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# Cooperative or uncooperative cooperatives?: Digging into the process of cooperation in food and agriculture cooperatives

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## Abstract

Cooperative organizing around food and agriculture is nothing new (Knupfer, 2013). However, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in the cooperative legal form. This research has followed this rebirth in a region in the western United States where rural producers and urban consumers, gentrifying communities of color, and environmentally minded communities strive to improve other communities and food futures. As part of these efforts, it can be easy to assume cooperation within a legal status. Yet, as this research examines, cooperatives can be quite uncooperative in practice. Through extensive field work, we found that food and agriculture cooperatives struggle to make decision-making inclusive, may reproduce inequities through leadership performance, and may unevenly distribute the emotional work necessary to cooperation. These patterns also relate to how cooperatives access resources and point to tensions in expanding networks. While homogeneity can make interactions smoother—thereby making trust and day-to-day activities easier—it also limits a cooperative's (co-op) resource access. Resource access can be improved through partnerships, such as with nonprofits. However, these connections can lead to certain leadership performances that

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delegitimize cooperative efforts from the perspective of structurally disadvantaged community members. Further, the anonymity that consumers have become accustomed to creates challenges for recruiting shoppers because co-ops take more emotional work. A disproportionate amount of emotional work falls on staff members, contributing to resentment and insincere performance. We make a number of suggestions about how cooperatives can work to improve both organizational *and* interactional forms of cooperation.

**Keywords**
Cooperative; Decision-making; Leadership; Emotions; Alternative Food Networks; Community Capitals

## Introduction

Cooperation is arguably a basic human ability and a fundamental process in food and agriculture. People have been working together to grow, distribute, and consume food throughout history. The institutionalization of cooperation in legal form is a more recent development. What previously was patterned and often informal has become formalized in legal cooperative organizations (co-ops) which are user owned, user controlled, and distribute benefits on the basis of use (Mooney, 2004). While the cooperative form has seen its ups and downs in terms of popularity, recently it has seen a resurgence of interest (Katz & Boland, 2002; Rothschild, 2016). Though national data trends suggest that the number of cooperative grocers has been fairly consistent (S. Reid, personal communication, Nov. 10, 2017) and the number of producer cooperatives has actually decreased (Kidd, 2015), our fieldwork has suggested the presence of renewed activity not captured in national trends. For instance, four consumer co-ops are working to open in our research area's large regional city and over six small-scale producer co-ops have started within the past ten years. The importance of developing such alternative food networks has been argued for by both practitioners and researchers (Goodman, DuPuis, & Goodman, 2012). In this paper, we pay particular attention to the role of socio-cultural boundaries and openings to improved food futures.

When we began to study the regional resurgence in cooperatives, a research participant made a valuable distinction that has driven this work. He explained that there is a difference between "cooperative" the *adjective* and "cooperative" the *noun*. Keeping this distinction in mind, we learned that assumptions about the latter often inform what the former looks like. Further, as will be described, the process of cooperation is rarely considered and reflected upon in food and agriculture cooperatives. When it is, cooperators commonly refer to the seven cooperative principles (Williams, 2012). While the principles do provide a roadmap, they do less to take into account the socio-cultural processes (structural and cultural barriers, road bumps, etc.) that shape participation.

Drawing upon extensive fieldwork, this paper examines interactions that impede upon and/or support, cooperation in food and agriculture cooperatives. In doing so, it explains how these interactions connect cooperative networks to community resources including social, cultural, political, financial, built, human, and natural capitals, collectively known as community capitals (Emery & Flora, 2006).

We begin by briefly situating this research in the literature on cooperatives, taking time to introduce the relevance of Rothschild's (2016) work on the subject, while folding in the discussion elements of Goffman's Dramaturgical approach. We then pivot by bringing this literature into conversation with the community capitals literature, with particular emphasis given to building and bridging capital. Collectively, we argue that this approach helps ground our understanding of some of the challenges faced within the empirical cases. After describing the qualitative methods used to arrive at our conclusions, we provide an in-depth description of three food and agriculture cooperative cases. To conclude, we discuss major themes that come out of our research and suggest ways for improving cooperation in cooperatives, particularly concerning decision-making processes, leadership performance, and emotional work.

## Cooperation in Cooperatives

While there have been some steps toward improving our understanding of how food and agriculture

cooperatives work (e.g., Mooney, 2004; Stock et al., 2014), less attention has been paid to examining *cooperation* itself. Here, the interest is on what is more or less cooperative in social action as it relates to food and agriculture cooperatives. It cannot be reducible to market relations (e.g., firm competition versus cooperation) since such relations are embedded in social and cultural relationships (Granovetter, 1985) imbued with relations of power which reproduce economic patterns (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). We argue that how groups anticipate and respond to such power and inequality (or not) is a necessary part of assessing cooperation.

When compared to competition, cooperation can be viewed as the result of norms, with strong reciprocity being conditional on others' cooperation (Fehr & Gintis, 2007). Rather than agents seeking to maximize their own payoffs (competition), cooperation necessitates a concern for the group and the existence of sanctions against those who violate cooperative norms. However, concern for the group and sanctions can be viewed as relational. For example, when individual contributions to the group are recognized and respected by the group, they can lead to further contributions (Willer, 2009). In other words, the desire for respect and social standing can lead individuals toward collective actions. If an individual's motivations include concern for the group, that person gains status. The greater the status obtained, the more influence an individual receives in the direction of cooperation. This can lead to groups bifurcating over time into free-riders and high contributor subgroups with contributors becoming more central to decision-making (Willer, 2009).

A norms-based understanding of cooperation leaves out the role of larger structural realities—habits, rules, identity, and laws that cannot be explained solely by intergroup dynamics (Hall, 1997; Stryker, 2008). Studying interactional rules, identity, and trust provide better indicators of the likelihood of cooperation (Misztal, 2001). Such an approach emphasizes the relational qualities necessary to cooperation, rather than solitary individual actors. This includes the gestures, dress, rituals, identities, and other interactional processes and impressions which make up social life (Goffman, 1978, 1956, 1983). Goffman's perspective is developed in detail in his Dramaturgical approach, which focused upon "the presentation of self" (Goffman, 1978). Essentially, Goffman argues that the self is performed in the interaction, that the presented self may or may not be accepted by others, and that we often take this into account. These performances can be either frontstage or backstage. Frontstage performance is aimed at a particular audience and in accordance with interactional conventions (i.e., norms and expectations). These performances are prepared and rehearsed off the record—in the backstage. Backstage is a place where actors may toss to the side particular fronts because they are not as necessary for a situation; it is often where we are more relaxed and comfortable.

Cooperation from a performative view is much more dependent on the interactive relationships between the people in a group. For instance, there can be specific leadership performances—whether bureaucratic or charismatic—both with roles in maintaining current organizational forms (Cicourel, 1958). More charismatic performances often come across as more natural and less prepared in the backstage. They are based upon feeling and passion and fuel advocacy. Bureaucratic leadership is typically more frontstage organizational performance, something enacted as a requirement of the standards of an organization. However, frontstage bureaucratic behavior can be reinforced through sharing backstage, charismatic performances, strategically (Cicourel, 1958). In other words, charisma is sometimes needed to reproduce bureaucratic structures, which involves showing natural and more automatic performance. This is a similar point made by Max Weber (1947) about different forms of authority and how charisma can become routinized.

While the emotional work necessary to these performances (i.e., bodily cooperation with an image, thought, and or memory) can be reproduced strategically, there is also work going on below the surface, or what has been called "deep acting" (Hochschild, 1979). According to "deep acting," the surface level, frontstage performances can impact internal emotions. This means that over time, frontstage performance can change internal

emotions, our backstage, over time. The continued dissonance between surface performances and embodied emotions can sometimes require "emotional management" (i.e., work to align surface performance with embodied emotions) (Hochschild, 1979), that is shared in more private settings. In other words, the emotional demands of work can spill out at home or elsewhere.

As a way to anticipate the role of power on situational interactions and emotional labor, the present work follows Rothschild (2016), arguing that cooperation is best seen as joint ownership, egalitarian values, and sustained dialog. It does not treat process, working together, and ends as merely procedural—particular values and practices (e.g., sustained dialog) are necessary facets of cooperation (Rothschild, 2016). Cooperation is found in social bonds where "any property at hand must be socially or collectively owned or such organizations will be unable to sustain egalitarian decisional processes" (Rothschild, 2016, p. 57). Such an understanding does not assume that the distribution of resources through the market mechanism is the common end we are co-operating toward.

Drawing on Weber's concepts of formal and substantive rationality, Rothschild argues for more emphasis on the latter (Rothschild, 2016). This means that rather than being guided by universally applied rules, laws, or regulations, it is the substantive values (e.g., egalitarianism, feudalism, Buddhism, etc.) that should shape cooperative action (Kalberg, 1980). Substantive values legitimate cooperatives as cooperative. This includes values such as ongoing participation; resisting hierarchies of authority; valuing and sharing diverse knowledge; and personal and egalitarian relationships that are free of the capitalist culture of instrumental relationships.

Yet cooperatives often face challenges in achieving these aims. Research has found that the rhetoric of "efficiency" can impede cooperative values such as egalitarianism (Taylor, 1994). Others have studied the challenges associated with not anticipating diversity and inequality (Meyers & Vallas, 2016) and the emotional work necessary for cooperation (Hoffmann, 2016). Comparing a bakery and a grocery cooperative, Meyers and Vallas (2016) show how the implementation of a "utilitarian" versus a "communitarian" regime resulted in stratifying types of participation along race, class, and gender lines. When race, class, and gender are understood as not relating to cooperative performance (utilitarian), the division of labor results in reproducing structural inequities. Further, the unequal influence on the decision-making process by a charismatic leader resulted in making the co-op less equal. On the other hand, the co-op that adopted a communitarian perspective included race, class, and gender directly into the co-op's day-to-day strategies. For example, childcare was provided for workers and the 40-hour workweek was rejected, both policies serving to address unfair advantages some groups in the co-op might have related to time and family.

Hoffmann (2016) demonstrates that co-op workers experience heightened freedom to express their emotions in co-ops and learn new emotional responses, but sometimes must also fake emotions to fit in with a co-op's culture (e.g.., frontstage performance). Over time this faking, or "surface acting," can segue into "deep acting" (Hoffmann, 2016)—the latter being when performance actually begins to correspond to internal memories and feelings (Hochschild, 1979). Newer members may internalize the co-op's unspoken rules, such as being helpful or friendly. However, this takes work and can be a slow process, and ultimately, although co-op members can feel more connected, this can come at the cost of personal stress (Hoffmann, 2016; Rothschild-Whitt & Whitt, 1986).

### *Community Capitals Approach*

The interactional and substantive theorizing above can be further grounded by pivoting to the community capitals approach to community development (Flora, Flora, & Gasteyer, 2015). The community capitals framework uses seven forms of capital to study community improvement efforts (see Table 1). This includes natural, human, cultural, social, political, financial, and built resources (we use "resources" and "capitals" interchangeably throughout the paper). It is argued that all of these are important to development. As others have distinguished (e.g., Granovetter, 1985), the community capitals framework makes important distinctions in the social aspects of structure. This

**Table 1. Community Capitals Framework**

| Natural | Cultural | Human | Social | Political | Financial | Built |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Location<br>• Weather<br>• Geographic isolation<br>• Natural resources<br>• Amenities<br>• Natural beauty<br>• Shapes the cultural capital connected to place. | • Knowledge<br>• Traditions<br>• Who and what we feel comfortable with.<br>• Language<br>• Influences what voices are heard or not heard. | • Skills and abilities that help develop and access resources and knowledge.<br>• Leadership across differences, participatory, proactive. | • Connections among people and organizations that make things happen.<br>• Could be close, more personal connections or more distant that create bridges among organizations and groups. | • Access to power, organizations, and resources to change standards, rules, and regulations.<br>• Ability of actors to engage in action that affects their community. | Available financial resources to invest in community capacity building, underwrite business development, support entrepreneurship, and save for future community development. | Infrastructure supporting community activities |

includes social capital which we understand as the connections between people and organizations which make things happen (Flora et al., 2015). There are two types off social capital: bridging and bonding. Bridging includes connections between heterogeneous actors, whereas bonding social capital is across more homogenous connections. Both have their positive (and not-so-positive) attributes: e.g., bridging capital is negatively correlated with "group think" and helps mitigate xenophobia within communities; bonding capital is positively correlated with trust within a community, although too much, absent bridging capital, can give groups the feeling of being exclusive and non-welcoming to "outsiders" (Agnitsch, Flora, & Ryan, 2006; Flora et al., 2015).

The community capitals approach points to social and human capitals as the ideal entry points, leading eventually to a "spiraling up" effect whereby all capitals are enhanced over time (Emery & Flora, 2006). Using this framework, for example, scholars have shown how investments in human capital at the community level through leadership training can impact financial capital as those leaders employ their newly acquired skills to acquire new funds and better manage existing funds, all of which, in turn, bolstered political capital (improved access), social capital (as social networks expanded), and so forth (Emery & Flora, 2006). A community capitals approach expands our everyday understanding of ideas such as return on investment, noting that it should be measured in terms of an increase in *all* capitals, not just financial.

Linking this conversation with the aforementioned Dramaturgical approach, we found evidence to suggest that frontstage performance can play an important role in building bridging capital. In the instances observed, this was because actors' more chameleon-like performances helped link them up with other (often heterogeneous) networks. Such performances depend on the situation and the conventions actors have access to (i.e., some can take on more roles than others). This frontstage-bridging connection is in tension with the backstage-bonding relationship. As we also observed, backstage performance can help establish bonding social capital—we often do not develop thick relationships with people until we see their backstage. However, some performances and performers can more easily access resources because of the cultural capital they have in the network. This includes the ability to draw on various repertoires that facilitate strategic action (Swidler, 1986).

When people feel judged or experience an insincere performance when entering a store, they will be less likely to return. Such experiences, and insincere performances, are especially linked to situations where there are cultural differences and a lack of collective identity (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). We understand collective identity as the process

and product of constituting a shared "we-ness" and collective agency (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). As we know from the literature (e.g., Fernandez & Nichols, 2002), collective identity is more likely to develop among varying communities and groups, which are intentional in developing bridging and bonding capital, which in turn further reinforces these feeling of collective identity—a virtuous circle.

In sum, this project aims to contribute to the growing body of research on cooperation by comparing a number of cases' ability to cooperate, particularly as it relates to community capitals access. By understanding differences in cooperative networks' resource access, we can continue to learn about the type of relationships and processes that may impede or encourage cooperation.

## Methods

We draw on interviews, focus groups, and participant observation conducted during a project that began in 2012. We have adopted an extended case position that values ongoing participation and often draws on established theoretical cases to guide analysis (Burawoy, 1998). As described above, early on, some conversations suggested that cooperation as an interactional process was less reflected upon within the food and agriculture co-op networks, as well as in the literature. In response to this, the lead author began focusing participation on board meetings, events, informal meetings, and distribution activities. Gatekeepers including current and former board presidents were initially contacted to begin the process of building trust and support for the research. This participant observation was particularly concerned with processes that included and excluded the participation of current and potential cooperative members.

In total, 59 interviews and 6 focus groups were conducted, in addition to more than 200 hours of participant observations of meetings, events, and other volunteer opportunities on farms and at distributions. Interviews were conducted with cooperative board members, staff, producers, and consumers. Individuals were chosen based off observations that suggested they were key informants (e.g., cooperative or community leaders) and/or that they could provide an alternative perspective (based on race, class, gender, etc.). Initially, we sought to understand motivations and important relationships using the community capitals and tensions therein. This included using Table 1 to help drive the conversation using the community capitals (Flora et al., 2015). Following these initial steps, we returned to the field, asking questions more specifically concerning decision-making, leadership, and emotional work in a way that helped confirm and disconfirm emergent themes.

After obtaining consent, all interviews were conducted in a setting in which participants felt comfortable. We sought to develop a conversation partnership (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and encourage participants to share their views with us. Interviews, focus groups, and notes were analyzed using both categorizing (i.e., codes) and connecting strategies (i.e., contextualizing in narrative) (Maxwell, 2012). This helps us retain contextual characteristics of each specific case while also developing categories to compare across cases (i.e., memos). Various aspects of the theoretical cases (e.g., social capital) are highlighted differently within each cooperative case. This means that the description of the salient aspects of social capital might look different for each cooperative. For example, in some cooperatives we highlight the qualities governing members' social capital, while in others we highlight different member classes (e.g. producer versus consumers) and potential members (possible consumer members). Our approach is similar to the constructivist method of Charmez (2006), especially the focus on issues of power and oppression. Pseudonyms are used for the interview and focus group participants, as well as the cooperative names.

## The Three Cooperative Cases

This research focuses upon three cooperative cases located in a western region of the U.S. (see Table 2). We sought out geographical, maturational, and organizational variation to help us identify the most transcendent socio-cultural patterns related to the process of cooperation. Just because an organization and/or network might be a "cooperative" in name, the practices, organizational logics, and

**Table 2. Three Cooperative Cases**

| Name | Type of Co-op | Location and service area | Date founded | Number of members |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fair Horizons Food Co-op | Grocery store | Low-income, community of color, in fast-growing regional city | 2014 (no store yet) | 300+ |
| Green Planet Food Co-op | Grocery store | Mid- to high- income, mostly white, educated college town | Late 1970s | 2,400+ |
| Prairie Farms Producer Co-op | Distribution | Low- to mid-income rural towns, customers in fast growing regional city | 2009 | 550+ |

perhaps even goals can differ (sometimes wildly) across cases. We recognize that difference, but also, in using such varied cases, we hope to highlight what (if any) qualities they may share.

Fair Horizons Food Co-op is a yet-to-open grocery store located in a gentrifying, predominately Hispanic/Latino urban neighborhood. This co-op particularly values affordability, community and economic development and ownership, and attends to issues of inequity and justice (Hale, 2017). Founded and driven primarily by a partner nonprofit, Fair Horizons accesses a number of resources through its network. It has high bridging social capital as observed in the diversity of people at meetings (e.g., race, gender, class) and the high-profile partnerships and media attention the project has received. This bridging capital is related to connections to regional political leaders and also to the relative diversity of cultural capital. However, the co-op has struggled to develop leadership that is not supported by the nonprofit and more representative of the target community. For example, many conversations suggested that the co-op does not include and encourage enough leadership from the Hispanic/Latino community. In this sense, the co-op has less bonding social capital between members. The co-op also struggles with creating an inclusive decision-making process since the meeting agendas are often set and facilitated by the nonprofit representatives.

Green Planet Food Co-op opened in a midsize college town in the late 1970s. Much of the membership values environmentally sustainable and local foods, local economy, and community building (Hale, 2017). The membership is primarily white and there is strong social bonding between much of the staff. These bonds and commitments have saved the co-op during financial struggle. During such times, the staff has taken pay cuts, essentially volunteering more of their time to the co-op. While connected to some local policy-making and projects, many have expressed that the co-op is less active in such processes, often viewed as unable to maintain such relationships. There is a core group of people who have been shopping at the co-op for decades, but beyond that, the co-op has struggled with developing connections with more diverse cultural groups (e.g., Hispanic and Latino and low-income populations). In this way, it has low bridging capital. Decision-making is often led, directly or indirectly, by the co-op staff. The strong relationships between staff have at least, in part, created challenges for general manager retention. The co-op is now being co-managed by a group of senior staff members.

Prairie Farms Producer Co-op is a regional co-op spread across four states. Participants are primarily white and value rural economic development, healthy food access, and growing future farmers (Hale, 2017). The co-op has been supplying food to the region's magnet city since 2009. This includes retail and wholesale sales (e.g., to households and to restaurants). The governing body of Prairie Farms is made up of rural producers with high bonding social capital. For example, the meetings serve as times for the geographically scattered producers to talk about the technical aspects of farming over home cooked meals. While run mostly on volunteerism, the co-op struggles to retain urban consumer volunteers. Some burn out while others feel disconnected from the producer-focused mentality of the co-op. This is a significant struggle that Prairie Farms faces—that of low bridging social capital. It creates challenges in

connecting with policy networks and other cultural groups such as those with different political views, younger and/or not white. Decision making is led mostly by insiders in the co-op. There is little to no involvement of the consumer members, which are the largest member class of the co-op.

## Three Emergent Themes

As introduced at the outset of this paper, a research participant early in the development of this project distinguished between *cooperative,* the adjective, and *cooperative,* the noun. We had not thought about it that way until that point and one thing began to take shape as a result—most people working in cooperatives do not spend time thinking about cooperation and how to achieve it. When asked what cooperation is, participants commonly either cited principles of cooperatives—e.g., one member, one vote; member-owned; cooperation among cooperatives—or they expressed surprise and acknowledged not having considered cooperation before. However, as conversations and observations developed, we did learn salient emergent themes about how participants in each cooperative view and practice cooperation. These themes centered on the topic of the *decision-making processes*, *leadership and identity*, and *emotional work, trust, and debt*. Table 3 briefly summarizes the cooperative actions of the cases described below.

### *Decision-making Processes: Inclusivities and Exclusivities*

The ways that ends and means are determined—what people are co-operating toward and how they get there—is an ongoing process for each cooperative. Much of this occurs in governance meetings such as board meetings and annual member meetings. However, participants often had differing views on how much decision making is shaped by circumstances more external to meetings. These divergent views take shape when considering different ways cooperation is understood, including inclusive and exclusive practices and when to recognize and when to ignore external forces (e.g., power).

Many participants often viewed cooperation through decision-making processes that involve listening, being thoughtful, and being respectful of differing points of view. We also observed this in meetings as participants would defer to others' previous statements and acknowledge another's views, even when disagreeing or illuminating the

**Table 3: Cooperative Actions of Three Cooperative Cases**

| Cooperative | Decision-making | Leadership and identity | Emotional work, trust, and debt |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Fair Horizons** | • More intentionally works to anticipate social and cultural inequities in shaping cooperation (e.g., vocalization, trainings)<br>• Some decisions made prior by nonprofit | • Hierarchical leadership by white, male professionals<br>• Charismatic frontstage of leaders contributes to bridging capital but struggles with bonding—challenge of identity and different performance | • Racial boundaries often maintained in gatherings<br>• Able to acquire more resources to work across difference but nonrepresentational leadership sometimes contributes to distrust |
| **Green Planet** | • Less intentional focus on social and cultural hierarchies<br>• Driven by staff; role of board diminished | • Struggle between hierarchical and horizontal leadership<br>• Frontstage of board is bureaucratic; backstage strong with staff<br>• Green, progressive, DIY identity | • Emotional debt spills out into store (e.g., gossip and insincere feeling performance)<br>• Consumers expect more anonymity; co-op can be too much emotional work |
| **Prairie Farms** | • Little intentional focus on social and cultural hierarchies<br>• Excludes urban consumers (i.e., not on governing body) | • Horizontal leadership, based on producer identity<br>• Frontstage more closely reflects backstage, bonding capital is strong | • Distance maintained with urban populations in interactions<br>• More work/less opportunity to build trust<br>• Consumers seen as "not caring" |

other side. When asked about what cooperation looks like, Anne, a Prairie Farms producer stated,

> "Well, you have to be flexible. Not everybody is going to think the way you do. You have to get along and if you are going to make a point, be sure to have the facts to back it up. Some people once they make up their mind, they don't listen to anything anyone else has to say. This makes everyone else's jobs much more difficult. Not everyone is willing to discuss disagreements."

Disagreements in Prairie Farms often included different ways to approach distribution of food, whether to take on debt, and how to grow the business (e.g., what markets to prioritize, who to hire). If people have already "made up their mind," this can work against a process in which people work together to determine ends and means. Relatedly, when minds are made up exclusively, such as in informal side conversations, this can create challenges to more open discussion within the larger group.

Prairie Farms' decision-making processes often do not include urban, consumer members—only involving them in decisions set aside for the annual meetings, if at all. Furthermore, there are no urban, consumer members on the board even though this is the largest member class. Not involving consumer members in the decision process results in the co-op's struggle to develop and maintain a distribution website which may be eased by information and human resources coming from urban members (e.g., consumer perspective, information technology volunteerism). While a previous website was causing the co-op financial issues and needed to be changed, those working to make changes did not work with consumer end-users to develop the end goal and a means to get there.

Though some consumers may not desire to be a part of the process, others are more critical of the producer focus of Prairie Farms and the exclusion of consumers from decision-making. As Keith, an urban resident, put it,

> "A lot of the [producer] board members are out of touch with where the consumers are at. Or if they are aware, they are voluntarily ignorant of it. They don't want the consumers to dictate what the producers do. They have an adversarial relationship with the consumers they sell with. They don't see eye to eye politically or morally. There is this conflict with the consumer that they don't necessarily want a relationship with. I guess this might be a little harsh. I'm just calling it how I see it."

The "adversarial" relationship sometimes has to do with interests at odds with each other such as the price of food or the way it should be distributed. Participation for consumers has been relegated to buying food from producers. Although producers on the board expressed a strong desire, often in a prideful way, in educating urban consumers about farming and food, the decision-making process remains exclusive as they do not emphasize equal participation from members and other social groups outside of rural producers. While this retains control for the producers, the co-op is struggling to find and maintain consumer member volunteers for distribution, enroll new consumer members, and access other resources such as skills, knowledge, and political connections.

Divisions exist in the decision-making processes of the other co-ops as well. For Green Planet, tensions revolve around decision making between staff and board members. The staff often end up driving the process of board decisions because they are more knowledgeable about the co-op's the day-to-day workings. This can diminish efforts by board members who have less grocery knowledge and are short on time. Although staff can be critical of the board not doing enough, when the board does not do what they want, the tensions created are sometimes made visible with eyebrow pinching and quick defensive responses from the staff. Participants described that it took time for new board leadership (e.g., president) to develop relationships and skills to work with staff.

When we asked about groups that may not be well represented in Green Planet, some people mentioned the homeless and Hispanic or Latino populations in the area. Relative to the producer communities of Prairie Farms, the Green Planet

community is more urban and socio-economically diverse. Involving diverse populations is often not viewed as the role or goal of the cooperative. Conversations at Green Planet rarely cover issues of race and class as it might relate to participation. When it does come up, diverse participation and membership is not seen as economically feasible or is argued to be organizationally challenging. Partnerships with nonprofits are typically viewed as opportunities for the co-op to engage with diverse populations.

Some participants described an "old guard" who have particular expectations about the co-op and the foods it provides. Appealing to other cultural groups whether Hispanic/Latino or those who desire more affordable foods is not the aim and therefore they are not viewed as being necessary to the cooperative's decision-making process. This contributes to a decision-making process that remains culturally exclusive, beyond the institutional differences between the staff and board.

Central to Prairie Farms' and Green Planet's challenges in finding the time for inclusive decision making lies an assumption about what should be prioritized. Here, cooperation amounts to listening and being respectful of other opinions, and relegating participation to consumer purchases, rather than also anticipating the role of social hierarchies, related inequities, and in the ability to stay engaged. Fair Horizons is more intentionally working to anticipate difference as it relates to inequality, although the challenge of time is still present.

For Fair Horizons, the main tension it is experiencing is between those who are generally more educated, white, and new neighborhood residents, and those who are generally less educated, Hispanic or Latino, and long-time residents. Furthermore, white men from the partner nonprofit generally lead the cooperative effort and decision making by setting the agenda (more on this in the next section). While a great deal of this occurs in side conversations in the nonprofit, proposals are still presented to the board that is made up of diverse community members. When asked about this, the lack of time and knowledge of other board members is viewed as an impeding factor for both inclusive conversation and still moving the cooperative effort forward.

Discussions observed at Fair Horizons acknowledge the impeding effect of racism and classism on decision making and work to address challenges as they come up. For example, in response to concerns of adequate participation from Hispanic and Latina women, meetings now have full-time translators and child-care services. After feedback occurring through these networks, meetings are beginning to be held more frequently in Spanish and translated into English. Even white, male leadership are reflecting on their role differently. For example, Steve, who acknowledges his race and status, said,

> "The way that I try to do that [co-operate] is slowing down. So allowing myself, others, and progress to be slower. I am aware that me as a person cares about efficiency and making decisions to move forward…just get it done and take action. Recognizing that being a privileged white male in a position of leadership in an organization comprised of mostly Latino women, I need to be more okay with being slower." –

The opportunity for such feedback and adaptation is not as possible in Prairie Farms and Green Planet. Participants view it as taking too much time; that it could problematically disrupt current networks; and that it is not the goal or responsibility of the co-op to address such inequities.

*Structuring Leadership and Identity*

Leadership and identity are closely intertwined in how each cooperative performs its work. Leadership can be more hierarchical, shared, detached, charismatic, and/or more representative. Each of these relate to how co-ops are able to access resources. Similar to the themes in the previous section, leadership is related to the amount of time and other resources cooperative networks have. For Fair Horizons, the nonprofit partner's continued pressure to acquire funding, and the "professional" culture this funding sits within, supports some bodies and presentations of self over others. One research participant, Kate, described how people who are formally educated, white, and male, for example, are "made to be in

front of people." Individuals from the nonprofit who are white, educated, and often male have ended up in paid positions to lead community-development efforts such as the co-op.

The lack of time and resources prevalent in co-ops results in a more hierarchical leadership structure where the conversations and agendas are more driven by the nonprofit representatives associated with the co-op. They are the ones who come up with the meeting agendas and generally lead and facilitate conversation. There is a degree of detachment these leaders present when facilitating meetings. When there are changes in funding or new technical information about running a grocery is established, it is communicated to the group via these leaders. While the frontstage of these individuals may transfer to funding and political circles—thereby acquiring support for the co-op that might not be there otherwise—their legitimacy is sometimes questioned by Hispanic and Latino community members who are the target population (Hale, 2017). Furthermore, by allowing the people and symbolic currency of professional culture to drive meetings, leadership can work to disempower members and potential members of the co-op. As Angel describes about a meeting with new board members,

> "At the first meeting we had with the new board, everyone introduced themselves and said 'I have such and such degree, I work for the City' or 'oh, I just finished my MBA,' you know whatever, and then you moved to the gals that are Spanish speakers, and then they would say things like, 'well, I don't have a degree, but I'm here to help,' and it was something that just bothered me. All of a sudden we created like this environment, without even wanting to, we created this space that people felt like, 'oh my gosh, we don't have a degree compared to the new members,' or, 'we don't have these top-level positions with the city.'"

Inclusive decision making takes time and leadership that works to be sure everyone can participate. However, sometimes the mere existence of differences between people's status can unintentionally disempower people in a room. Angel provides some examples of what leaders can do to address this such as valuing diverse knowledge and culture. This might include explicitly acknowledging different forms of knowledge, the often privileged nature of western education, the importance of traditional and subaltern forms of knowledge, and creating spaces for the expression of difference.

Though it is easy to focus upon the nonprofit leadership, Angel is also an example of a charismatic leader within the co-op who challenges some of the less-cooperative power dynamics such as those described above. In meetings, Angel's expressions are oriented toward feeling and connection to the community—more reflective of backstage performance—rather than organizational efficiency. Such leaders are viewed by some as being vital to the success of the co-op. However, time and knowledge are challenges for such leaders to sustain participation, especially as the nonprofit has mostly driven the process. As Alison describes,

> "I feel like that until there is a champion besides Renovation [the nonprofit], it is difficult for everyone to know what's going on in the co-op. Even if I wanted to do it, so much happens behind the scenes. How would I have the time? I have a job and a life. And can't be that engaged with what they're doing. I know the goal is for it not to be Renovation's pet project but I don't think there is enough momentum for that to happen."

As made up of a mostly white, educated staff, Renovation has received criticism for not hiring individuals from the community for leadership positions. However, during our time studying the group, the need for the co-op's leadership to be from the community, along with a process to ensure this outcome, increasingly became a part of Renovation's approach. For example, the group has hired a Hispanic/Latino office manager from the community, held anti-oppression trainings, and has continued to develop intention around who should be represented on the board and group dynamics therein.

For Green Planet, the leadership is bifurcated into the board and the staff that is made up of a general management team (GMT). The GMT was put in place as the result of three general managers lasting less than a year or two. General managers (GMs) were hired from outside the community and typically came from a more "corporate" background. This included more professional presentation of self, with a focus on efficiency, profit, and hierarchical decision making. While some viewed hiring from the outside and GMs not fitting in, others saw the current staff culture, and charismatic leaders within it as being the problem—"gossiping" or being divisive and manipulative. However, there are others who describe a quieter leadership that offsets some of these dynamics.

Leadership dynamics also plays out between board and staff. Though the board may have particular goals—a second store, for example—if these do not align with staff interests, they rarely happen. This is especially the case since the board is voluntary, with limited knowledge of the day-to-day operations. In this way, while the board is to work to mediate staff and member concerns, the staff tends to drive the process. The current board leadership is often viewed as being too stuck on bureaucratic rules, following the policy governance protocol, or occupied with their own agendas which align more with more corporate, bureaucratic performances. We witnessed a number of times where there was tension between staff and board about following the protocol or particular agendas, rather than staff experience. In a way, the tension might be better understood as the staff wanting more legitimacy in managing board activities, while the board aims to play a visioning role but is forced into managing as GMs left. Therefore, the unclear leadership dynamic often becoming the subject of board meetings.

While bureaucratic rules and frontstage performance have provided grounding for some, others, including the staff, have desired more focus upon relationship building. The process of the board leaves some "feeling high and dry," particularly if they are concerned with community building—something with which many perceive the co-op struggling. Focusing on institutional, bureaucratic processes limits the time and possibilities for getting others involved, particularly those who might not identify with the current cooperative network's cultural make-up. This might have to do with the types of food found at the grocery, but also could be the politics and subcultures of the staff and board—something that fuels social bonding. Many of these community resources are not valued in following protocols but can be developed through having social events and leadership that prioritize such activities. Such leadership would necessitate the ability to develop relationships across differences (e.g., cultural).

Prairie Farms also struggles to have leadership that works across cultural groups. However, the homogeneity of Prairie Farms often leads to more horizontal leadership on the board between producers. Most people are active in the conversation and play a particular role such as distribution coordination, accounting, and community partnerships. The president of the board's aim is to ensure that if any two or three people were to step down from the board, the organization would not fold. He wants to "empower all the way down in the co-op." However, as described above, the horizontal leadership is based on the producer identity, so the leadership of the consumer members is often minimized to that of buying foods.

Leadership in Prairie Farms is often detached, following an agenda determined by core leadership in advance of the meetings. There is an emphasis on recognition on the board such as people referring to and praising others' work and efforts. Charisma can sometimes be based on age or presentation of self. For example, the aim of Prairie Farms making farming viable for young farmers again helps one young farmer and employee of the co-op gain status. Board members listen closely to this person, encouraging his contributions which lead to more contributions. An urban consumer member and marketing employee works to connect with people new and old at distribution; she was described by some as a "people person." This person is a charismatic leader but has also expressed frustration with some of the decisions of the board, which she perceives as not focused enough on the consumer experience. In this way, charisma will only go so far if the space is not opened for that force to change cooperative operations.

*Emotional Work, Trust, and Debt*

Cooperation takes a degree of trust, which often takes work, particularly when working across differing cultures and ways of doing. This work can be emotional and when it is perceived as uneven, participation can wane or stop completely. The difference between the emotional surface, and what is going on below it, can lead to emotional debts, even if these debts are not known to others. Emotional debts are conceptualized by the authors as the result of uneven emotional work in which one party becomes framed as the source of another's emotional work. As described below, these debts can contribute to social bonding but also result in interactional barriers with others in a cooperative network.

The salient surface level emotional work of Green Planet is twofold: occurring between staff and customers, and between staff and the board. The general presentation of self for the staff of the cooperative includes being caring, helpful, and community-minded, as well as efficient and thoughtful grocers. Mike describes the emphasis on caring and community here,

> "[It is important] to take the time to connect in such a way that shows that you really care about this person, that I really care about the cooperative movement as a global movement for justice. I do care about what this job means to me. I care enough to make a difference and connect in this way."

As we allude to in the previous sections, the emotional work between the staff and board often goes further, below the surface, with the staff more readily expressing frustration and emotion. The board typically has a more emotionally detached presentation of self. When frustration and emotion are expressed, this often pushes the decision-making process in the staff's direction and takes more decision-making autonomy away from the board.

While this dynamic works in the staff's favor with the board, its implications with customers can result in less patronage. A number of participants we talked to from the board and staff described how staff culture sometimes made customers uncomfortable coming to shop at the store; one participant described it as "a snootiness, better-than attitude." Some participants also noted the "cliquishness" of the staff. Others were quick to emphasize that this was not the case for all staff. Some perceive it as a "clubhouse," while others think it demonstrates commitment to the community. As Lars put it,

> "Yeah, it was interesting, it's like it's cool to be at the co-op, you know, we're not working at [expletive] Whole Foods, but at the same time, that's kind of where I feel like it ended. I would say some people put their heart and soul into the place, and really like the idea of having a community market where we are selling as many local things and helping producers, and is pretty involved. For others, I don't know, it's just cool to work there, but I don't think they really give a shit. It kind of just became more of a hangout place for them to just complain and a lot of that affected business I think."

The staff talking within earshot of consumers about other employees, customers, or other activities is an example of what happens as emotional debts build up and there is a culture that encourages that it be shared in public. Staff have felt underappreciated for taking pay cuts, and then are expected to perform surface level emotions, such as smiling and being friendly, when customers come in. This results in debts that staff might feel customers, management, and the board owe them. While some staff are able to bond over this, other non-staff sometimes witness it by overhearing conversations or perceiving unwelcoming, or insincere gestures.

Related to this, staff and members we spoke with at events and in the community often referred to the Green Planet as being expensive. However, the co-op regularly conducts price comparisons with other natural food stores, finding that their prices were competitive with other stores such as Whole Foods or Natural Grocers. We began to ask people if the perceived expense was perhaps representative of something else. Some described challenges with convenience such as parking or getting

all the foods they needed. However, others suggested that it may be representative of the emotional work sometimes necessary to shop at the co-op. As Marsha, one participant, said,

> "There is a certain level of anonymity in other grocery stores. People are afraid of too much closeness and they want the anonymity. That is why the co-op draws a very small portion of its potential market. They are afraid of being known. I go to the co-op because I love having people there I can say hi to. But I'm gaining a sense that I'm more of an anomaly."

The co-op's expense is also related to the emotional work of interacting with a small staff in a small store. If identities are more discordant, it takes more work, especially for staff, and this can lead to debts and insincere performances.

As the conversation further unfolded with Marsha, she continued to describe concern with being able to compete with the anonymity of larger grocers. We asked how the co-op might be able to appeal to more diverse identities, and not be reliant on "anomalies," such as with people like herself. Marsha said,

> "I think potential co-op shoppers would want to see themselves as wanting diversity, but the reality is that people often want to see people that look like themselves. The emotional reality is there is a very big difference between what people say they want and what makes them comfortable. I think people end up going with comfort a lot more than we are willing to admit."

In this way, the customers have a certain amount of willingness to engage with below-the-surface emotions, particularly if it involves working across difference. Such work is more emotionally taxing though. Marsha's statement is also representative of staff and board members who view working across socio-economic diversity as potentially taking too much emotional energy.

For Prairie Farms, the performance of self is more detached, as a pragmatic utilitarian producer working to bring consumers a good product. There is less effort in developing relationships with the consumer members beyond market relationships and sometimes at volunteer-run distribution. Besides distribution, where a few producers are present, and board meetings, there are few opportunities consumers and producers have to interact. At distribution, people interact, moving food around a room before it goes to the next location. People are subtle in acknowledging each other, sometimes not greeting each other at all. The distribution manager makes some announcements about the work and tiredly expresses appreciation for their time. Many conversations are about farms, family, and logistical challenges with the co-op. However, most people kept distance from us during the times we volunteered. Though this may have to do with being a researcher, whenever a new consumer member volunteer came, we took notes about the tendency of the interaction to be surface level and often evolve into minimal social interaction. Further, at an annual meeting at a community health center in an urban African American community, there was an often a visible line dividing white and non-white people in the room of around 50 individuals. Put another way, there was little interaction between producers, current consumers, *and* potential and curious African American community members.

When asked about what kinds of interactions keep consumers from participating in board meetings, Anne, a producer board member, said,

> "Sometimes you just meet someone and you don't like what they say and how they act. If you get someone like that on the board and the other eight board members don't like them because their personality doesn't mesh, there would be a problem. I think that is what happens with a lot of boards."

When personalities do not "mesh" it takes more emotional work to cooperate and can create social distance for consumer members who might be on the board. Anne went on to describe that some of the past challenges with retaining consumer representation, such as not being interested or having as much passion for the work. However,

some consumer member volunteers often talked about feeling like an outsider at meetings or even slighted at times: not being as trusted or recognized as quickly as producer members for their contributions. As an example, Keith offered the following,

> "I've suggested having a hip summer dinner. The consumers want to have a party with drinks, kids running around, other soccer moms, talking about the food they buy at the coop, what meals they made. But those things never happen and it's a shame. I've suggested the idea but it always gets shut down. It we had more events like this, we would have no problem finding someone to be secretary. A stay at home mom or dad could be into it but these people are not going to be found at the annual meeting with the boring booths of food. I mean, come on. Throw in a little music or sit down food. People love that stuff."

So while the co-op may save on the emotional work of developing trust with consumers in board meetings, distributions, and other day-to-day activities, Keith suggests that this has a financial cost for the co-op. Without the involvement of consumers, the co-op loses out with how to be more convenient, resources to have events, and building networks that brings the cooperative other resources.

The social distance between different socio-economic groups is the focus of the emotional work for Fair Horizons. Board members aim to be inviting and inclusive. However, meetings still typically end up being spatially organized along racial lines. As community development professionals, the leaders of the co-op and nonprofit typically work to greet people across groups. Yet there are still challenges to levelling the field right from the moment people walk in the door—such as feeling judged for the food brought to share or for tensions around how the co-op is implicated in the process of gentrification. While such patterns create challenges in building trust, participants described the benefit of requiring anti-oppression trainings, inclusive field trips, and making space for discomfort.

In this way, nonprofit organizations, or potentially other types of established coalitions, may help take on more of the burden of an uneven emotional field. However, as stated previously, the ability of organizations to do this—to connect and retain commitments from diverse groups—is a place of power dynamics where white, male professionalism often winning out with funders and politicians. One expense of this is that emotional work to connect with these leaders can fall on the target populations, creating barriers to trust and leadership legitimacy. It also can reproduce sentiments that other identities cannot themselves be in leadership positions, thereby contributing to broader structural inequities.

## Discussion: The Struggle to be Cooperative

Cooperatives serve as a valuable case in studying alternative forms of organizing food and agriculture networks. They also provide an opportunity for imagining and enacting alternative food futures. However, as this research has shown, cooperatives can sometimes struggle to be cooperative. Decision making can exclude certain current or potential members; leadership can reproduce divisions through bureaucratic performance and routinized forms of charisma; and the emotional work necessary to cooperative culture can lead to emotional debts that can delegitimize surface level performance. All of these enable cooperative networks to access certain resources and disable others.

All the cooperative networks studied had different ways of including and excluding others from decision-making processes. These are often identity based—such as producers, professionals, or staff driving decision-making process—and values based—such as utilitarian or environmental sustainability (Hale, 2017). Particular identities and values can bring resources (e.g., capitals). For Prairie Farms and Green Planet, identities and values resulted in bonding social capital and volunteerism. Political capital was often generated for Fair Horizons. However, values and identities also limit resources that other potential networks might provide. Consumer members are sometimes excluded intentionally—their participation is valued through market relations only. Even when they are not, the amount of time, information, and physical

and spatial distance these other networks have to go through limits capitals access. For example, websites, distribution centers, and markets may be more easily accessible if urban consumer members were more intentionally included in the decision-making process.

These tensions within the decision-making process suggest that while economic interests can directly erode the potential of one-member, one-vote (Mooney, 2004), so too can cultural differences within current and potential networks. Voting is not independent of the social and cultural locations members occupy within and outside of the cooperative network. The "adversarial" relationship between consumers and producers, as one participant put it, is fueled by economic interests as well as cultural judgements and priorities. Alternatively, for power to be shared, diverse knowledge to be valued, and personal relationships to be developed and maintained (Rothschild, 2016), bonding relationships, which often drive volunteerism, may be eroded. Diverse cooperative efforts may also require more time and other resources during the start-up phase, such as those observed in the case of Fair Horizons.

Cooperatives such as Fair Horizons more intentionally anticipate and encourage the expression difference in the decision-making process. Race, class, educational, and other structural inequities come more regularly into the conversation, guiding means-end process to navigate structures both external and internal to Fair Horizon's efforts. By doing so, this cooperative network has opened more readily accessible feedback circuits. It also demonstrates effort to counteract indirect forms of power (Hall, 1997). For example, the nonprofit partner provides childcare and translation services to help ensure participation. The board has also been more intentional with including a majority of Hispanic and Latino community members. Leadership regularly reflects upon slowing down the process and not focusing as much on efficiency. In this way, the inclusion of these voices in the decision-making process has produced forces to counter the influence of power in fully appointing delegates. However, the power dynamics in shaping the leadership in Fair Horizons still presents significant challenges.

Tying back to the role of performance of self (Goffman, 1978) and leadership (Cicourel, 1958), cooperative cases display tensions between professional, bureaucratic and charismatic leadership performance. Though Fair Horizons includes more diverse voices, the professionalism and bureaucratic demands of being led by a nonprofit create challenges for the leadership being representative of the target community. By having broader repertoires of action (Swidler, 1986), this leadership helps the project access additional resources such as grants, technical expertise, and efficiencies but can sometimes be seen as disempowering to the community. White, male leadership often make backstage decisions, such as meeting agendas, what opportunities to explore, and identifying potential problems. Though many are quick to say that they do not have the time or expertise to do this, some still view it as a problem that the leadership is not representative of the target community of low-income, Hispanic and Latino residents. The leadership works to develop bridging social capital sometimes at the expense of bonding capital. In this way, power still works to empower specific delegates as leaders, who set agendas (Hall, 1997), thereby reproducing structural inequities in interactions (Stryker, 2008). In other words, frontstage performance (e.g., claims of education level) can be detrimental to building trust across power differentials. While frontstage, bureaucratic performance and/or routinized forms of charisma may lead to financial and human capital that help the co-op acquire a store space and fill out a proforma for example, it can decrease bonding social capital and cultural capital by shaping what is considered "efficient." In doing so, the co-op may actually be less efficient because it loses out on other forms of human capital (e.g., volunteerism) and potential membership. In this way, the reception and implications (e.g., capitals access) of the presentation of self is contingent on the audience (Goffman, 1978).

However, once again, Fair Horizons' relatively diverse feedback networks allow such lessons to be reflected upon and addressed. The separation between cooperative membership classes (e.g., workers and managers) are not as institutionalized as others such as those in Mondragon (Taylor, 1994), possibly making "efficiency" relatively more

negotiable. The relationships between those in the co-op and the nonprofit leadership are still sometimes personal, more readily displaying the backstage of social life (Cicourel, 1958). When compared with Green Planet, Fair Horizons likely has a more negotiable order (Hall, 1997), at least in part because it is at an earlier stage of its development. Various forms of charismatic leadership are still observable in Fair Horizons. However, in the later stages of this research, some leadership had begun to wane, particularly in those who saw the co-op as potentially contributing to gentrification rather than helping it.

When compared to Fair Horizons, the other cooperatives have a more horizontal form of leadership. These networks often have more time but, possibly more importantly, are more homogeneous. Decision making and trust is easier for networks with strong bonding social capital such as Prairie Farms. Hierarchical leadership is less necessary for acquiring the needed resources, as is the case with Fair Horizons. In fact, because trust is more automatic, around a producer identity and related social bonds, it could be easier to share leadership and create investment across the group. Yet, like Meyers and Vallas (2016) found, this group takes a more utilitarian approach to understanding its work. Leadership works to fill in roles necessary to bring product to market, rather than taking a communitarian approach (e.g., Fair Horizons) which would be more concerned with how inequities structure, and are structured by, the co-op's leadership. This supports a view that market relations alone cannot address structural inequities. For groups such as Prairie Farms to wrestle with such challenges, efforts may benefit from sustained guidance (e.g., funding, training, intervention, etc.) which develop strategies for developing human capital, and in turn bolster frontstage performances and bridging social capital. In other words, cooperative frontstage interactions need to work to better reflect current and potential social networks to ensure the development of collective identity.

This research supports others who have shown that, in comparison to corporate forms of business, cooperatives may allow a wider range of emotions to be displayed, such as anger and excitement (Hoffmann, 2016). Further, the time spent with the cooperatives suggests that surface emotional performances that conflict with those below the surface can lead to emotional debt, such as resentment. Much of the time these performances are related to sometimes conflicting forms of community resource access (e.g., financial vs. social vs. cultural capital) and challenges in marrying surface performances to deep, backstage feelings. This is observed between grocery store staff, the board, and customers, as well as producer and consumer members. The emotional tensions between these groups sometimes result from performances—between different staff groups and/or staff and customers—that further divide decision making and leadership, thereby limiting resources and ongoing commitments. Green Planet now finds itself labeled as "expensive" or "cliquish." Some consumers do not feel comfortable going into the store because of being judged or feeling insincere performance. This suggests that more intentional and sustained work aimed at cultivating an engaging collective identity is needed. While bonding social capital has formed among some staff, less effort is spent developing bridging capital, thereby limiting the co-op's collective identity horizon. This confirms others who have found that bridging and bonding capital are both needed to reinforce feelings of collective identity.

Relatedly, in the case of Prairie Farms, customers are often viewed by producers as not caring enough about the cooperative. This territorializing of care supports the continued insularity of the co-op from urban, producer members. Board meetings and day-to-day efforts are spaces where producers feel comfortable because they do not have to work as much across other socio-economic, political, and cultural lines. This comfort, a place where surface performance and deeper felt emotions more easily align, supports the ongoing commitment of producers—a producer collective identity. However, at the same time, it limits investment and empowerment of other current and potential members, such as urban consumers.

In this way, while it can be slow to segue into deep acting for potential cooperators (Hoffmann, 2016), if the ability for current and potential members to participate is unequal, groups are not able

to develop ways to emote across difference and expand their collective identity in a way that encourages ongoing cooperation. If groups are not doing the emotional work—whether it be surface or deep acting—to ensure participation across difference their efforts might be characterized as uncooperative (Rothschild, 2016). Yet, for groups to work across difference, such as the case with Fair Horizons, other forms of bureaucratization may be necessary to acquire resources—grants, in-kind donations, volunteerism—to support trainings, events, and other forms of interaction which can help build trust and bolster bridging social capital. However, this bureaucratization can also chip away at the energy of charismatic leaders who play a critical role bridging networks. Table 4 includes some recommendations on how co-ops can improve cooperation.

This research can be used as a step in developing a grounded approach to the process of cooperation in cooperatives. However, as with any research, this project has its limitations. For example, we were unable to consider the various cultural repertoires within particular places that may help cooperatives be more or less cooperative. How might cultural practices be different in various regions or countries which facilitate cooperation? Further studies could help with this comparison, especially by developing survey methodologies that facilitate the numerical comparison of practice.

## Conclusion

The cooperativeness of cooperatives is often assumed in practice. After all, most people involved in such forms of social organizing likely consider themselves to be cooperative. However, as demonstrated in this paper, legal status alone does not guarantee cooperative relationships. Decision-making processes can be exclusive, leadership can disempower, and emotional work can limit the ability to work across socio-cultural difference. In this way, when we speak of cooperation, it is important to ask: cooperative for whom?

This work has assumed a position that to be cooperative, food and agriculture cooperatives must also practice egalitarian decision making, hierarchies must be resisted, diverse knowledge valued and shared, and that relationships must be personal and free from capitalist, instrumental rationality (Rothschild, 2016). Such practice helps cooperatives diversify their resource access, especially bridging social capital, political networks, and cultural diversity. For example, by anticipating socio-cultural difference and limits to participation and expression, some cooperatives are able to access broader networks and resources.

**Table 4. Action Steps for Cooperatives to be More Cooperative**

| For cooperatives and evaluators |
|---|
| • Work intentionally to anticipate and build capacities for addressing inequalities within and between current and potential member groups. This may include, for example, regular open agenda items for people to share stories and concerns as it relates to inequities, changing staff, anti-oppression trainings, cultural competency trainings, and revisiting visions, missions, and business plans. |
| • Develop intentional processes for establishing and revisiting collective identity. |
| • Work to ensure staff and leadership positions are held by less structurally advantaged identities. |
| • Strategize ways to encourage both bridging and bonding social capital. This may include, for example, regular events and gatherings. These should sometimes aim for cultivating exclusive space, and other times for inclusive spaces, but being sure to value both. |
| • Work to ensure emotional work is shared over time and space (intervention may be needed). |
| • Prioritize all capitals (not just financial). |
| **For policymakers and funders** |
| • Support the development of human and infrastructural resources aimed at creating equitable cooperative cultures and strong collective identities. |
| • Deprioritize measuring success in financially "sustainable" terms. For cooperatives to financially thrive and be cooperative, extra support is often needed to build capacity. |
| • Do not assume a one-size-fits-all model. |
| • Prioritize all capitals (not just financial). |

However, communitarian approaches (Meyers & Vallas, 2016) may also create challenges for some groups who are fueled by bonding social capital. Working across difference takes emotional work and potentially takes away from incentives fueling participation (e.g., camaraderie with other producers). Depending on the type of leadership (e.g., charismatic vs. bureaucratic, hierarchical vs. horizontal), and supporting emotional investments, values, and performances, some identities feel disempowered and struggle with ongoing participation. Both bridging and bonding capital must be prioritized to develop a collective identity that sustains cooperative efforts across space and time. This also means addressing uneven access to performance repertoires that help access resources and how this may shape priorities, participation, and other connections necessary to co-operative success.

By attempting to enact alternative values, while to some degree working within more traditional value chains, cooperatives can serve as a kind of "third way". Traditional value chains' focus on producer, distributor, and consumer economic relationships can often miss other important interactions that happen in day-to-day relationships. Alternative food projects can sometimes seem destined to be dispersed and episodic, with less coordination across space and time. Cooperatives provide an alternative legal form but also need to continuously interrogate what cooperation is in action—something that can also depend on the time and place in which a cooperative network works. If an intentional process of cooperation is not sought after, it can be easy to revert back to the competitive values that drive traditional economic processes, even under the banner of a cooperative legal form. Projects working deliberately on organizational *and* interactional aspects of cooperation may fare better in creating better food futures—an aspiration that fueled steps toward cooperation in the first place.

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