

Emancipated shelf: Labor Process in A New Wave Food Coop

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Abstract :

This paper explores how new wave food cooperatives (NWFC) are challenging labor relations on the shop floor. I argue that these NWFC represent an organizational shift for cooperativism, in the form of a hybrid model between consumer cooperatives & worker cooperatives. Previous forms of cooperatives were shown to have limitations and few capacities to really challenge our food regime. While previous research explored prices, food selection and why individuals joined these coop, we yet don't know much about how work is organized on these food coop's place of production. I draw on LPT to analyze labor within food coop and connect it to the wider political economy through an ethnographic inquiry in La Louve, the first and biggest food coop of its kind in France. Preliminary results show that this new model is not the end of a control of the labor process. Standardization and a binding shift system ensure volunteers' work. This shows (1) the relevance of LPT to the understanding of alternative organizations by exploring their entanglement in a larger political economy and its consequence on labor and (2) how new wave cooperativism renew LPT. NWFC are boundary cases in which labor process is not aiming at extracting surplus value but rather securing time engaged in the coop and a fixed collective surplus.

Mots-clés : New Wave Food Coop – Labor Process Theory – Alternative Organizations – Critical Management Studies – Free Labor

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, a new wave of food cooperatives has been emerging in France and western Europe. Inspired both by early cooperativism and the US hippie counterculture, it promises to challenge mainstream retail practices, to offer better food, social relations and cheaper prices through members' voluntary work. These supermarkets are comprised of thousands of volunteer members, each contributing few hours every month and a few, paid, full-time employees for specific continuous tasks. Non-members are not allowed to shop so only working members can benefit from attractive prices and food selection. All kind of products are available from light bulbs to butternut squashes so that they can be members' unique place for convenience shopping. They emerged in France as an echo to a renewed attention to *terroir* food and struggle for quality and local food.

These organizations attracted a lot of media attention. The most famous one is *La Louve* in Paris' 18th popular district, but we can name *Scopelie* in Nantes, *SuperQuinQuin* in Lille, *SuperCoop* in Bordeaux, *La cagette* in Montpellier, *La Chouette Coop* in Toulouse, L'Elephant in Grenoble or *Otsokop* in Bayonne¹. These non-profit cooperatives, through a lower cost structure, make better food products more affordable. These projects hence aim at improving food practices as well as organizational practices.

Food coop can be traced back to the 19th century in France and the UK and the first crisis of capitalism. They emerged as consumer cooperatives in which proletarian workers gathered to own small grocery store and avoid prohibitive food prices in period of recurring crisis. Some of these consumer cooperatives grew very large to include thousands of members. The basic model was that these supermarkets were opened to everyone but cooperators benefited from annual rebate in case of profit. These cooperatives failed to radically challenge the economic system because they only transferred ownership of the means of production from one group (capitalist class) to another (consumers) while sustaining the predation of a surplus from workers' labor. This captured surplus was then distributed to consumers through the rebate system. However, they diffused again in Europe in the US during later crisis, particularly in

¹ <http://alternatives.blog.lemonde.fr/2016/11/02/le-formidable-essor-des-supermarches-cooperatifs/>
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the 1930s. NWFC emerged in the US along the hippie counterculture and developed with the economic crisis of early 70s (Belasco, 1999). Despite creating distance with large consumer cooperatives through giving the labor's "burden" back to cooperators, NWFC are not becoming worker cooperatives either. Worker coops entangled in hostile and competitive market relations find themselves in situation of self-exploitation to keep prices low through intensification and reorganization of work (Cheney, 1999). Within NWFC labor is largely done outside waged relations and without pressure to find market opportunities since clients are registered members. This new model is then a radical shift in the sense that consumers own the means of production (shares of the capital) but also participate to the labor process by working three hours every four weeks to earn the right to shop within the coop. In exchange, prices are meant to be more affordable. This innovation is, I argue, an important shift in the cooperative movement, which, until now, never really challenged the dominant labor process of our societies.

While previous research on NWFC explored prices (Sommer & Hohn, 1983), food selection (Jochnowitz, 2001), potential for growth (Hall & Hall, 1982) and why individuals joined these coop (Sommer, Becker, Hohn & Warholic, 1983), we yet don't know much about how work is organized on these food coop's place of production; for an exception see (Huber & Brown, 2017) for the disciplinary role of humor in a NWFC. To understand how free labor is organized in a food coop, I draw on Labor Process Theory (LPT). Derived from a Marxist understanding of value, LPT looks at how the organization of labor in the place of production connects with the broader political economy (Thompson & Smith, 2009). It is thus mainly concerned with processes of control and consent among workers on their exploited situation, entangled in capitalistic modes of production (Burawoy, 1978; Braverman, 1974). Case studies drew on LPT to explore various forms of labor such as emotional labor (Hochschild, [1983]2012); self-managed teams (Sewell, 1998; Barker, 1993) or more recently digital labor (Beverungen, Böhm & Land, 2015). LPT analysis of alternative organizations remain scarce, particularly regarding those organizations contesting the capitalist system and its divide between capital and labor. My article explores how alternative food networks challenge Marxist organization studies and particularly Labor Process Theory.

To address these issues, I draw on a three-years long ethnographic work in la Louve, the first food coop of its kind in France. I became a full member of the coop and engaged in various of its many activities to become native and understand how work is organized and eventually

managed in this alternative organization. This shows (1) the relevance of LPT to the understanding of alternative organizations by exploring their entanglement in a larger political economy and its consequence on labor and (2) how new wave cooperativism renew LPT. NWFC are boundary cases in which labor process is not aiming at extracting surplus value but rather securing time engaged in the coop and a fixed collective surplus.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Diverse food cooperatives

Food cooperatives are considered a promising path for improving working conditions and to create better food supply chains (Chen, 2015). Cooperatives have long been analyzed as alternative in that they challenge mainstream governance practices, profits sharing practices and that they aim for the emancipation of their workers (Cheney, 1999; Leca, Gond & Barin Cruz, 2014). Before the industrial revolution, many organizations relied on cooperation principles (Toucas-Truyen & Dreyfus, 2005). However, the modern form of cooperatives has its roots in the 19th century in western Europe where Capitalism was more advanced (in the UK and France).

Cooperativism and food co-ops can be traced back to the first industrial revolution. In the 19th century, in France and in the United-Kingdom, new cooperative grocery stores, bakeries or emerged to provide affordable food to deprived workers struggling to access basic food. Such cooperative, in the UK, led to the creation of the Rochdale principles (Holyoake, 2017; Toucas-Truyen & Dreyfus, 2005). These, mostly non-profit, cooperatives were owned by their clients (consumer cooperatives), sharing their surplus through annual rebates proportional to members' purchases. Perceived as dangerous for mainstream capitalism and source of revolutionary upheavals, these cooperatives were not supported by states and highly sensitive to economic downturn, frequent in the 19th century. Because membership is diluted, and members are not engaged in everyday work activities, the potential of consumer cooperatives is often bypassed and the potential for emancipation is rather explored in worker cooperatives (e. g. Bryer, 2014).

The first food cooperatives originate from the first industrial revolution labor movements. Inspired by the broad philosophical streams of the time, from Fourierism to anarchism. It was mostly about a practical emergency of securing access to basic food products for workers, fleeing the rural areas and thus deprived from their capacity to produce their own food. A

second wave of food cooperative supermarkets emerged in the 60s, particularly in the US, inspired by the US counter-culture (Cox, 1994). Two critical changes in cooperativism emerged in this period. Firstly, at this period, cooperativism is not only about economic conflicts inscribed in larger class struggles. On the contrary, this new cooperativism is entangled with wider social claims. US food coops are thus places where new food practices, spreading among part of the US population, can take place. These coops are inspired by alternative food imaginaries and new trends such as veganism, vegetarianism or Buddhism and a rejection of consumer society (Jochnowitz, 2001). Because food consumption is highly embedded in social relationships (Bourdieu, 1984). Contesting imaginaries around food are thus central in the food coops movement in the US which was not just about securing access to affordable basic food products for low income workers.

It emerged that NWFC are places to new forms of control among coworkers, through codified conducts and discourses (Huber & Brown, 2017). NWFC also face a strong paradox regarding exclusivity (Zitcer, 2015): to secure low prices, only members are allowed to shop, which means that a high number of dedicated members are needed to balance the financial accounts of the coop. Historically, the failure rates of these coops proved rather high (Hall & Hall, 1982) but seems to be now stabilizing. Despite the first new-wave food coops being almost half a century old, studies on these organizations remain scarce.

It is also at this time that a new management tool emerges in those coops: A shift system creating an exclusivity for its working members. The new food coops are then opened only to members doing their mandatory working shifts. Simultaneously, these supermarkets moved away from the rebate system to propose a *direct savings* through a lower cost structures due to the voluntary work of NWFC members. In such supermarkets, access to the shop is conditioned to members' effective work in order to secure low prices. It thus forms a hybrid model between worker cooperatives and consumer cooperatives. This shift-system, similar to what can be find in parent-run daycare centers, has been left out of management literature. The failure rate of food coops in the 60s can explain such disinterest. However, since 2008, a new wave of food coop emerge which largely rely on this shift system, partly because old coops such as Park Slope Food Coop in Brooklyn explain their longevity by the strict enforcement of this shift system.

While consumer cooperatives have long been criticized for lack of engagement and diluted membership (Passetti, Bianchi, Battaglia & Frey, 2017) and that voluntary work,

prosumption, is denounced as a new exploitation mechanisms, the recent boom of alternative food networks contradicts such pessimistic accounts and opens a new gate to challenge mainstream food systems. We see that we cannot use classic categories of cooperatives to understand these new wave food coop. These new empirical objects do not correspond to previous categories and challenge how we have understood labor in these cooperatives until now. To explore labor relations within these coops more in-depth, I, now, propose to draw on Labor Process Theory.

Labor Process Theory

Labor Process Theory purpose is to link organization of labor on the workplace with the wider political economy of the society in which the organization is entangled. LPT is derived from Marxist studies, and concerned with processes of control and consent among workers on their exploited situation, entangled in capitalistic modes of production (Burawoy, 1978; Braverman, 1974). It aims at explaining labor relations on the shop floor by linking it to wider socioeconomic systems. Case studies drew on LPT to explore various forms of labor such as motional labor (Hochschild, [1983]2012); self-managed teams (Sewell, 1998; Barker, 1993) or more recently digital labor (Beverungen et al., 2015). The main idea in LPT is to decode concrete labor process within organization and particularly to understand how labor power is transformed into effective labor ('why workers work so much' to rephrase Burawoy (1978)). Accordingly, scholars looked into trend such as deskilling or upskilling (Adler, 2007), work intensification, technological change, relocation or work reorganization (Thompson & Smith, 2009) with the idea that to sustain its capacity for profit, owners of the means of production need to reinforce their control over the labor process. This is combined with a socialization of production: workers are more and more interdependent and less in charge of the whole process of production. Individuals are only in charge of a very small part of what will be exchanged in the end (Adler, 2007).

Free labor (unwaged labor) and productive labor.

LPT initially focused on waged labor as the sign of productive labor in a capitalist society. However, recent developments showed the necessity of exploring labor process outside wage relations to understand how more and more activities are controlled by managerial interests (Böhm & Land, 2012). From initial understanding of productive labor, recent developments

highlight the potential for value creation of unpaid, volunteer work (Terranova, 2004). These debates led LPT authors to explain that the focus should be on how “capital’s attempts to capture free labour and to make it productive, and how this labour is disguised as non-work ‘often by refusing to remunerate it’ (Henninger, 2007, p.174)” (Beverungen et al., 2015: 478). Overall, LPT recent developments express skepticism towards new trends of free labor. In the case of new wave food coop, this free labor remains productive because it fulfills the two conditions of productive labor: being controlled and captured by capital (Beverungen et al., 2015) ;even though, here, capital is own by the members themselves. However, LPT analysis of alternative organizations remain scarce, particularly regarding those organizations contesting the capitalist system and its divide between capital and labor. My article explores how alternative food networks challenge Marxist organization studies and particularly Labor Process Theory.

With this new organizational trend in France, we see non-profit structures in which those offering their labor power are also those owning the means of production. It seems, however, that instruments of control emerge, blurring the food coop work regime. These new cooperative supermarkets can How to rethink, then, the labor process under new wave food coops?

METHODOLOGY

The Case Study

A single case study allows us to gain insights on emerging objects (Yin 2003) such as new types of cooperative supermarkets. The case we chose to study is about La Louve². La Louve is the name of a cooperative and participative supermarket, born in Paris in 2010 and which is open since November 2016 in the 18th district of Paris. The adjectives cooperative and participative are used by actors themselves to describe the project. According to them, it is about highlighting, on the one hand, the cooperative status because members own the capital of the supermarket and take decisions according to the one member = one voice principle. On the other hand, the participative nature is crucial since members are actively participating by working for the supermarket three hours every four weeks (thirteen times a year)³.

² She-wolf in French. The name was chosen by both US native founders because of the musicality of the word in French.

³ These three hours are usually spent at activities such as handling the cashier, filling the shelves, or unpacking the deliveries. I will make accounts of many more volunteer activities (IT work, welcome meetings, writing of Montpellier, 6-8 juin 2018

Consequently, the cooperative is a hybrid model between a consumer cooperative and a worker cooperative. As we discussed in the introduction, the principle of la Louve is simple: Only members-cooperators- can come to do their groceries and every member has to work three hours every four weeks. This allows for less running cost (no marketing spending, almost no labor cost etc.) and, thus, prices in the cooperative are meant to be cheaper compared to mainstream retailers.

This model did not emerge by chance. La Louve two founders are US citizens, former New Yorkers living in Paris for several years. Disappointed by the food offer in Paris, they try to reproduce, with la Louve, the model of the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC), a pioneer cooperative supermarket, established in Brooklyn in 1973. Although PSFC is not financially linked with la Louve, they openly support the project. Skype meetings are organized every week, full visit of PSFC are proposed (I had the opportunity to benefit from such a visit for this research) and they allow Tom, La Louve's president to direct a documentary on PSFC. After a steady growth of cooperators number, the 2008 crisis led to a skyrocketing number of subscription to the Brooklyn coop⁴ and two years later, in 2010, the idea of La Louve emerges.

Presently (January 2017), the project has more than 5500 members and six full time employees, the latter being paid 1.5 time the minimum wage. The supermarket is, since November 2016, in a "test stage" which corresponds to a beta version of the project, operating the supermarket to spot bugs, mistakes and possible issues. This is materialized by a front door still closed and an access to the supermarket by a back entrance through the delivery dock. On a day to day basis, the shop is; however, open from 09am to 09pm from Tuesday to Saturday and from 08.30am to 12.00pm on Sunday. After witnessing the project birth, we now participate to its rooting in the landscape.

Ethnographic data

Our case study relies on an ethnographic work (Brewer, 2000; Fetterman, 1989), started in February 2015 and still ongoing with the idea of being 'based on close contact with the everyday life of the studied society or group over a fairly long period of time' (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000: 45). To create an account of "an extended period time in which the

process). All of these activities are doing on top of the three-hours shifts by volunteers willing to give more of their time to the coop.

⁴ They now have more than 17 000 members in New York.

ethnographer immerses herself in the community she is studying: interacting with community members, observing, building relationships, and participating in community life” (Cunliffe, 2010: 227). I subscribe to La Louve to become cooperator n°972 and acquire my 10 shares of the supermarket capital. At first, the ethnographic activity consisted of participations in various meetings and coordination committees in charge of monitoring the project. In the spring of 2016, the “ephemeral grocery store” opened its doors on Wednesday and Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. It was in its small associative premises, a few blocks away from the present supermarket. The goal was to test products, IT tools, to start work shift and to earn some incomes, in short “to learn” to be a participative store. Then, in the summer 2016, the construction works were coming to an end and to save tenth of thousands of euros, members were asked to help for many works (painting, cleaning, sanding...). In July 2016, I was asked to become a squad leader⁵ because of my experience in retail, my knowledge of the coop and my « long » experience in la Louve. I have, therefore, been coordinating a squad with two other squad leaders, since the opening of the supermarket in November 2016. The coop has about 400 squad leaders to cover all work shifts. All are volunteers, and it grants no privilege. I schedule a planning of one three-hours long weekly visit at the coop which was 45 minutes away from my residence. La Louve never became my main shopping location but I occasionally shopped there after my shifts. Although I tried to do as many shifts as possible, I restrained from doing so because of legal constraints regarding undeclared work. Some visits were more observational with natural discussions with other members: it is very common to stop and chat with one another at the coop, even without knowing each other. It was also an opportunity to take pictures and even some video clips. I completed these visits with participation in key social events (General Assemblies, opening and anniversary parties and so on). Although I tried to abide by this schedule, when academic constraints were more demanding, I had to limit my visits. On the contrary, at times I had to go more often at the coop when the activity there was more intense (During the first days, when handiwork was necessary or when bulk products first arrived). After a year of participation, I began to collect more intensively data such as meeting reports, discussions from the Facebook groups or the forum. All these participations are compiled in an ethnographic diary. It allows me to gain a refine knowledge of the organization, of its codes and daily modes of functioning by

⁵ The French word « coordinateur » is closer to the english coordinator. The term squad leader is used at the Park Slope Food Coop but French members were against referring to leadership.

« studying events, language, rituals, institutions, behaviors, artifacts, and interactions » (Cunliffe, 2010: 227). In April 2017, I had the opportunity to visit the PSFC in Brooklyn. Although I am not a member of PSFC, thanks to the contact between la Louve and PSFC, I could meet with John, one of its founding member. He showed me around the entire coop, including the working spaces underground and answers all my questions before introducing me to other members of the Brooklyn coop: two squad leaders and the procurement officer in charge of bulk products. This was necessary to understand the model inspiring the founding members of la Louve and what they are trying to recreate in Paris and the key differences. There also, it was an opportunity to take pictures and to gather secondary data (flyers, posters, notes and diverse documents provided inside the supermarket).

These ethnographic data form the heart of the data collection and the main constituent of my analysis. They were, however, completed and triangulated (Fetterman, 1989) by formal and semi-directive interviews as well as the collection of many secondary data (process, committee reports, monitoring of the private Facebook group and internal discussion forum). Pictures and videos from the Facebook group and the documentary video on PSFC by Tom were also used as secondary data. As of now, 13 interviews have been done for a length comprise between 45 and 90 minutes each. More are already planned. It allows creating moments of reflexivity with actors and their practices inside the coop, to discuss their understanding of the model and the reasons behind them joining the project (Alvesson, 2011). Interviews were also privileged moments to discuss food practices of individuals and their perception of the major food issues. Overall, this let me become close to the organizational life (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000) including about what is outside the walls of the supermarket through the forum and the Facebook interactions. In the end, members do not spend so much time strictly within the confine of the supermarket, it was thus, necessary to monitor all these complementary elements and to make a consistent account of what is happening at la Louve.

RESULTS:

Labor Process within the Coop

Firstly, our analysis highlights the pivotal role of the shift system within the food coop. The cooperative can run with only six full-time workers. It is approximately five times less employees than a mainstream supermarket of comparable size (Bisault, 1987 see also Xerfi, 2017). This is achieved through the effective help of 5000 regular members, contributing each, to three hours of work, every four weeks. From a strictly quantitative point of view, their volunteer work corresponds to that of roughly 100 full-time workers. This large amount of work is regulated through working shifts. The labor process within la Louve revolves around working shifts: the fact that the coop is members-operated is not just a principle enunciated by the coop but came to be materialized into concrete tools. The principle is that every cooperator has to subscribe to a fix schedule of shifts (for instance, my shifts were on Thursday between 8am and 11am every week “b”), and if one missed her shifts, she must do two make-up shifts. Any cooperator willing to do her work shift must perform an inscription work by signing, at the beginning and at the end of the shift, an attendance sheet, with the approval and control of the squad leader. This sheet is automatically edited every Monday with the current information comprised in the IT system: who are the regular member of a given shift? Who is unassigned because of two missed shifts (they won’t appear on the list)? Who are the non-regular workers registered for this specific slot? This sheet is then forward to the member office team, there, information will manually be implemented into the IT system to credit members’ shifts count and create the information about who is up-to-date. This information will then circulate and be present in membership cards, black-box at the heart of the coop functioning. To access the supermarket, it is necessary to present one’s card, yet, the card reader will appear green only if the card holder is up-to-date of her work shift. Likewise, at the cashier, the member’ card is scanned again, operating a second, redundant control to prevent non-members or unassigned members to shop and benefit from la Louve selection of products and attractive prices. The shift system is thus first and foremost a binding system. Ensuring effective work is secondary, the priority is that every member is present 13 times three hours per year. Because the food coop is “more than a regular supermarket”, new missions will always be available for members (creation of a creche for shoppers or worker, cooking of a soup kitchen, composting of unsold produce, drive-home programs...). This has

several implications. First, members engage a lot in labor-intensive activities. Second, it secures an abundant labor force for the coop daily operations.

This first analysis on the shift system, does not tell us much of *how* these shifts are organized and what is done concretely. The most striking element during my ethnographic work was the substantial place taken by written procedures in the structuring of these alternative organization activities. To regulate and standardize the activity of members working only three hours a month, it was decided to use massively writings. The walls are thus covered by sheets, pictures, drawings, schemes, tables, lists, signs and indications to guide and inform members' work. Most activities are then prescribed through written procedures. These range from how to use trash bins to how to respect hygiene protocol while cutting and packaging cheese and include how to sign and fill-in attendance sheets, how to operate cashiers or how to use maintenance products. Even if all processes are not red by members, full-time employees have an extensive knowledge of these process, squad leaders were also asked several times by e-mail or direct communications to read those process in order to communicate rules and principles to members, ensuring the diffusion of rules.

Framing workflow

The workflow is extensively framed in the written process. Rules prescribe the number of cooperators required for each task. Temporality is also framed by prescribing the duration necessary for each task but also by frequently reminding readers of the virtue of patience and that rush is not needed. Diverse mechanisms are used to frame work spatiality. The “where” to work is often indicated in written process: “depalletizing must be done on the delivery area”, specific areas are, on the contrary, delimited as forbidden places (“no one is allowed inside trucks”). More generally places within the supermarket are being coded and labelled to frame the activity between shopping areas, delivery area, cold room, storage area and so on, creating a new arrangement of space, shared by members to standardize the activity. It is used for instance to standardize tools location and written process often precise, referring to these location codes, where to find and store brooms, cleaning products and other equipment. Finally, an important part of the framing process deals with the material side of work. Not all tools are considered equals, and some are thus specifically recommended to cooperators to undergo specific tasks and excluded from other functions: “the two black buckets under the table are for organic waste exclusively” or suggested as relevant protheses for members to be

able to act properly “Make sure that cooperators wear hygiene or safety equipment when necessary”.

Framing Food

To standardize work and ensure members capabilities within the supermarket, process often frame food. To perform the basic tasks necessary to run a supermarket, members use their food acknowledge and are asked to do so. For instance, when eggs delivery arrived, members are asked to check eggs boxes for non-compliant products, assuming they can recognize such. Likewise, when working near the produce scale, members are asked to check for spoiled products to sort them out of the shelves. Again, assuming that all members can recognize spoliations on every vegetable. Because, this is not the case, I witnessed many negotiations between members wondering if some signs were really physical signs of spoliations, or if those signs were large enough to justify wasting the product. To avoid mistakes, on specific cases, food is specifically framed such as: “Coconut oil from this supplier arrives on a fresh goods pallet but it goes in area 3 [where ambient products are stored]”.

Normative Framing

The written processes are also largely used to standardize and frame the normative ideals pursued by the coop. For instance, by insisting on the necessity of recycle and sort waste or by linking clearly specific work activities with the normative ideals on which members agreed. To pack dried fruits is allowing lower prices, the arduous task of collecting and compacting wooden boxes allows a service provider to hire people undergoing professional reintegration to collect the compacted products and recycle them.

Framing roles

Finally, procedures are used to frame actors’ roles within the coop. The role of a squad leader, of a full-time employee or of a regular member is thus specified but not only. These roles can be materialized through armband but mostly it gives volunteer members specific responsibilities. The squad leader is then someone familiar with the process, having red them, it is someone familiar with the space and localization of materials and able to find activities for members but also someone actively participating in the tasks.

An organization without surplus?

Products are less expensive within the coop because, by shopping at the coop, members are not remunerating the capital through a profit. A fixed margin of 20% is applied on all products to cover fixed costs such as rent, electricity, taxes and wage. Because capital is not remunerated, when leaving the coop, members cannot make a surplus by selling back their share of the coop. But labor is not remunerated either, at least most of it. Regarding waged labor, it does not generate surplus because there is no group acquiring the value of the waged labor to its own profit. Regarding deskilling and work intensification, two main debates among LPT, our preliminary results indicate other directions. Free labor is done by unskilled workers which by their consistent engagement within the coop acquire new skills on retail, consciously, often jokingly referring to it and their future capacity to sell it on the labor market. Because there is a massive availability of labor inside the coop, the tendency was not toward intensification but observations indicate that this can be linked to the early age of the coop. My observation of the PSFC in Brooklyn indicates that work is much more intensive there.

DISCUSSION:

The first contribution is empirical: Through this case study, we can illustrate how usual categories on cooperativism need to be rethought. Even though, *La Louve* is officially a consumer cooperative, we show that its organizing principles deviate largely from big consumer cooperatives such as cooperative banks or retail group like Coop in which cooperative shareholders are diluted and classic managerial practices largely diffused. New Wave Food Coops seem to partially overcome these drawback through the introduction of binding shift systems to have the right to shop. It has strong consequences on the legal framework under which these organizations operate. It is now not well suited and force these organizations to legal tinkering.

The second contribution is theoretical by showing the relevance of LPT to alternative organizations' analysis. LPT appears as a fruitful framework because it allows to go beyond a simple analysis of labor on the shop floor but rather encourage to make connections with broader political economy and put alternative organizations into perspective. It is thus interesting to note that this food coops, despite their potential and appeal, remain entangled in capitalistic food systems. Particularly on three dimensions. Firstly, it deals partly with regular for-profit suppliers, secondly, its volunteer members can afford to work freely for three hours every four weeks because they earn their living in other organizations, often in waged-relations within capitalist organizations. Thirdly, the food coop, remains entangled in a competitive social system of food retail: it controls only a (very small) part of the means of the production of the retail industry and competes with other firms (Adler, 2007) particularly around prices. More concretely, it means that its promise of cheaper prices is relative *to competing organizations* to which the food coop cannot escape but to compare to. This contributes to show the relevance of using Marxist studies to analyze alternative organizations, even though as they appear outside capitalism.

The third contribution shows how the study of alternative organizations can renew LPT by presenting critical issues. The present case has two critical features. On the one hand, the supermarket is not for profit and does not aim at extracting surplus value from its members, it is more about securing the time they give to the coop. *La Louve's* integration of six waged employees has mixed consequences. Their interests can appear opposed to that of volunteers because the more wages the more fixed costs and expensive prices but at the same time,

members decided for a fix gross margin of 20% on all products which mean than prices are always in control. On the other hand, most of the labor is done outside waged relations. But members expect cheaper food or access to affordable quality products which is a form of indirect remuneration. This creates a boundary case for LPT and its conceptual framework: cooperativism does not mean the end of labor process, we see clear signs of control. But, although present, the control of the labor process appears as pursuing radically different ends in our case with a focus on labor intensive activities and food issues such as securing access to craft products and local food. In other words, it differs on what is of value here.

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