they think Beanies wants to hear. So, the girl talking about feminism might not be getting the point across exactly how she wants to, but she is thinking about it.</p> <p><i>Evan seemed to recognise that you are only going to get part of a person's story in an application form but from that can start to get an idea about whether they might fit in.</i></p> <p>Mark said that he is no good at this. Evan: 'yes you are'</p> <p>Mark asked if he had to put reasons down, adding that he struggled to explain why he didn't want people – (commenting on a previous applicant who Mark had met) '<i>I just don't like the guy, which is fine in a coop. I would say yes if I don't have to work with him.</i></p>
<p>02/07/15 (observation)</p>	<p>I discovered in today's meeting that a new coop member had been taken on.</p>

Table 7.2: Summary of member recruitment process (Beanies)

Appendix 24: Representative and direct democracy

	Representative democracy	Direct democracy
Decision-making process	Voting Election of representative	Deliberation Contestation
Outcome/aim(s)	Majority agreement	Contestable consensus Antagonism turned into agonism Emancipation; (re)subjectification Creation of the new Challenging of existing/dominant power relations
Modes of involvement	Elections Voting Formal meetings	Day-to-day decision making Ongoing deliberation (Formal meetings)
Key decision-makers	Elected representatives	All affected members
Purpose	Decision-making tool Organisational structure Means to an end Economic efficiency	Culture Identity; connected to values and goals Means-ends equivalence
Democratic spaces	Formal Organised	Informal Emergent (Formal and organised)
Epistemology and ontology	Essentialist Positivist: view can be measured and quantified Objective reality Rational decision-making Knowledge resides in individual	Participatory worldview Anti-essentialist Constructionism Subjective-objective reality Knowledge resides in relationships

Table 7.3: Representative and direct democracy

Appendix 25: Summary of participant information

Member	Length of membership	Previous employment	Negative experience of corporation/capitalist organisation	Experience of redundancy or unemployment	Involvement in activism/practical action and community organising	University education
Evan	13 years	Low skilled work; dole	Pointlessness of university education; rubbish jobs	Unemployment	Animal rights activist	Yes
Heather	11 years	Secretary; self-employed	Disliked secretary role	Redundancy	Promotes vegetarian, organic and high-quality food	No
Dave	18 months	Corporate firm	Competition and disposable nature of employees	Redundancy	Promotes recycling	No
Chris	18 years	Theatre; worker cooperatives	None mentioned	Redundancy	Cooperation as political action; previous experience of cooperatives	Not mentioned
Gemma	15 months	Corporate firm	Lack of control, increasing pressure and loss of benefits	Redundancy	Promotes organic	Not mentioned
Rocky	8 months	Charitable sector; worker cooperatives	Negative impact of off-site management	Unemployment	Anarchist worldview; promotes cooperation; experience of housing cooperative	Not mentioned
Jake	15 months	Low skilled work; public sector	Lack of personal coherence in relation to values	No	Not mentioned	Yes
Mark	14 years	Unknown	Profit motive	Unknown	Animal rights activist	No

Table 7.4: Summary of participant information (Beanies)

Member	Length of membership	Previous employment	Negative experience of corporation/capitalist organisation	Experience of redundancy or unemployment	Involvement in activism/practical action and community organising	University education
Fran	17 months	Corporate firm; self-employed	Lack of control over work	No	Promotes organic; grassroots organising	Yes
Lisa	6 months	Charitable sector; volunteer	Profit motive, funding cuts and move to financial self-sufficiency; impact of financial crisis	Redundancy	Immigration rights; Promotes organic; anti-capitalist movement	Yes
Rachel	2 years	Charitable sector; volunteer; self-employed	Poor management; impact of financial crisis	Unemployment	Youth development; grassroots organising	Yes
Nicole	15 months	Corporate firm	Lack of personal coherence; focus on profit	No	Underground music scene; grassroots organising; environmental/low carbon	Yes
Tim	5 years	Public sector; self-employed	Excessive bureaucracy	No	Underground music scene; grassroots organising; anti-capitalist movement	Yes
Gareth	6 year (founder)	University; charitable sector; self-employed	Impact of financial crisis; squandering of funding	Unemployment	Underground music scene; grassroots organising	Yes

Table 7.5: Summary of participant information (Regather)