What’s in a name? Reflections on the marginalisation of the co-operative as an organisational form

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The decline of co-operatives?

- Co-operative economy is thriving
- Renewed academic and policy interest
- Should we be concerned?

Source: Co-operatives UK, 2016
Finding funding for co-operative research

- AHRC Connected Communities early career development workshop
  - ‘Sounds interesting but I don’t know anything about co-operatives’

- HEFCE Social Innovation sandpit
  - ‘You mean social enterprises? Yes, they’re great’
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Source: data from Web of Science (http://wok.mimas.ac.uk/)

**RESEARCH TRENDS**

Social enterprise research roughly 6 times more popular than co-operatives

More than twice as many papers with ‘social enterprise’ as a title
Research trends

Citations based on title 2006-2016

Source: data from Web of Science (http://wok.mimas.ac.uk/)
What is a social enterprise?

- Fragmented, uncritical and atheoretical research (Dacin et al., 2011, Dey & Steyaert 2012)

- General uncertainty about the term (Mair & Martí 2006; Teasdale 2010)
  - Includes products, services or organisations intended to stimulate social change or meet social needs (Mair & Martí 2006, Corner & Ho 2010, Haugh 2012)
  - Only emerges in response to state or market failure; does not replace existing services or products

- Is it an individual or collective pursuit? (Zahra & Wright 2016; Novkovic 2008)

- Overlap with private enterprise? (Corner & Ho 2010; Haugh 2007)

- Culture of dependence: reliance on external funding (Haugh 2007)
What is a social enterprise?

- A ‘fascinating playground’ for academics? (Mair & Martí 2006:42)

- To ‘reposition co-operatives and mutuals as new models for public and private ownership’ (Teasdale 2012: 108)
  - Increasingly neoliberal policy tool (Dey et al. 2016)
  - Over-emphasis on wealth creation and economic growth (Zahra & Wright 2016)
  - Functionalist problem solving rather than a radical alternative
    - Loss of political voice (Seddon 2007)

- Broader critique of enterprise discourse:
  - Self-interest & individualisation (Gleadle et al. 2008; Nayak & Beckett 2008; Doolin 2002)
  - Gradual erosion of collective action (McCabe 2007)
The co-operative advantage?

• Co-operative principles of equality, fairness, democratic control and autonomy
  – Radically reimagines society rather than simply offering a response to market / state failure
  – Taking control of production and consumption
    • Rochdale Pioneers (Holyoake 1922)
    • HB Fustian Manufacturing Co-op, Hebden Bridge (Bibby 2015)
    • Nationwide credit unions in Ireland (Mangan 2009)
    • Food contamination & environmentalism in Japan (Kurimoto 2010)
PROPAGANDIST & DEFENSIVE ACTION

Inclusivity of the final three ICA principles

Education, training and information

Co-operation among co-operatives

Concern for community

Source: [http://www.archive.coop/collections/co-operative-union](http://www.archive.coop/collections/co-operative-union)

REFERENCES


