

2021 International Co-operative Governance Symposium – Highlights Report

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Cian McMahon
Karen Miner
Sonja Novkovic

The International Centre for Co-operative Management
Saint Mary's University (Halifax, Canada)



**Saint Mary's
University**

International Centre
for Co-operative
Management

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1 Introduction

The 2021 International Co-operative Governance Symposium convened June 17-19 to discuss and debate the pressing issues of co-operative governance with regards to practice, research and education. Over 100 delegates (including over 60 presenters from a dozen countries) joined the launch of this online gathering, with upwards of 200 delegates participating over the course of three days.

The symposium launch set out a context-dependent perspective on co-operative governance, bringing together insights from leading thinkers and doers in the field. The panellists emphasized the co-op difference while outlining alternatives to the standard corporate governance approaches.

The presentations that followed after the Launch Session dug deeper into theories, philosophies and practices of humanistic co-operative governance: from indigenous co-operation in Northern Canada and Africa; to co-op models in continental and Nordic Europe; to workplace democracy in the Basque country, North America, Northern England, Greece, and Cuba; to agricultural and financial co-operation in India and French Canada - the symposium was marked by a certain unity in all its diversity. We also witnessed engaging and lively debates on co-op professionalization and board renewal; on governance innovations such as co-operative platforms and sociocratic decision making; and on ideal legislative and regulatory regimes. Thank you to all of the speakers, researchers and practitioners for your contributions.

2 Symposium framing

Governance means “to lead, to steer, to be the head of, to set rules, to be in charge of the power”. The ultimate goal of governance is to

effectively fulfill an organization's goals in a way consistent with the organization's purpose.

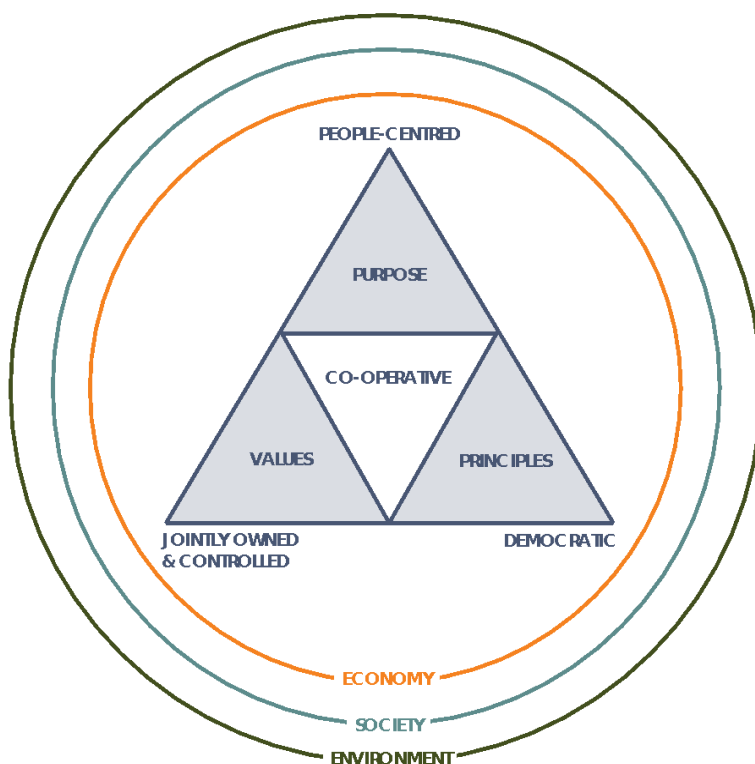
Governance is understood in the context of the co-operative purpose/values/principles and **enterprise model** (see graphic representation below) - combining three inherent properties of co-operatives.¹ The best governance system that is fit for co-operatives:

- Is **People-centred**, and specifically **member-centric**: members as users that own, control, benefit. Control is a personal right of membership, rather than a property right.
- Embraces the **jointly-owned and controlled** nature of co-operatives.
- Supports **democratic** decision making that is participatory in nature, including engagement of members (and other key co-op stakeholders).

The dual - or, more accurately, complex - (economic and socio-ecological) purpose and embeddedness of co-operative membership impacts upon organizational governance and culture.

¹ Novkovic, S., & Miner, K., eds. (2015). *Co-operative governance fit to build resilience in the face of complexity*. International Cooperative Alliance.
<https://www.ica.coop/en/co-operative-governance-fit-build-resilience-face-complexity>

A Framework for Co-operative Enterprise (Miner & Novkovic, 2020)²



This perspective builds upon humanistic economics and management theories.³ Humanistic organization aims at promoting human dignity and enhancing wellbeing, with an emphasis on interpersonal and socio-ecological relationships such as stewardship, reciprocity, loyalty, trust, care, regeneration, etc. Regarding the social and ecological embeddedness of actualizing persons, traditional western humanistic framings are constructively critiqued, expanded and extended along lines parallel to indigenous thought. Interconnectedness and interdependence amongst humans and non-human nature is a foundational

² Miner, K., & Novkovic, S. (2020). Diversity in Governance: A Cooperative Model for Deeper, More Meaningful Impact. *The Cooperative Business Journal* (NCBA CLUSA) Fall 2020 - Building Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Amid Crisis.

<https://ncbaclusa.coop/journal/2020/fall-2020/diversity-in-governance/>

³ Pirson, M. (2017). *Humanistic management: Protecting dignity and promoting well-being*. Cambridge University Press; Lutz, M. A., & Lux, K. (1988). *Humanistic economics: The new challenge*. New York: Bootstrap Pr.

understanding from this perspective, emphasizing the collective and reciprocal basis of sustainable development.⁴

We understand governance as a system that includes structures, processes, and their dynamic interplay.⁵

- a. **Structures** include co-op ownership/“usership” rights; decision-making bodies (boards, committees, councils, membership); and the co-op’s constitution, rules and policies. Co-op structures are impacted by the organization’s purpose and culture, and the nature of members’ relationship with the co-operative.
- b. **Processes** include member voice as a personal right (not a property right); the forms of (representative and/or direct) democratic decision making; the formal and informal social communications; conflict resolution practices; and governance system review. Co-op governance processes are democratic, but situation dependent and not uniform.
- c. **Dynamics** involve change in the governance structures and processes, i.e. the co-op’s adaptation and evolution arising from external (e.g. stakeholder influence) and internal (e.g. emergent change) factors influencing members’ evolving needs and goals. Isomorphism - take corporate professionalization and mimicking “best practice”, for example - is often the cause of these dynamic changes.

Best co-operative governance is evolving and dependent on situation (co-operative type, culture, legal framework, economic sector, and other factors).

⁴ See Blackstock, C. (2011). The emergence of the breath of life theory. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 8(1), 1-16; and Hickel, J. (2020). *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*. New York: Random House.

⁵ Eckart, M. (2009). *Cooperative governance: A third way towards competitive advantage*. Saarbrücken: Südwestdeutscher Verlag für Hochschulschriften.

For what purpose? Overall, maintaining and enhancing co-operative health.

- a. Secure democratic (member) control
- b. Identify and pursue the co-operative purpose
- c. Create and maintain co-operative culture (values), built on reciprocity, solidarity and trust;
- d. Continue to meet member needs (the ‘service’ role of the co-operative); and,
- e. Secure long-term viability as a co-operative (vision focused on future generations of members).⁶

The current report builds on these themes by elaborating key aspects and potentials of the co-operative governance system - i.e. specific participatory democratic structures and processes, as well as their dynamic interplay under internal and external pressures. A humanistic outlook guides the general approach while encouraging adaptation to specific contexts and evolving situations.

3 Take-aways

The 2021 International Co-operative Governance Symposium built on the key themes and principles of best co-operative governance identified during the 2013 Symposium. The **situational/contingent/context-dependent** nature of best co-op governance was stressed throughout, by academics and practitioners alike. Yet some common foundational elements related to **participatory democracy** were also

⁶ These five items were the key themes coming out of the 2013 International Co-operative Governance Symposium. See ICCM (2013). *Themes and Recommendations from the International Co-operative Governance Symposium*. https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/Report_InternationalSymposium_CooperativeGovernance-2013_SSBSMU_Web.pdf

consistently identified across various aspects core to the co-operative governance system.

As an initial philosophical exercise, challenging prior conceptions and rooting subsequent deliberations more firmly, indigenous thought from across Africa and Northern Canada helped us to formulate a more *co-operativist* articulation of humanism. This understanding is premised upon the reciprocal interrelationships and interdependencies between human persons, and between human persons and non-human nature. In respect of the ICCM Enterprise Model, **co-operativist humanism** gives philosophical content to the **social and ecological embeddedness** of co-operatives.

A related theme was the renewed emphasis on promoting **Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion** (JEDI), alongside of **sustainable development**, within co-operatives and community alike - and **in deeds as well as words**. This can be advanced through external co-operative initiatives in the local community, providing education and material resources to disadvantaged communities, in concert with internal policy changes and provisions.

As regards best co-op organizational structures, **multiple boards** were highlighted in both theory and practice. To the Board of Directors and General Assembly can be added, for example, supervisory boards; as well as various member volunteer and advisory committees and councils; or panels of external experts and stakeholders; or even labour union locals. All such “**network governance**” bodies allow for greater specialization and a spreading of the work- and information-load, particularly as co-ops grow in size and complexity.⁷

⁷ Pirson, M., & Turnbull, S. 2011. Toward a more humanistic governance model: Network governance structures. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 99(1): 101-114.

A key principle of network governance, and a practice of many successful co-op cases examined, is the engagement and **involvement of multiple stakeholders** in strategic decision making. This brings different perspectives and forms of expertise to the table, otherwise lost to co-op governors. Indeed, lack of multistakeholdership was identified as one reason for co-operative degeneration in prominent cases. The various governance bodies and decision-making processes through which multiple stakeholders participate are crucial to effective participation.

A similar idea involves the deployment of “**organizers**”/“facilitators”/“advisors”/“coordinators” who go out into the field to provide advice and support to **geographically-dispersed co-ops** - whether as part of a federation or sector, or indeed across work sites within a single co-op entity. This helps to provide **unity of purpose and capability** within the federation/sector/co-op. These organizational innovations have been supplemented with the strategic deployment of **communications technologies** within co-ops - internet, video-call, radio, telephone, platforms etc. - to improve the smooth functioning of participatory governance across time and space.

Contributors were keen both to warn against the threat of undue state intervention into co-op governance decisions, while also arguing for the potential of **mutually-beneficial co-operative-state partnership**. This can help to facilitate, through legal and other means, democratic and participatory co-op structures, processes and dynamics, without undue infringement upon co-operative independence and autonomy. A similar principle applies to co-operative federation building, after all. The **co-op movement needs to take the lead**, however, particularly in respect of **co-op education and promotion** to instigate wider internal and external **cultural shifts**.

Informal social-communicative relations within and between co-op firms, in addition to formal structures and processes, were understood as equally, if not more, crucial to a flourishing participatory governance system. **Distributed economies of scale** through informally networked co-op spin-offs can at least partially compensate for a lack of formal centralization in certain instances. Likewise, developing **mutualistic informal communications** aimed at **fostering consensual decision making** can guard against over-centralization and oligarchic tendencies within existing formal governance bodies. **Co-operative membership and management education** come to the fore, alongside careful personnel strategies and policies. Involving labour union expertise (sector-specific consultants; union lawyers, economists, accountants etc.) in co-op governance may be one potentially fruitful, if under-explored, avenue.

Regarding change management dynamics, a constant theme was the potentially democratizing and regenerative force of **regular co-op governance system review and renewal**. This undertaking facilitates the development of **synergistic models of (direct and indirect) democratic governance**, often leading to more effective member and stakeholder participation overall; as opposed to fetishizing either hierarchical or flat models regardless of circumstance.

Congruent (co-op-friendly) isomorphism was seen to be encouraged through federated co-operative structures, facilitative state support, and **co-operative professionalization** via appropriate (co-op-specific) training, education and external expert consultation. Scorecards and governance surveys, incorporating social/ecological as well financial criteria, are some of the ways in which practitioners and academics attempted to **track and measure progress** in relation to maintaining overall co-operative health in line with co-op identity.

The following key take-away points summarise the main lessons shared throughout. Best co-op governance entails:

- i. **Flexibilities** in the governance system components because of contingent situations - there is no uniform and universal “one-size-fits-all” best practice.
- ii. **Participatory** democratic governance structures, processes, and dynamics.
- iii. Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (**JEDI**) and **sustainable development** policies and practices.
- iv. **Network governance** through multiple boards that engage multiple stakeholders.
- v. Co-operative deployment of **organizational innovations** and **communications technologies** in accordance with geographic situation.
- vi. **Partnerships** with **state** and **non-state** institutions that respect co-op self-help, autonomy and independence in decision making.
- vii. Co-operative **self-education** and **self-promotion** to instigate cultural shifts within and without.
- viii. **Distributed economies of scale** through networked co-op spin-offs beyond very large-scale growth.
- ix. **Mutualistic informal communications** that are geared towards **consensus-oriented** democratic process.
- x. Regular **co-operative governance review and renewal** to help evolve **synergistic models** of (direct and indirect) democratic governance.

The remaining sections report on highlights from the Symposium proceedings.

4 Humanistic theory, philosophy and practice

4.1 *Symposium Launch*

The launch of the symposium set the scene regarding the theory, philosophy and practice of democratic and participatory co-operative governance. Sonja Novkovic presented a humanistic perspective on co-op governance theory; while Karen Miner facilitated a panel discussion involving two esteemed co-operative practitioners, Alexandra Wilson and Martin Lowery.

Novkovic advocated for a contingent, as opposed to “cookie-cutter”, approach to co-op governance (i.e. not one size fits all). She argued that a practical commitment to humanistic organizational principles results in the intergenerational stewardship of co-op enterprises and the realization of co-op purpose. Lowery echoed this sentiment: “[That’s how] we change the world, fundamentally”.

Wilson took aim at the “sacred cows” of standard corporate and (all too often) co-op governance, with regards to the role and composition of boards. To govern simply by policy was to govern “by code or formula”, where there is “no fixed formula” to best co-op practice. The lines demarcating strategy and operations are often less clear in practice than in theory, and care needs to be taken to avoid “revolution proof” boards because of professionalization, restrictive size and staggered terms. Co-op governors need to think rather than trend! She advocated for regular governance reviews with this in mind.⁸

Reflecting on Novkovic and Wilson’s contributions, Lowery found common ground between the theory and practice of best co-operative governance in a particular emphasis on the centrality of membership.

⁸ Wilson, A. (2021, June 17-19). Challenging Governance Orthodoxies [keynote address]. 2021 International Co-operative Governance Symposium. Halifax, Nova Scotia.
[https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/CHALLENGINGGOVERNANCEORTHODOXIES\(Wilson\).pdf](https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/CHALLENGINGGOVERNANCEORTHODOXIES(Wilson).pdf)

Maintaining an “accountability loop” between members as owners and as users of co-operatives sets co-ops apart from investor-owned firms, but it sometimes gets lost as they grow and succeed economically (Wilson). Co-operatives can’t lose sight of the social, or else corporate isomorphism may lead the way to demutualization. Stakeholder (and particularly employee) engagement was also seen as crucial.

“The division between thinking and doing might be the basis for the division between boards and management, and - in my opinion - co-ops should understand the importance of overcoming such divisions.” - Camila Piñeiro Harnecker

“The ‘separation of powers’ principle gets oversimplified into Boards should ‘stay out of’ operations. But ‘interference’ and ‘connection/involvement’ are different.” - Fred Freundlich

4.2 *Indigenous co-operation*

The opening sessions of the Symposium allowed participants to critique and refine conceptions of humanism in a co-operative organizational setting. Anne-Marie Merrien and Mary Nirlungayuk delivered fascinating presentations on the indigenous philosophical and cultural underpinnings of federated multi-service consumer co-operation in Northern Canada - specifically the Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec (Ilagiisag-FCNQ)⁹ and Arctic Co-operatives, respectively.

A particularly interesting aspect concerned tensions between the co-operative business model and indigenous traditions. On the one hand, co-ops introduced monetary and market exchange relations, where reciprocal gift and subsistence relationships had predominated before. Co-operatives have also, historically speaking, often been

⁹ See forthcoming ICCM case study.
<https://www.smu.ca/academics/sobey/cme-working-paper-series.html>

introduced to deprived communities by Eurocentric Catholic social missionaries, as in the case of Nova Scotia (unceded Mi'kmaq territory). On the other hand, the co-operative model facilitated Northern Canadian indigenous communities in regaining a sense of local ownership and control over their livelihoods by breaking the monopoly of exploitative capitalist corporations. It is also true that community leaders spearheaded the co-op model's introduction in these particular instances. Co-operatives provided access to necessary resources at reasonable prices, and in a manner broadly consistent with indigenous values and principles of collectivity and self-help, if not always adhering to traditional democratic practices (e.g. indigenous leaders usually weren't democratically elected). This co-operative transition required adaptation in both directions.

Yet the high degree of co-operative embeddedness within indigenous communities subsequently, as evidenced by impressive membership and participation rates, forces us to question the received wisdom that consumer co-operatives are unable or unwilling to act as transformative institutions. Indigenous communities genuinely felt that without their co-operatives today they would still be "second-class citizens".

The geographic spread and remoteness of individual co-ops within these federations meant that they needed to be innovative in terms of ensuring sufficient member participation and community engagement, both within and across their co-operatives. A number of technological strategies were deployed in this regard: for example, Annual General Meetings and election nominations via radio or, more recently, conference video call. In addition to realizing economies of scale through joint purchases and grocery delivery, as well as providing a range of financial and administrative services to individual co-ops, the federations play a key role in training and educating general managers and other reps who visit stores semi-regularly to provide support,

advice and communication channels (known as “District Support Advisors” at Arctic Co-operatives - district reps are also elected to the Board).¹⁰ Managers and reps often face an initial “culture shock” regarding the geography, weather and language etc., hence they require a certain degree of introductory guidance.

Humanistic and participatory co-op governance is also achieved through regular strategic meetings and visits, whether remotely or in-person, and through continuous member education and training. Nirlungayuk emphasised in particular the key importance of co-operative self-promotion, though generally lacking, in actioning wider educational and cultural shifts. There is no strict delineation between co-operatives and communities that adhere to Inuit/indigenous beliefs, stated Merrien: “Nobody is left behind” and co-ops of any type can be imbued with broader social purpose.

“Centralize for efficiency, localize for effectiveness”
Ilagiisaq-FCNQ motto

4.3 *From Eurocentricity to socio-ecological reciprocity*

There was an interesting overlap between the ideas presented above and the session on approaches to humanistic governance in co-ops. This saw engaging presentations from Silvia Sacchetti and Ermanno Tortia on a “needs theory of governance”, considering co-operatives from the perspective of Maslovian psychology, and emphasising the positive feedback relationship between human wellbeing and workplace democracy;¹¹ and also from Eklou Amendah and Christina Clamp, who related Social Capital Theory (emphasizing group norms and trust) to the successful governance of shared service co-operatives in the non-profit sector.

¹⁰ Lund, M. (2021). Case Study: Arctic Co-operatives Limited. *International Centre for Co-operative Management Working Paper and Case Study Series 02/2021*.
<https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/ArcticCooperativesCaseStudyMay2021.pdf>

¹¹ Sacchetti, S., & Tortia, E. (2021, June 17-19). A needs theory of governance [paper presentation]. 2021 International Co-operative Governance Symposium. Halifax, Nova Scotia.
https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/SacchettiTortia_Aneedstheoryofgovernance.pdf

T.O. Molefe's presentation on the implications of African Ubuntu philosophy, "lived and practiced today . . . across much of the African continent and diaspora", for co-operative governance resonated most with the Northern Canadian indigenous perspective. Molefe began with the ICA definition of a co-op 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".¹² He challenged us to think more about the nature of such "persons" - leaving corporate personhood aside. Molefe warned of the "epistemic coloniality" associated with standard co-op definitions, statements, language and legislation, whereby the persons envisaged all too often take on a Eurocentric guise. In this respect, it is important to distinguish at the outset between the Eurocentric conception of an *individual* and the indigenous conception of a *person*: the latter, from an Ubuntu perspective, comprises at least two individuals (whether "dead, living, yet-to-come"). That is to say, "a person is a person through other people", taken to include past, present, and future generations.

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He noted some "conceptual tensions" up for debate, as to whether Ubuntu is a type of humanism or not. Perhaps it is necessary to attach appropriate adjectives to the differing conceivable "humanisms".¹³ In any case, Ubuntu emphasizes sociobiological interdependence, whereby a "good person" establishes harmonious relations with other beings and nature. Co-operative social behaviour and intergenerational stewardship of land and resources is good and desirable from this perspective. Co-operative organizations, whether narrowly (e.g. co-op firms) or broadly (e.g. community) conceived, are "the means by which

Persons *are* other people; and co-operatives *are* their communities, "transgressing the typical co-operative typologies" (Molefe).

¹² International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) (1995). Statement on the Cooperative Identity. <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

¹³ Melé, D. (2003). The challenge of humanistic management. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 44(1), 77-88.

individuals survive and thrive” as Maslovian self-actualizers. It is perhaps better then to speak of “transindividual actualization”, dissolving strict distinctions between our understandings of individuals, persons, co-ops, and communities. Persons *are* other people; and co-ops *are* their communities, “transgressing the typical co-operative typologies” (Molefe).

“A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, based from a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.” - Desmond Tutu

“A [co-operative] member in the Ubuntu paradigm isn’t only, nor should it be only, those who complete a membership form and pay their dues. Members are all individuals in the greater whole. And not in an abstract sense, but in real and measurable terms, however fluid at the edges. This is why I got excited earlier at the Northern [Canadian indigenous] co-ops, because there’s a very similar [underlying philosophy at play].” - T.O. Molefe

The insights gleaned from this session encourage advocates of humanistic co-op governance to adopt and promote a socially- and ecologically-embedded - and ultimately *co-operativist* - variety of humanistic philosophy and practice. Co-operativist humanism respects and protects socio-ecological integrity, and is therefore sensitive to the diversity of human (and non-human) experiences, histories, cultures, and needs (as reiterated by discussant Jerome Warren). It rejects narrowly individualistic and Eurocentric conceptions derived from the strictly liberal variety of humanism. Liberal humanistic ideas and frameworks, derived from Eurocentric Enlightenment thinking, are doubtless worthy of consideration, but on their own are at best insufficient and lacking indigenous enrichment.

Humanistic governance in this co-operativist sense is “a way of life” and “a way of relating” to the wider community, rather than simply a way of meeting individual member needs (Molefe).

“[This discussion is] important for how co-op development practitioners (like us!) might contextualize co-operative principles, values and the business model within cultural and spiritual norms.” - Virginia Brown

“Democratic governance can have positive effects *if* (and maybe only if) embedded in a culture of equality and solidarity. . . . Participatory democracy is definitely vital for full human development!” - Camila Piñeiro Harnecker

In the following sections we elaborate on the Symposium presentations and discussions as they relate to the main components of the co-op governance system (Structures-Processes-Dynamics).

5 Organizational structures

5.1 *Multiple boards*

Supervisory boards are mandated in Finnish co-operative legislation, as discussed in Kari Huhtala and Anu Puusa’s presentations. These bodies generally monitor and oversee the Board on behalf of the wider membership, mediating communications between representatives and their constituency.

The presenters were of the view that supervisory boards potentially have an important role to play in maintaining sound co-operative governance. But networked structures count for little without clearly mandated democratic powers and decision-making processes. This indicates the central need to develop a co-operativist culture at the organizational and regulatory levels.

Camila Piñeiro Harnecker's presentation on the history, current status and governance of Cuban co-operatives (traditional agri/producer co-ops, agri worker co-ops, non-ag worker co-ops) uncovered humanistic practices within a broader socialist economic setting. As regards the institution of multiple control centres, Cuban co-operatives generally supplement the General Assembly and Board of Directors with a Supervisory Council, and often a Management Council.

Along with key managers and elected members, Cuban co-op boards often involve labour/social/political reps in an advisory capacity. Co-op managers are members who collaborate actively with the other governance bodies. Labour is prioritized over capital, and permanent wage labour is limited so as to encourage the subsumption of wage workers (potential members-in-waiting) into full membership. Income is distributed according to work complexity, output and quality, with a mandated 1:3 maximum pay ratio between the lowest and highest earners (no more than 1:5 under exceptional circumstances).

5.2 *Support structures*

Alternative participatory governance mechanisms in Cuban co-ops included regular meetings for the purposes of communicating information and building consensus; as well as support “organizers” who visited individual agri producers, and/or “coordinators” who facilitate consensual dialogue amongst work teams. Organizers and coordinators are the “lifeblood of [Cuban] co-ops”, fostering ongoing dialogue within and between representative governance bodies and the wider co-op membership (Piñeiro Harnecker).

“Supervisory boards could and should have a key role in co-ops. They could act as mediators between membership and management and, most importantly, they should be the ones who constantly monitor that the decisions the board takes and operational management executes are in line with the co-op's mission and in favour of the membership.”
- Anu Puusa

Organizers and coordinators are the “lifeblood of [Cuban] co-ops”, fostering ongoing dialogue within and between representative governance bodies and the wider co-op membership (Piñeiro Harnecker).

A “co-operative promotion structure” was similarly devised by the large Agropur dairy processing co-op.¹⁴ Claude-André Guillotte explained that this helped to enhance the “co-op life” for dairy producers by disseminating information directly to all members. Agropur also deployed a team of “facilitators” to provide operational and governance support to producers in the field. These support structures grew out of the Solidarity Committee, whose agenda prioritizes strategic thinking on co-op life - i.e. “where Agropur is going in the next few years”, as regards management priorities in a globalized economy. “Tight co-op bonds have been forged”, such that the co-operative logic dominates the capitalist logic within Agropur’s internal balance (Guillotte).

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The large Sollio Cooperative Group, likewise based out of Quebec, implemented a similar new structure in response to the growth of its organization. The goal here too was to maintain and enhance co-op life, given the threat of excessive power concentration due to necessary mergers aimed at enhancing competitiveness. Demutualization remained a risk unless democratic member-centric governance could be rejuvenated. A review committee was again established, resulting in the “ambassador” program (composed of “members in good standing”). Once more, these federation reps work to strengthen member connection and involvement in co-op governance by sharing information and listening to any concerns raised. “In our network, the principles of autonomy and independence are almost sacred”, stated Colette Lebel. “We wholly respect the freedom of our co-ops”. Though this can’t compromise the necessary leadership role of the federation (ensuring collective action), so also requires a degree of balance. “The federation must find its communication niche, as it plays an important role in

“The federation must find its communication niche, as it plays an important role in sharing a message that is collective and common to all” (Lebel).

¹⁴ See forthcoming ICCM case study. <https://www.smu.ca/academics/sobey/cme-working-paper-series.html>

sharing a message that is collective and common to all” (Lebel).

5.3 *Co-operatives and the state*

During the ensuing discussions, questions were raised about the independence and influence of Cuban trade unions. Yet Piñeiro Harnecker noted how the “pretty horizontal” nature of management in Cuban state enterprises allowed some limited space for worker participation (apart from appointing managers and distributing surpluses). This, she argued, contributed towards a relatively easy transition to worker co-operation in the case of conversions. Operating within a broader societal culture geared towards equality and solidarity, Cuban state workers are not subordinate like workers in capitalist investor-owned firms, and hence are very well prepared to self-manage co-operative conversions (Piñeiro Harnecker). The co-op development ecosystem is still “very weak” in Cuba and needs to be improved to encourage greater intercooperation via co-operative-friendly state regulation and independent representative bodies etc.

Operating within a broader societal culture geared towards equality and solidarity, Cuban state workers are not subordinate like workers in capitalist investor-owned firms, and hence are very well prepared to self-manage co-operative conversions (Piñeiro Harnecker).

The unique case of socialist Cuba brings into sharp focus the relationship between the co-operative movement and the state. This was also a topic of intense discussion and debate in the governance codes, tools and frameworks session. Though A. J. Lakshmi pointed to the potentially disruptive role of state interference in co-op governance decisions, citing the case of Kerala in India, there was a more general agreement amongst panellists that balance was required between co-operative autonomy/independence and partnership with government. Novkovic pointed to mutually beneficial state-co-op relations in the case of Italian social co-operatives, as well as experiments with municipal socialism (e.g. the Preston Model in Northern England).¹⁵ Jozef

¹⁵ See Manley, J., & Whyman, P. B. (Eds.). (2021). *The Preston Model and Community Wealth Building: Creating a Socio-economic Democracy for the Future*. New York: Routledge.

Cossey, in dialogue with Nick Money and Paul Jones, considered the merits or otherwise of standardising governance codes and systems, with both presentations highlighting cultural barriers to full cross-country standardisation.

Sizwe Mkwanazi's account of South African co-operative development reiterated the dangers of state-led co-operative development that creates illusions in co-ops as *the* cure for poverty and unemployment. This "over-responsibilizes" the poor, and lets the state off the hook for macro policy failures. The co-operative movement needs to "take the lead" on co-op development, particularly in respect of co-operative education. He concluded that the values and "principles must be in the faces and hearts of the people to work" (Mkwanazi).

The co-operative movement has historically distrusted state institutions (often for good reason), but there also exists many examples of mutually-beneficial partnership relationships between co-ops and governments. Co-ops need to be facilitated through sufficient autonomy and support from the state to demonstrate grassroots leadership and independence. Yet co-op-state partnership, like co-operative federation building, also requires a certain concentration and coordination of functions through democratic representation. This can be justified as far as it advances the common good for co-ops, society and ecology on the whole. The challenge is to decentralize participatory decision-making to the greatest extent possible, without losing essential coordination functions. The ICCM Enterprise Model emphasizes this social and ecological embeddedness perspective on co-operatives.

The co-operative movement needs to "take the lead" on co-op development, particularly in respect of co-operative education ... The values and "principles must be in the faces and hearts of the people to work" (Mkwanazi).

"The [South African] state is very interventionist but without a real understanding of the unique aspects of the co-operative model; co-ops are seen as a form of small business and the state is focused singularly on profitability without consideration of other aspects of the co-operative identity." - T.O. Molefe

6 Participatory processes

6.1 Stakeholder dialogue

The challenges associated with maintaining democratic and participatory governance processes and procedures, particularly while engaging multiple stakeholders, were a recurring theme. Oier Imaz and Fred Freundlich, for example, presented indicative findings from their research on multistakeholder co-operatives (MSCs) within the broader Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (MCC) network. This is an understudied aspect of the co-operative group, which is usually understood as composed solely of worker co-ops. However more than one-quarter (and two of the biggest three) of MCC co-ops have explicit multi-stakeholder structures. In terms of sectoral composition, while most MCC MSCs are non-industrial, at least five are industrial.

Yet governance in these MSCs remains somewhat more oriented towards the worker-member category, particularly in terms of control and surplus distribution. With few exceptions, this holds true even without a majority of worker-members on the Governing Council or General Assembly. Some tensions have arisen among key stakeholder groups, many of whom are included in the basic governance structure, if not always integrated effectively into (formal and informal) decision-making processes. Relatedly, Daphne Rixon & Fiona Duguid were keen to stress an important distinction between stakeholder consultation and stakeholder *involvement*, where the latter indicates a more substantive degree of decision-making power and participation. This is particularly important when it comes to developing strategic plans.

The MCC MSCs in general have managed these tensions via complementary boards (i.e. multiple control centres) and “soft governance” (i.e. trust-based organizational culture). The co-operative democratic process of governing is helped along by the co-option of independent

(if still “co-operativist”) expertise onto governance bodies. This contrasts with the example of Fagor Electrodomésticos (FED).

Indeed, the lack of multistakeholder input and external expertise, alongside a breakdown of communications and decision-making processes within and between complementary boards, were important factors contributing to governance failure at the flagship FED industrial worker co-op within MCC, as Imanol Basterretxea explained.¹⁶ He encouraged spin-offs where worker co-ops reach such scale and complexity, with labour unions also a potential ally in terms of co-operativist governance consultation and support. In many instances, it may be necessary to delegate more powers to the Governing Council and other assemblies of delegates (i.e. representative democracy) rather than leaving all (complex) decisions to lay members in the General Assembly (i.e. direct democracy). No doubt this raises co-operative dilemmas over member voice, representation, and expertise.¹⁷ But training and education of lay members can only go so far in very large co-operatives (Basterretxea).

Training and education of lay members can only go so far in very large co-operatives (Basterretxea).

“It seems to me that there were two dynamics that impacted the Governing Council. One is that there was a belief that MCC would save them. The other is what I would call an ostrich mentality [of] not react[ing] appropriately to their business crisis.” - Christina Clamp

“Yes, the sense that Mondragon wouldn't let FED fall was in the mind of all FED members. That false sense of security [delayed] retrenchment decisions, and also . . . many labour flexibility measures that are typical in Mondragon co-operatives (wage flexibility, relocations of redundant worker members to other co-ops, schedule flexibility [etc.])” - Imanol Basterretxea

¹⁶ See Basterretxea, I., Cornforth, C., & Heras-Saizarbitoria, I. (2020). Corporate governance as a key aspect in the failure of worker cooperatives. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339030421_Corporate_governance_as_a_key_aspect_in_the_failure_of_worker_cooperatives

¹⁷ Birchall, J. (2017). *The Governance of Large Co-operative Businesses*. Co-operatives UK. <https://www.ica.coop/en/media/library/research-and-reviews/governance-large-co-operative-businesses>

“To say ‘it’s culture’ is to say everything and nothing. But there is a lot to talk about there: leadership, participation systems, communication, governance preparation, supervisory relations - all kinds of relationship and work content issues that evolved in many negative ways over many years.” - Fred Freundlich

6.2 *Distributed scale*

Júlia Martins Rodrigues and Nathan Schneider presented on the diversified multistakeholder *Namasté network* (as opposed to federation). This looser association of specialized co-operatives in the solar and clean energy industries is based out of Colorado. The flagship worker co-op within this network is *Namasté Solar*. The co-operatives within the network are separate and distinct businesses with different stakeholder models; yet they maintain co-operative interrelationships and a shared culture “to compensate for the relatively weak structural ties that connect the businesses in the network”. It is a “hybrid network structure” in the sense that it brings a credit union and a purchasing co-op together with worker co-ops to achieve distributed economies of scale. Part of the network’s strategy to remain vibrant mimics the Italian “strawberry patch” spin-off model.¹⁸ Once a co-op reaches a certain level of growth and maturity, it is encouraged to set up a separate specialized business of a more appropriate size for democratic and participatory decision making.

Questions and challenges of co-operative scale were also to the forefront during Simon Pek and Morshed Mannan’s presentation on worker co-ops that utilize platform technologies. Given the competitive nature of the gig economy, quickly reaching scale is often a strategic priority. This means that the governance structure has to evolve rapidly

“Scaling a co-operative is a matter of scaling the democratic decision-making process.” - *Namasté Solar* worker-member Jenna Stadsvold

¹⁸ Zanotti, A. (2011). Italy: The Strength of an Inter-Sectoral Network. In Zevi, A., Zanotti, A., Soulage, F., and Zelaia, A., *Beyond the Crisis: Cooperatives, Work, Finance Generating Wealth for the Long Term*: 21-100. CECOP.

to facilitate truly democratic and participatory decision-making processes.

The session on sociocratic (i.e. consensual) decision-making in worker co-ops gave an indication of how workplace democracy can be maintained through non-hierarchical structures, even at relatively larger scales. Abbie Kempson explained that the basis of sociocracy in Unicorn Grocery in Manchester, England is the “deep democratic sharing of power” through: 1) consensual (consent if not always consensus) decision making; 2) working through “circles” small enough to allow for productive debate and discussion; 3) the interconnection of circles to facilitate two-way communication flows; and 4) open and transparent consensual elections. Sociocracy may be difficult to implement in its purest form at very large scales, or where the operation is spread across multiple sites, but modified forms of sociocracy can also be implemented. This has been achieved at Unicorn with circa 70 worker-members; and, as John McNamara reveals, also at Union Cab in Maddison and Rainbow Grocery in San Francisco (both having over 200 worker-members).

Paraphrasing T.S. Eliot, however, Simmonds warned against “people striving for systems that are so perfect that nobody needs to be good”. Sociocracy is potentially a great system, but requires a lot of work and the development of a really positive culture.

“Union Cab’s planning always had a goal around membership engagement and it led to a fundamental member-led redistribution and democratization of power, a switch to hybrid vehicles, and greater engagement of the membership in non-operational duties.” - John McNamara

Simmonds warned against “people striving for systems that are so perfect that nobody needs to be good”.

“Consent-based decision-making essentially allows a larger solution space - you consent to decisions that are within your tolerance rather than holding out for the perfect solution. Often framed as solutions which are ‘Good enough for now and safe enough to try’. . . . It’s one of the interesting things about the implementation of sociocracy in co-ops - it’s typically more of an evolving community of practice rather than the adoption of a rigid ‘operating system’. . . . It is proving particularly popular with multistakeholder co-ops in the UK.” - Mark Simmonds

“Informal hierarchies have probably always been present (length of time in the co-op, experience/training [resulting in] expert power and referent power etc.). But using consent helps a lot with equalising contributions, encouraging dissent, allowing everyone’s ideas to be included.” - Abbie Kempson

“We’re engaged in a big experiment (in sociocratic co-ops) and one of the key drivers is to improve [Diversity] Equity and Inclusion. Equal Care Co-operative - probably the UK’s largest sociocratic multistakeholder co-op - uses sociocracy explicitly as a way to include recipients of care into the governance of their care - something from which they have been traditionally excluded apart from token ‘consultation’.” - Mark Simmonds

6.3 Unions and co-ops

McNamara also called attention to other potentially compatible models of workplace democracy: specifically, the *unionized* worker co-op model gaining traction particularly in the UK, US and Canada; and the solidarity-staff (multistakeholder) model. He felt strongly that worker co-ops and labour unions can be key partners - a matter of “both/and” as opposed to “either/or”, especially given their shared history and values. This is likewise true for all co-op types aspiring to the cooperative identity, not solely worker co-ops. Protecting and promoting the wellbeing and dignity of non-member workers should be a priority for all co-operatives.

Some advantages for unionized co-ops concerned union campaigns for macro policy change to benefit working people; access to union benefit packages; and union information regarding prevailing wages and sectoral consultation, which can add to co-op governance expertise. The union can also potentially play the role of watchdog on management and the Board; with collective bargaining agreements spreading the policy management workload. In the other direction, humanistic

co-ops can also potentially teach unions ways to improve democratic governance.¹⁹

Kempson agreed that there is an important role for unions in co-ops, even if Unicorn is not unionized. Mark Simmonds felt likewise, speaking as a former branch secretary for the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU) at the Suma worker co-op (80 percent union during his tenure) in West Yorkshire, Northern England. In the spirit of consensual decision making, there is no senior manager at Suma or Unicorn;²⁰ and while the former's Board acts as a "collective CEO" the latter doesn't have a traditional Board (general members' meetings are board meetings!). Hence the co-op-union recognition and bargaining processes, or lack thereof, may appear unusual to outside observers at first glance.²¹

7 Change management dynamics

7.1 Synergistic co-op democracy

Suma today is made up of 300 or so workers, around three-quarters of whom are also members, communicated Ross Hodgson during the session on worker co-op governance dynamics. This increased size has brought with it both greater decision-making complexity and greater external regulation. The co-op needed to adapt and evolve its governance structures and processes in response. Suma has moved away from flat and informal governance to more formal and hierarchical (if

¹⁹ Co-operative College (2020). *Union Co-op Solutions: A Manifesto*.
<https://www.co-op.ac.uk/event/union-co-op-solutions-a-manifesto>

²⁰ Though Suma's democratic system is based on majority vote rather than consent per se, the organizational culture promotes consensual decision making.

²¹ See McMahon, C., & Novkovic, S. (2021). Case Study: Suma. *International Centre for Co-operative Management Working Paper and Case Study Series 01/2021*.
https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/Suma_casestudy_FINAL_C_Mar4.pdf
and McMahon, C., Kempson, A., Miner, K., & Novkovic, S. (2021). Case Study: Unicorn Grocery. *International Centre for Co-operative Management Working Paper and Case Study Series 04/2021*.
<https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/UnicornCaseStudyJune2021.pdf>

still consensus-oriented) governance. The establishment of networked decision-making bodies has allowed for greater specialization of tasks and functions, as well as more effective worker-member participation in governance, even while some direct decision-making power has become more concentrated. A system of functioning checks and balances to ensure accountability has been vital to building and maintaining trust here.

Orestis Varkarolis of Pagkaki worker co-op in Greece and Joey Pittoello of the Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-operative in Nova Scotia told of how their organizations underwent similar dynamics of change, having experimented with direct and indirect democracy at various stages. The result again was paradoxically to enhance co-op democracy in a synergistic way, with direct and indirect democratic practices reinforcing and enhancing one another,²² taking account in particular of the nature of the specific co-op business and its specific membership.

An appropriate governance structure needs to be adapted to the people concerned and their culture as a starting point, rather than primarily the other way around. This helps to ensure an effectively functioning democratic process and long-term survival of the co-operative business. The recruitment, induction, learning development, and turnover of members is key²³ - which likewise implies meaningful non-member participation as a bridge to full membership status. Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) is a related policy agenda that has gained increasing traction in recent times, given the legacies and realities of various forms of racism and (neo)colonialism still existing and regenerating across the modern world.

“I don't think anyone at Suma would view co-operating as 'fun': it's their work and job, it's part of having a better life, living their principles.” - Ross Hodgson

²² See McMahon, C., & Miner, K. (2021). Case Study: Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-operative. *International Centre for Co-operative Management Working Paper and Case Study Series* 03/2021. <https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/JustUsCaseStudy.pdf>

²³ Stryjan, Y. (1994). Understanding cooperatives: The reproduction perspective. *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, 65(1), 59-79.

“I’m not sure that co-ops have more problems with governance in my experience. I’d say that corporate governance is poor across the entire economy. The difference is that co-ops beat themselves up more around their governance as they hold themselves to higher standards.” - Mark Simmonds

“Contrary to some opinions, co-ops aren’t slowed down by their democracy (we saw that in our findings on research into co-op responses to COVID in Canada)”²⁴ - Hanan El-Youssef

7.2 *Countering corporate isomorphism*

The threat of isomorphism to co-operatives (i.e. adopting so-called corporate best practice) was raised on more than one occasion during the Symposium. Neha Christie explored this topic specifically in relation to dairy co-operatives in India - one of the largest milk producers in the world. Isomorphic pressures are managed through a tiered governance structure: from the national federation; to the state federation; to the district union; to the village co-operative. Christie suggested a suite of policies and practices to encourage congruent (or co-op-friendly) isomorphism. Creating greater space for women and grassroots community members to participate democratically and occupy leadership positions was a core proposal. Active involvement (if not undue interference) of government representatives at the micro level was also welcomed. However, state law that mandates two women on the Boards of village co-ops has only been implemented in a tokenistic manner to date. More needs to be done to strengthen implementation so that women participate meaningfully in democratic decision making.

Isomorphic pressures also impinged upon co-operative federations in Europe and French Canada. Hans Groeneveld’s survey of European

²⁴ El-Youssef, H., Charbonneau, J., Fouquet, É., Guillotte, C.-A., Jankovic, I., Merrien, A.-M. & Novkovic, S. (2021). Industry Reports & Media Review on Co-operative Responses to the Pandemic. *International Centre for Co-operative Management Working Paper and Case Study Series* 06/2021. [https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/CoopsCovidPartIIFindings\(July212020\).pdf](https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/CoopsCovidPartIIFindings(July212020).pdf)

co-operative banking groups found that, while membership grew by an average of circa 25 percent between 2007-2018, the number of local co-op banks fell by a commensurate proportion over the same period. Of the 16 co-op banking groups surveyed, 80 percent provided at least one or more financial advantages for members over non-members; while 40 percent provided two, and 20 percent provided four. Meanwhile, regarding network governance structures, 50 percent had three or more governance bodies, and more than 50 percent had managers selected by the membership. The centralization of co-op banking groups suggests necessary mergers for competitive economies of scale in the context of financial services technological innovations. But retaining the “co-operative mentality” of co-op employees and top managers at scale was understood as crucially important; as was member diversity, education, training, involvement, engagement, and participation in a digitalising world.

Yvan Rouillé presented on strategic planning and governance at the Desjardins credit union group in Quebec. This process involves multiple stakeholders: leaders/Board; managers; members; employees; and suppliers. Like Arctic Co-operatives, Desjardins has developed a scorecard methodology to track and evaluate progress on social as well as financial goals.

“In the [United] States there is a revival of this [working class] focus among credit unions, particularly through the lens economic inequality and addressing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.” - Erbin Crowell

“This is one of our focuses at Vancity with examples like Pigeon Park Savings, [our] connection with ISS BC [Immigrant Services Society of BC], Mosaic etc. - other organizations within our local economy that support new immigrants and many other programs - it seems to be working well for us overall and keeps us true to our mission, vision and values.”- Tara Williams

“[It’s a] difficult challenge of managing (and pricing) risks of lending to ‘unbankables’ from communities suffering financial exclusion (withdrawal of banks); this [is] in [the] context of [an] outrageous poorly regulated loan industry for people with poor (or no) credit ratings.” - Roger Spear

“The homeless also have difficulties, being ‘unbankable’. A few years ago Assiniboine CU developed a program for them too.” - Leslie Brown

A panel discussion around the professionalization of co-operative boards considered the dangers of *corporate* professionalization versus the potentials of *co-operative* professionalization. The former has resulted in a spate of high-profile co-op demutualizations in recent years - for example, Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) in Canada. Marc-Andre Pigeon presented findings that just under 10 percent of surveyed Canadian co-ops have non-member directors on their Board. The selection criteria for non-member/external board directors at both MEC and Calgary Co-op, however, emphasised professional background, with little if any mention of co-operative experience/knowledge. Only one co-operative (Desjardins) had its CEO chairing the Board. A big pressure on credit unions to professionalize today comes from federal regulators (i.e. “policy isomorphism”) requiring pre-skilled directors, contrary to the co-operative standard practice of involving lay board members.

Anthony Piscitelli unpacked the “economical” logic for co-op demutualization underlying corporate professionalization. “I’d suggest in the economical case the contempt for the model is not that thinly veiled at all”. Dionne Pohler outlined a “good” co-operative governance

“At one time in the UK consumer co-ops, there was discussion of forming a register of expert professionals (lawyers, accountants, managers) with good knowledge about the co-op values and practices...” - Roger Spear

framework, accounting for the management of strategic interdependencies; establishment and maintenance of legitimacy among internal and external stakeholders; and adaptation/responsiveness to changing and uncertain environments. Thane Joyal also drew upon this framework in her presentation on policy governance in US food cooperatives. She advocated for multistakeholder retail co-operation, bringing together consumers, producers and communities on representative boards.

7.3 Back to source

Pushing back against corporate suspicion of democratic structures, Pigeon pointed conversely to the Rochdale Pioneers as naturally suspicious of deference to expertise, particularly in the context of promoting working class self-help/management. This perspective treated “democracy as ideology” at a fundamental level. Sheldon Stener rooted the growth of professionalization discourse in the fallout from the 2001 Enron scandal and the 2008 global financial crisis. He was careful to distinguish between expertise and knowledge, however, pointing out that many so-called professional experts simply don’t understand co-operatives; hence their pretensions to expertise in a co-op setting is tenuous at best.

Skills matrices for potential board directors, whether internal or external, need to incorporate a fundamental understanding of co-ops and a belief in co-op values as key competencies/requirements. If the CEO or Board Chair doesn’t possess these qualities - “CEOs that have no sniff about what a co-op is . . . and they see this equity and they want it . . . they want to get it out” - then the co-op is “over” (Stener). It is also imperative that the co-operative movement ensures governments and regulators know the fundamental difference between co-operatives and investor-owned firms. He felt that Calgary Co-op is currently “on

“CEOs that have no sniff about what a co-op is . . . and they see this equity and they want it . . . they want to get it out” - then the co-op is “over” (Stener).

the road” to becoming the next MEC unless there is a change of course internally and externally.

Self-education of co-operative directors was the place to start in terms of mounting a counteroffensive, Stener concluded: we’ve got to “keep fighting the fight”. This sentiment was shared by Myriam Michaud during her talk on co-op board renewal. The resolution wasn’t so much to dump co-op professionalization, as to *co-operativize* co-op professionalization. That is to say, she encouraged participants to think about ways to professionalize governance without compromising the co-operative identity: “We are searching for another way to conceptualize what it is to be ‘professional’ . . . (non-corporate, let’s say)”. Doubtless paradoxical tensions will arise in the process of (internal/external) board member training and evaluation; but the challenge is to manage these tensions in the most co-operative manner possible.

“Imposing ‘experts’ on co-operatives risks undoing them.” - Alexandra Wilson

“Co-op managers and leadership should go through programs at education centres such as SMU :) But seriously.” - Camila Piñeiro Harnecker

“Many of our co-ops are caught in this trap of increased competition from the mainstream, and we as a movement are not doing enough to offer a compelling model for ‘co-operative professionalization’ versus ‘corporate professionalization’. ICCM and others are making progress in this, but we are reaching a fraction of co-op directors and managers.” - Erbin Crowell

Courtney Berner’s ongoing survey research of co-op governance practices in the US likewise highlighted the need to continually innovate ways to balance member voice, representation, and expertise in a co-operative manner. This kind of cross-sectoral research of different co-op types can also help to build connections and shared understandings across the co-operative movement.

In evaluating governance competencies over time to inform co-op training, Diane Friend and John Park argued that “individuals add value by applying personal beliefs and actions to the building up of people around them”. This brings us full circle to the embedded conception of humanism derived from indigenous thinking discussed earlier, where the self is understood in relation to broader (human and non-human) groups and communities. This kind of understanding should inform approaches to leadership and education alike within co-operatives, they argued.

8 Conclusion

The 2021 International Co-operative Governance Symposium deepened our collective understanding of the specific mechanisms and practices of participatory democratic co-operative governance. This builds upon the foundations of the 2013 Symposium and points towards fruitful avenues for future collaboration and co-operative learning. The participation of indigenous scholars and co-operators, in particular, contributed to philosophical grounding for a complexity perspective on humanistic co-op governance. This greater sense that human organizations are deeply and inextricably embedded in their surrounding community and natural environment informs an updated governance paradigm fit for the challenges of the twenty-first century. Symposium proceedings offered a diverse range of speakers from across the world (see Appendix), demonstrating the emergent reality of best co-op governance in line with this way of thinking. These developments are also reflected in ongoing debates around updating the Statement on the Co-operative Identity. The co-operative movement is working towards greater unity of purpose and action, despite unprecedentedly difficult

“It seems like the training that Diane [Friend] was speaking of was aimed at ‘soft skills’, whereas the professionalization of governance seems to focus more on technical or ‘hard skills’.” - Joey Pittoello

circumstances, to articulate and demonstrate a brighter, safer, and healthier future for all. “We Owe It to Our Grandchildren”.²⁵

²⁵ Webb, T. (2016). *From Corporate Globalization to Global Co-operation: We Owe It to Our Grandchildren*. Halifax, NS / Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing.

Appendix: Registration List

International Co-operative Governance Symposium

Hosted by the International Centre for Co-operative Management, June 17-19, 2021

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Job Title	Country/ Region
Husen	Ahmed	Haramaya University	Lecturer, Department Head	Ethiopia
Joseph	Ajayi	Massey University, New Zealand; The Federal University of Technology Akure	PhD Scholar	Nigeria
Salman	AK	University of Hyderabad	PhD Scholar	India
Iñigo	Albizuri	MONDRAGON Corporation	Global Head of Public Affairs	Spain
Hussein	Al-Ghattas	University of Technology Sydney	PhD Candidate	Australia
Emily	Alice			United States
Eklou	Amenndah	University of Southern Maine	Assistant Professor	United States
Pamela	Anstey	St. John's Farmers' Market Cooperative	Executive Director	Canada
Lakshmi	Arakkathara Jayan	Sree Narayana College, University of Kerala	Assistant Professor	India
Jan Danica	Asma	University of the Philippines Los Banos	Assistant Professor	Philippines
Luc	Audebrand	Université Laval	Full Professor	Canada
Ginelle	Augustin- Lesmond	N/A	Senior Policy Advisor	Canada
Habtamu	Awoke	Agriterra	Business Advisor	Ethiopia
Jennylyn	Bailey	The Human Capital PowerHouse	Director	Trinidad and Tobago
Jay	Ballenbeger	Denver Public Library	Business Librarian	United States
Imanol	Basterretxea	Universidad del País Vasco UPV/EHU	Professor	Spain
Andreas	Bastias	Three Rivers Market / Cooperation Knoxville	Member & Customer Service Associate	United States
Phil	Baudin	The Co-operators	Board Director	Canada
André	Beaudry	Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada	Executive Director	Canada
Marc	Bédard	Desjardins	Directeur général	Canada
Nazik	Beishenaly	KCO-KU Leuven	Researcher	Belgium
Bert	Belben	Eagle River Credit Union LTD	Board Chair	Canada
Carmel	Bellamy	The Co-operators	AVP, Governance & Corporate Secretary	Canada
Courtney	Berner	University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives	Executive Director	United States
Jean	Bertheleme		Researcher, co-op member	Canada
Subrahmanyam	Bhima	International Cooperative Banking Association	President	India
Adrien	Billiet	KU Leuven	PhD candidate	Belgium
Barbara	Birnbaum	OASFCU	Governance Officer	United States
Monique	Bolli	ETHZ	Postdoc Researcher	Switzerland

Peter	Bosmans	Febecoop Vlaanderen Brussel	Managing Director	Belgium
Hugues	Bourgeois	CMC	Manager, HR and Governance	Canada
Julie	Breuer	Central 1	VP Stakeholder Relations	Canada
Leslie	Brown	Mount Saint Vincent University	Professor Emerita	Canada
Virginia	Brown	NCBA CLUSA	Senior Program Manager	United States
Jen	Budney	Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives	Professional Research Associate	Canada
Sam	Byrne	The Co-op Federation	Secretary	Australia
Carlos	Calderon	OAS FCU	President/CEO	United States
Bridget	Carroll	University College Cork	Researcher	Ireland
Valerie	Carruthers	Collective Interchange Co-operative	Director	Canada
Keely	Carter	Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-operative	Assistant to Management	Canada
Janice	Chipman	Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-op	Board Chair	Canada
Neha	Christie	Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai	PhD Scholar	India
Christina	Clamp	Southern New Hampshire University	Professor of Sociology	United States
Frederic	Clavet	Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency	Program Officer	Canada
Korinne	Collins	Canadian Credit Union Association	VP, Education & Events	Canada
Laurie	Cook	Chutzpah Consulting	Consultant	Canada
Tony	Cook	Two Piers Housing Co-operative	Member	United Kingdom
Louise	Cooke-Escapil	N/A	N/A	Ireland
Jozef	Cossey	KU Leuven	PhD Candidate	Belgium
Cameron	Cross	uBegin	Porto Alegre	Brazil
Erbin	Crowell	Neighboring Food Co-op Association	Executive Director	United States
Liezel	Cruz	University of the Philippines Los Baños	Director	Philippines
Emanuele	Cusa	Università di Milano-Bicocca	Professor and lawyer	Italy
Wendell	Dawson	Provincial Credit Union & Working group on Governance	Director	Canada
Claudia	De Fuentes	SMU	Associate Professor	Canada
Gilles	Doutrelepont	P&V	Advisor	Belgium
Mark	Downey	Shared Capital Cooperative	Director of Finance and Operations	United States
Cathy	Driscoll	SMU	Professor	Canada
Frédéric	Dufays	KU Leuven	Assistant Professor	Belgium
Fiona	Duguid	CEARC, SMU	Research Fellow	Canada
JP Roma	Duque	Institute of Cooperatives and Bio-Enterprise Development	University Extension Specialist	Philippines
Hanan	El-Youssef	ICCM, SMU	Consultant, Strategic Programming	United States

Matthew	Epperson	Savvy Co-op / Georgia Cooperative Development Center	Co-operative Administrator / Founder ED	United States
Sarah	Eppley	Grassroots Economic Organizing	Treasurer	United States
Ander	Etxeberria	MONDRAGON	Co-operative Dissemination	Spain
Chip	Filson	retired	retired	United States
Stephane	Forget	Sollio Groupe Coopératif	Vice-président principal	Canada
Deivid Ilecki	Forgiarini	OCERGS	Coordenador do Curso de Graduação	Brazil
Quintin	Fox	Gay Lea Foods Co-operative	Director, Training Development	Canada
Kevin	Freedman	The Governance Guru	Principal Consultant	Canada
Fred	Freundlich	LANKI Institute for Cooperative Research, Mondragon Univ.	Professor / Research Fellow	Spain
Stefanie	Friedel	KU Leuven	PhD Student	Belgium
Diane	Friend	Texas A&M - Kingsville	Assistant Professor	United States
Marty	Frost	Self-Employed	Co-operative Developer	Canada
Tato	Fuentes	CIESCOOP - USACH	Coordinador de Proyectos y Asistencia Técnica	Chile
Jean-Philippe	Galesne	Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario	Director - impact pole	Canada
Elena	Garnevaska	Massey University	Academic	New Zealand
Faith	Gates	Newfoundland-Labrador Federation of Co-operatives	Membership Manager	Canada
Sean	Geobey	University of Waterloo	Assistant Professor	Canada
Georgi	Georgiev	National union of worker producers' co-operatives	Head of Co-operative Development	Bulgaria
Terri	Gilbert	Eagle River Credit Union	Director	Canada
Stephen	Gill	VME Coop	Founder CEO	The United Kingdom
Rodrigo	Gouveia	PromoCoop	CEO	United States
Hans	Groeneveld	Tilburg University	Professor Financial Co-operatives	Netherlands
Abe	Gruswitz	GEO collective	Co-editor	United States
Stephanie	Guico	N/A	Consultant	Canada
Claude-André	Guillotte	IRECUS	Director	Canada
Deanna	Hammel	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	Senior Outreach Advisor	Canada
Erin	Hancock	International Centre for Co-operative Management, SMU	Program Manager, Education	Canada
Ove	Hansen	Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Ltd.	Corporate Secretary / Director, Member Relations	Canada
April	Harkness	HCCS	Governance & Community Engagement	United States
John	Harvie	The Co-operators	Chair - Board of Directors	Canada

Marc	Henrie	Coopérative de développement régional Acadie	Directeur général	Canada
Ross	Hodgson	Suma	Company Secretary	United Kingdom
Douglas	Holland	Independent Co-op Advisor	Consultant	Canada
Hannes	Hollebecq	Cera coop	Advisor co-operative entrepreneurship	Belgium
Wendy	Holm	wendy@wendyholm.com	Co-operator	Canada
Peter	Hough	Sustainability Solutions Groups Worker Co-op	Chair, Board of Directors	Canada
Kari	Huhtala	Pellervo Coop Center	Director of Cooperation	Finland
Oier	Imaz	LANKI - Mondragon University	Research professor	France
Iñigo	Iñurrategi	MONDRAGON Cooperative Corporation	Cooperative Education Manager	Spain
Gurli	Jakobsen	Roskilde University	Lecturer	Denmark
Kawkab	Jamal	Squamish Insurance a Vancity company	GM	Canada
Iva	Jankovic	BC Co-operative Association	Co-operative Education Coordinator	Canada
Stefan	Jetchick	Interpreter	Interpreter	Canada
Paul	Jones	Liverpool John Moores University	Reader in the Social Economy	United Kingdom
Thane	Joyal	Columinate	Board Development Consultant	United States
Aritz	Kanpandegi	Mondragon Unibertsitatea	Lecturer / researcher	Spain
Ken	Kavanagh	NL Federation of Co-operatives	Co-op developer & Organizational Governance Trainer	Canada
Esteban	Kelly	U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives	Executive Director	United States
Abbie	Kempson	Unicorn Grocery	Co-op Member	United Kingdom
Tracey	Kliesch	Concentra	Director	Canada
Thomas	Kohlbacher	Tilburg University	Researcher	The Netherlands
Christopher	Kopka	Center for Agricultural Cooperative Director Development	Co-founder	United States
Olga	Kuznetsova	Manchester Metropolitan University	Reader	United Kingdom
Faye	Lageu	Independent	CMEC Board member	United Kingdom
Roman	Lalich	The Co-operators Group Limited - Guelph, ON	Assistant Corporate Secretary & Senior Manage, Corporate Governance	Canada
Pierre-Philippe	Lambert	Sollio Cooperative Group	Director Governance and Ethics	Canada
Colette	Lebel	Sollio Groupe Coopératif	Directrice des affaires coopératives	Canada
Billy	Lee	Petty Harbour Fishermen's Producers Society Co-operative Limited	Fisherman (retired)	Canada
Olivier	Lepage	America Interpretation	Interpreter	Canada

Aileen	Ling	Makeshift Commons	Designer	Canada
Douglas	Locklin	www.TheLongWay.fi	Founding member	Finland
Marco	Lomuscio	University of Trento	PhD Candidate	Italy
Annelies	Lottmann	Texas Rural Cooperative Center	Co-Director	United States
Martin	Lowery	NRECA	Executive Vice President Emeritus	United States
Margaret	Lund	M Lund Associates	Principal	United States
James	Macfarlane	nil	Director	Canada
Alicia	Mah	Housing; Agriculture and Food; Transportation	Consultant	Canada
Sara	Maharajh	CCUA	BRM	Canada
Morshed	Mannan	European University Institute	Research Associate	Italy
Morshed	Mannan	Leiden University	PhD researcher	The Netherlands
Julia	Martins Rodrigues	University of Colorado Boulder Law School	Visiting Scholar, PhD Candidate	United States
Olive	McCarthy	Centre for Co-operative Studies, University College Cork	Director	Ireland
Cian	McMahon	ICCM	Postdoc researcher	Ireland
John	McNamara	Northwest Cooperative Development Center	Senior Cooperative Development Specialist	United States
Anne-Marie	Merrien	IRECUS	Doctorante	Canada
Myriam	Michaud	Université Laval	PhD Student	Canada
Cliff	Mills	Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP	Consultant	United Kingdom
Karen	Miner	ICCM, Saint Mary's University	Managing Director	Canada
Sizwe	Mkwanazi	Africa Cooperatives Institute of SA	Associate Director: Institutional Development (Academic) and Research	United States
T O	Molefe	University of Johannesburg (MPhil candidate)	Writer, editor, researcher	Switzerland
Nick	Money	Centre for Community Finance Europe	Director	United Kingdom
Victoria	Morris	Saskatchewan Co-operative Association	Executive Director	Canada
Nicos	Moushouttas	Loughborough University London	Doctoral Researcher	United Kingdom
Theresa	Murphy	St. John's Farmers' Market Cooperative	Administrative Assistant	Canada
Susan	Mutali	Stima Sacco	Senior Legal Officer	Kenya
Karthikeyan	Muthumariappan	Wollo University	Professor	Ethiopia
Ramu	N	Annamalai University	Professor	India
Nisha	Naidoo	Liberating Living	Coliberator	South Africa
Mark	Needham	CMC	Director	Canada
Mary	Nirlungayuk	Arctic Co-operatives Ltd	VP, Corporate Services & Corporate Secretary	Canada
Social Justice Coop	NL	SJCNL	Volunteer Coordinator	Canada

Malcolm	Noble	Leicester Vaughan College	Transition Manager	United Kingdom
Sonja	Novkovic	ICCM	Professor	Canada
Nkechi	Ojiagu	Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State	Lecturer	Nigeria
Maria Celeste	Osses	JSGS	student	Canada
Victor	Oyegoke	Cooperative Support Services	Principal Consultant/CEO	Nigeria
Gabriella	Padilla	KU LEUVEN	PhD Researcher	Belgium
Santosh Kumar	Padmanabhan	ICA	prefer not to say	Belgium
Rachel	Palaci	CCUA	Business Relationship Manager	Canada
Laurie	Parris	Co-operative Enterprise Council of New Brunswick	Executive Director	Canada
Adam	Payler	University of Birmingham	Doctoral Researcher	United Kingdom
Simon	Pek	University of Victoria	Assistant Professor	Canada
Andrea	Perrella	Wilfrid Laurier University	Associate Professor	Canada
Marc-Andre	Pigeon	University of Saskatchewan	Assistant Professor	Canada
Camila	Pineiro	NCBA CLUSA	Co-op Development Director	United States
Anthony	Piscitelli	Conestoga College	College Professor	Canada
Joey	Pittoello	Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-op	General Manager	Canada
Dionne	Pohler	University of Toronto	Acting Director and PhD Chair	Canada
Fernando	Polo-Garrido	CEGEA - Universitat Politècnica de València	Associate Professor	Spain
Sweet	Potato	River Run Farm/CME Certificate Cohort	Irrigation Manager	United States
Carol	Power	Centre for Co-operative Studies, University College Cork	Lecturer and Researcher	Ireland
Jessica	Provencher	CWCF	Administratrice	Canada
Anu	Puusa	University of Eastern Finland	Professor	Finland
Alicia	Quicoy	University of the Philippines Los Banos	University Researcher	Philippines
Adriann	Quilloy	Institute of Cooperatives and Bio-Enterprise Development	University Researcher	Philippines
Laetitia	RAKOTOSON	Université Paris-Dauphine	PhD Candidate	France
Deborah	Rausch	USDA-RBS Cooperative Services	Business Loan and Grant analyst	United States
Andrea	Renaud	Sollio Cooperative Group	Coop Affairs Advisor	Canada
Marita	Riedel	Sustain Caucasus	Founder	Germany
Daphne	Rixon	Centre of Excellence in Accounting and Reporting for Co-operatives	Associate Professor	Canada
Valeria	Roach	NCBA CLUSA	Executive Vice President & CFO	United States
Brenda	Roberts-Harmon	Atlantic Central	VP, Corporate Services & CRO	United States
Jude	Robertson	ICCM	Operations Administrator	The United States
Yvan	Rouillé	Caisse Desjardins	Directeur Général Adjoint	Canada

Roseline	Roy	Sollio groupe corporatif	Conseillère gouvernance et éthique	Canada
Clayton	Rudy	Bike Winnipeg Inc.	Co-chair, Board of Directors / Bikeshare Project Manager	Canada
Ginger	Ryland	Eagle River Credit Union	Director	Canada
Sanna	Saastamoinen	UEF Business School University of Eastern Finland	University teacher	Finland
Silvia	Sacchetti	Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento	Associate Professor Economic Policy	Italy
Shanti	Samaroo	Eagle River Credit Union Limited	CEO	Canada
Nathan	Schneider	University of Colorado Boulder	Assistant Professor	United States
Anouar	Semlali	Université de Montpellier	Doctorant	France
Mark	Simmonds	Co-op Culture	Co-op Developer	United Kingdom
Kerr	Smith	Gay Lea Foods Co-operative	Manager of Co-operative Community Engagement	Canada
Marilyn	Smith	Mexum	Secretary	Trinidad and Tobago
Suzette	Snow-Cobb	Neighboring Food Co-op Association	Co-operative Food Systems Developer	The United States
K.C.	Soares	OAS FCU	Chair, Board of Directors	United States
Roger	Spear	Roskilde University	Prof Social Entrepreneurship	Denmark
Sheldon	Stener Q.C.	Federated Co-operatives Limited	General Counsel and Corporate Secretary.	Canada
Amanda	Stock	People's Memorial Association	Interim Executive Director	United States
Getachew Mergia	Tache	Agriterra	Cooperative Business Advisor	Ethiopia
Janet	Toner	Canadian Credit Union Association	Manager, Certification and Accreditation	Canada
Ermanno	Tortia	University of Trento	Associate Professor	Italy
David	Upton	Common Good Solutions CIC	CEO	Canada
Michael	van Gelderen	N/A	N/A	Switzerland
Ryan	van Hout	Coöperatieve Rabobank U.A.	Risk Advisor	Netherlands
Jordan	van Rijn	University of Wisconsin-Madison / Credit Union National Association	Senior Economist / Lecturer	United States
Orestis	Varkarolis	Nottingham Trent University	Co-operator	Greece
Ernst	von Kimakowitz	Humanistic Management Network	Director	Switzerland
Dave	Walsh	Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of Co-Operatives	Managing Director	Canada
Akkanut	Wantanasombut	Chulalongkorn University	Researcher	Thailand
Jerome	Warren	University of Cologne	Doctoral Student/Researcher	Germany
Anthony	Webster	Northumbria University	Professor in history	United Kingdom
Georgina	Whyatt	SMU	Adj Professor	United Kingdom

Tara	Williams	CMEASC	President	Canada
Alexandra	Wilson	The Co-operators	Board Member	Canada
John	Wilson	University of Northumbria	Faculty Pro Vice Chancellor	United Kingdom
Rod	Wilson	Arctic Co-ops	CEO	Canada
Lourdes	Wilson	SRKV College of Arts and Science	Associate Professor of Cooperatives.	India
Lana	Wong	NASCO / WCRI / COCHF	Board member	Canada
Teresa	Young	The Kohala Center	Co-operative Developer	United States
Karen	Zimbelman	National Co+op Grocers	Sr. Director of Membership and Cooperative Relations	United States