



# Open Research Group REPORT

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## Event at HSCB: CO-OPERATIVES IN THE CO-OP

The cooperative movement began in Britain and France in the C19th in response to the industrial revolution, and the increasing mechanism of the economy threatening the livelihoods of many workers. Robert Owen (1771-1858) is considered the father of the movement. Owen had earned his fortune in the cotton trade, but believed in empowering his workers with education for themselves and their children. His idea was to help create “villages of co-operation” where workers would drag themselves out of poverty by growing their own food, making their own clothes and ultimately becoming self governing.

We ask how worker Co-ops can equip us to move forwards now, in an economy which is producing inequality and poverty as well as environmental destruction. How can contemporary local co-ops help us to bond together at grass-roots and build a new world among the chaos of our contemporary one?

**1. Carlota Sanz - Economy for the Common Good (ECG)** is an international movement started in Austria in 2010, whose vision is to move to an economic system where money is a means rather than a goal in itself, putting people and the planet at the core of all economic activity. ECG also promotes Cooperative ownership structure as part of the Common Good balance sheet – much relevant information is on: <https://www.ecogood.org/en/>

**2. Torange Khonsair, Public Works** - a not-for-profit critical design practice set up in 2004 that occupies the terrain in-between architecture, art, performance and activism. Torange is about to lead a new MA course on “Design for Cultural Commons”.

This is a one-year (two-year part-time) postgraduate course in the field of cultural and urban commons. They are working with other commons – trying to sustain community gardens collaboratively – keen to break the “enclosure” matter, didn’t want it to be in an architecture school, so it goes across several disciplines, eg art, design, architecture, technology, etc, also opening it up as knowledge commons, students, presenting to other practitioners, debating, how to move things forward, also working with Tim, Commons Rising, on UK Commons Assembly, can be any discipline to do this, not just the built environment, don’t need a degree to get into it, activists can do it. Expertise covers urban commons and land ownership, architecture as a way to grab land and turn them into Community Land Trust, how to build social capital around the land, and argue for it not to be privatised or enclosed. A student did an edition and put it into all the Metro newspapers, IP wikileaks, started to map where your IP address gets farmed to, 2013, began a big discussion about data, also fuctional things about “data farms”. Another student mapped the Fukishima disaster, mapped if it happened in Britain that we would need to create a city bunker that would need to house all of Somerset etc. Another project is this Curiosity Shop, Knowledge Commons is that everyone can contribute, wiki..., also closed loop soup, anaerobic digestion, idea of circular economy, like in Covent Garden where they waste food, Re-Juice. The knowledge commons of creating your own energy. Bank of the Commons creating stuff in the UK, work with blockchains. For details see: <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/PMDESCOL>

**3. Marlene Barrett from Organic Lea:** Co-ops UK list the seven cooperative principles, including not having outside share-holders, or separate bosses, and benefiting the wider community. Legal structures vary, but the key idea is “working together”. It’s difficult also to be a charity which has independent trustees. This limits fund-raising opportunities, but there is co-operation between coops. Organic Lea has 17 members in the co-op, but there are lots more people involved, allow and encourage people to bring ideas and get involved, has been talked of as being a commons space, but operates as a business, with an equal pay structure, consensus decision-making, run a box scheme, well known in local community. Have to learn a different way of thinking than in hierarchical work places, ie taking responsibility for the wider co-op and seeing the bigger picture. This creates a more supportive environment, dual responsibility for their own position and for everyone else can be daunting. Discussion about consensus decision-making – advice can be obtained from Seeds for Change: <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk> • <https://www.organiclea.org.uk>

**4. Calverts** are a printing company based in Bethnal Green, they are a worker-owned co-op, operating in many different sectors. Member of Coops UK, they follow similar principles, ie members jointly own the firm and put into practice the principles of the coop. Everyone is a valued member of the team, the cleaner on same rate as director, all staff have equal status. One of the reasons why coops have survived the recession, when things got hard in 2010, they all took 10% pay cut. They are active in networking of coops, community and the environment first, they collaborate with CoTech, Julie’s Bicycle, The End Trades Guild, Zero-Emissions network, and Advance London, which pioneers the circular economy, this leads on to the environment. They take environmental issues seriously, want to improve energy use etc on a regular basis, meeting Environmental Management standards, FSC paper product, use vegetable oil-based inks on larger print, and non-toxic toner, all solvents are collected and recycled, plastic shredded, recycled and used for building industry. They use Ecotricity – <http://www.ecotricity.co.uk>, and only choose products that are safe for the environment. They consult customers re design & print, support other co-ops and social enterprises. They encourage cycling to work. They are members of the Zero-Emissions network, and also campaign for better facilities for cycle and electrical vehicles in the city.

1977 was the year of punk and unemployment, many worker-coops started up, including North Star Press (after local pub in Finchley) <https://www.northstarpress.com/about-us.html> - and Calverts - Giles Calvert was executed, but his wife carried on the business. Calverts remains a one-member-one-vote organisation. Its working practices enable it to have a Global Coop mark, which is authorised by the International Co-operative Alliance - <https://www.ica.coop/en> based in South Africa. ICA initiated a universal symbol, and did a huge range of workshops to find out what people would want in an international mark, they went through several sets of visualisations, it was a global decision-making process, it’s available in seven colours and Calverts was involved in designing it. You can also apply for a .coop domain - <http://www.coop>. Calverts has also Worked on branding for Solid Fund: <https://solidfund.coop>, has 400 regular subscribers and are members of it – members invested £25,000 in its first year. 2012 was the UN International Year of the Coop, working with others, they a got big job for the Coop Group, a special members publication, for the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary, based in Rochdale, took 7weeks to print, biggest job they’ve done,

Calverts has 13 full or part-time workers, everyone is employed for their specialist skill and also have management heads on, keeping building maintained, mentoring new staff, health & safety, they have a sociocratic decision-making process via smaller sub-groups to drive things forward. Background was not in co-operative working, finds it a very empowering experience, able to expand skill base, in 11 years has changed from just technical to strategic review, also attends events like this. Cons are decision-making process can be a bit slow, everyone is equal but some people like to be heard more. You can set up a working coop via Cooperatives UK, has booklets, what is a cooperative: <http://www.calverts.coop> • <https://www.coops.tech/co-op/calverts> • <https://www.peopleofprint.com/general/calverts/>

**4. Paula Goes, Fair Coin** - an ethical cyptocurrency who have recently established a London 'node' - and whose aim is to create "an innovative global economic system from the bottom up in favour of an alternative and post-capitalist model, paving the way for a collective change towards a life based on value in common."

**FairCoop** is a global cooperative: <https://fair-coin.org> – people know system isn't working and they complain, but a growing number of people are working on how to change it. Faircoop started 2010 – based on the idea of collaborative society - “do it with others”. It's now all over Europe, and south America, giving people freedom and tools to be free of state control. They have a global organisation, they talk to the internet, there are also assemblies online once a month, as well as working autonomous, also local nodes, they exist to create a circular economy around Faircoin, the idea of which is to meet basic needs, including housing mediated outside the main capitalist system. Exists to give people tools, the main thing is Faircoin, which is a cryptocurrency, is ecological, distributed free initially to people who wanted it, now used fo exchange, see FairMarket website: <https://market.fair.coop>

**London Faircoin**, ua for those who want to set up a point of exchange, buy or sell, can convert it back to pounds, can get people to put their shops on the market place and build ecosystem. The plan is to move to a co-operative model and build society which is more fair, and to be free from the economic system we currently have. They have a very horizontal structure, ie there is no leader and everyone has the same power. Sometimes people are not sure about joining so they can be an associate, The main goal is to have the commons for all of us. Can sell services, if you are within the values of the co-op.

Members have an online wallet, android, a card (not yet in the UK), people can tap the card, the money in comparison with bitcoin, two prices. It's digitalised so can't stop people from buying, they try to buy back, but have own value, own price, which they decide in the assemblies, currently 1.20 Euro, which brings stability for the merchants, as opposed to Bitcoin, whose price varies over time. Faircoin is ecological because they don't mine it any more. It's open to any skills, basically anyone who has time, eg local knowledge.

Someone asked if Faircoin can be to buy HSCB notes - the answer was that currently they can only be bought for sterling. There are various different websites: <https://coopfunding.net>  
• <https://coopfunding.net/en/> • <https://coopfunding.net/en/campaigns/refugees-fund-faircoop/> • <https://coopfunding.net/en/campaigns/>

**5. Sustainable Hackney** – the aim is how to help each other out and set up something like this, bringing growing projects together, different events, film shows, etc, encouraging people to talk and collaborate, and establish a fair market: <http://sustainablehackney.org.uk>

Also mentioned was **The Hive**: <https://hivedalston.wordpress.com/regeneration-project/>.

**Positive Money** also challenges the idea of money created as debt and are campaigning for a mainstream money and banking system that enables a fair, sustainable and democratic economy: <http://positivemoney.org>

DISCUSSION: Local money is a “complementary” project, there are different models, Local Exchange Trading Schemes which work by mutual credit and local “pound” vouchers promoted by Transition Towns, which, unlike HSCB (which is using funds from the sales of their currency notes to promote four local projects and to pay off debts), are not transparent in the way they account for sterling monies received as backing for the vouchers. Mary and Dan discussed briefly the idea that HSCB might also operate as local currency, but Dan felt that this would complicate things too much, as they are simply being sold as works of art. We also discussed the fact that artists and researchers' careers are eg-driven and their careers are based on the ability to claim authorship, and how this fits in with co-operative values.

## **Commons Assembly: Friday 20<sup>th</sup> - Saturday 21st July 2018**

**Commons Rising** - <http://commonsrising.uk> and **Public Works** <https://www.publicworksgroup.net> - are holding a UK-wide event at the School for Civic Action at the Tate Modern (London) on - PROPOSED PROGRAMME:  
• **Friday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2018** • 10am -12pm: Closed session for commons practitioners to meet each other and get to know each other with five minute presentations from invited participants • 12pm -1pm: Lunch: opportunity to mingle. Food will be provided in the space • 1pm -3:30pm: Outreach to Tate audiences to familiarize them with Commons ideas, run 15mins workshops across 11 themes • 3:30pm-3:45pm Break and people socializing • 3:45pm-6pm (Tate Bar is open for informal discussions): Common Visioning. Visioning of UK Commons: three short presentations, everyone reviews the notes taken during outreach workshops, the exhibition and the morning presentations. Cafe style discussions and plenary.  
• **Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2018** • 10am -1pm: How we action our vision (end of event) • 1.30pm walk and visit to R-Rurban Garden project in Poplar with further activities planned there

*The School for Civic Action is a pedagogical experiment that tests alternative modes of knowledge transfer at work in civic city making, challenging traditional urban teaching and disciplinary restriction. The School for Civic Action manoeuvres across disciplines, implementing new ways of knowing and acting. Teaching and learning at the School for Civic Action is symbiotic; by situating its curriculum within live projects in the city, it can mutually provide a support structure back to the local communities, the sites they occupy and for the individuals enrolled. The School for Civic Action draws together a network of local civic classrooms; physical rooms situated within specific areas in a city; where knowledge is commonly shared about hands on city making. Knowledge is disseminated on various sites such as social housing estates, high streets, community gardens, parks and other urban sites currently under threat. There are four "Civic classrooms" already set up across London with the aim to grow to other sites, forming new partnerships and supporting existing neighbourhood initiatives. The emerging curriculum is driven by the needs and desires of local citizens as its base, which is co-produced. Outside Tate Exchange the School for Civic Action continues to develop and grow in neighbourhoods. The School for Civic Action builds on a rich tradition of artist lead schools and academies, re-imagining educational models. It will reflect on such traditions, recognising itself as part of a larger movement towards more democratic forms of knowledge production. To map out this history, a growing Archive of Alternative Schools and Academies will be exhibited during our stay at Tate Exchange.*

**OPEN 2018: Platform Cooperatives: Open Co-op are running their next Platform Co-operatives Conference at Conway Hall on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018:** The platform cooperative economy is evolving as a viable alternative to the centralised, profit-hungry, extractive business model which dominates the web today. By shifting the focus toward fundamentally fairer forms of ownership and governance, and rewarding their communities instead of venture capitalists, platform cooperatives provide a template for a new type of organisation – forming the building blocks for a more equitable economy.

The co-operative model is far from new but, as more and more of the businesses we rely on move online, the co-operative sector must evolve to stay relevant and challenge the norms of this new digital world. By placing members at the heart of organisational ownership and governance and the development of thriving communities before profit, platform cooperatives form an essential component of the transition to a transparent, democratic and decentralised economy which works for everyone. A society in which anyone can become a co-owner of the organisations on which they, their family and their community depend. A world where everyone can have say in the decisions that affect them.

- OPEN 2018, the Platform Cooperatives conference, will focus on three main themes:
- The Platform cooperative showcase will present examples from functioning platform co-ops, including practical examples of legal structures, funding and financial setups, and detailed insight from platform co-op practitioners about how their organisations work.
- The Collaborative and Peer to Peer technology sessions will feature presentations on alternative digital currencies, open source tools and technology and the development of the new platforms and protocols which are enabling online co-operation to evolve at scale.
- Discussions on the changing narrative will explore the co-operative vision and the evolving politics and philosophy of a world of abundance and inclusivity which underpins the creation of a more collaborative, equitable economy which works for people and planet before profit.
- Incorporating a mix of presentations, showcases, discussions and open space sessions in which the participants decide what is discussed, OPEN 2018 presents an opportunity to meet co-operative development experts, legal practitioners and software developers to discuss the structure, challenges and opportunities of the new cooperative economy.

If you are interested in co-creating our collective future register here: <https://open.coop>