

Co-producing Justice? How social cooperatives can support social integration and desistance

#CoproductingJustice

Twitter: @Coprod_Desist

Dr. Beth Weaver

beth.weaver@strath.ac.uk

University of Strathclyde,
Glasgow



Employment and Desistance

- How and why does work matter – and what does it mean to ‘matter’?
- It is the meaning and outcomes of either the nature and/or quality of the work, or simply participation in employment, and how these experiences influence an individual’s self-concept and social identity - as well as how they *interact* with a person’s priorities, goals and relational concerns that count (Weaver, 2015).

Where have we got to with supporting work integration in the UK?

- Not very far (though see MOJ 2018)
- Work in prison is unpaid – well, average is, conservatively, 30 pence per hour (£10 – £16 per week) (national min. wage for adults over 25 £7.50)
- On release – mandatory unpaid work ‘placements’ – and heavy financial sanctions in the event of non-compliance.

Methods

- Italy: 40 interviews, three cooperatives
 - 22 former prisoners/prisoners, 18 professionals
- Sweden: 24 interviews, eight cooperatives
 - 95% of employees from a disadvantaged background, many former participants
- UK: 54 interviews, three social enterprises
 - 28 professionals, 26 workers

Cultures and Contexts Count

- *Network relationships and external ties can influence the internal equilibrium of the [co-op], because internal norms develop in connection with the social values prevalent in the community (Borzaga et al., 2015: 224)*
- “Work’ with ‘family life’ and ‘house’ – this is a cultural norm of this area. These are the three values that have been chosen by the coop to respect the community culture’ (Professional_9_Italy)
- Work is much more important even than the value placed on family and the home because article 1 of our constitutional law said that our republic is based on work (Professional_12_Italy)

What it means to work: workers' views

Instrumental incentives and outcomes

- A cultural norm - and the constraints and conditions of social welfare and penal policies

The relational context and outcomes of work

- To be working alongside others is really important and working together makes you feel connected to something. Before I felt so isolated. There is a sense of togetherness among the women working in here (Worker, Female, Age 32_6)
- ...providing a job is not the only thing but through work, we put the person at the centre of our relations inside the co-op. The social relationships within the cooperative and the feelings that develop among people who belong to the coop are the most important part of the rehabilitative journey (Professional_1)

What it means to work: workers' views

A ***symbolic or communicative aspect to work***, in terms of what it signifies to and about oneself

- I had the need to show myself that I was able to work and so it is that I am (Worker, Male, Age 33_1 Italy)

And to others

- I have to show to my family that I am a different person and I have noticed that they are looking at me with different eyes (Worker, Male, Age 43_10 Italy)

And from others, therefore – social recognition and acceptance

- It provides me with access to a normal life, accepted (Worker, Male, No 2 Sweden)

Negatives relate to the level of pay although this varies between coops – some mirror that of private sector; for others its can be 200 euros less per month.

Overall self-reported job satisfaction was high.

What it feels like to work for a social cooperative

- In prison, its mainly about having a job and getting an income to save for release: the co-operative culture is constrained by the environment.
- ‘The ethics of the co-op is one of inclusion; it is to move toward, to develop, active citizenship. It is a way of acting – or being’ (Professional_2 Italy)
- In the cooperative, we all have to cooperate with each other and so the way we relate to and interact with each other is different – the whole experience is different. **It is a matter of responsibility.** We are all part of something that together is collectively owned. A boss [in a private firm] can instruct you to do something but, whatever way, the final product belongs to him or to her. You produce it for them. It is not yours. In a co-op the final product is yours, so you are invested in the whole process. **A cooperative depends on cooperation.** It cannot function any other way so unlike the private sector, **there is a chain of responsibility rather than a chain of command...**so, if I make a mistake, there is no sanction or punishment – **we work together, all of us, to find the solution.** (Worker, Female, Age 40_5 Italy)
- Once I realised what the place was about and what it was actually doing for people like myself and everybody else involved, do you know what I mean, I realised that they were trying to do good and that made it mean something (Worker_5 UK).

What reintegration means

- Working for the coop has given me a sense of what it is to be normal and to take responsibility...[it] has taught me how to live normally, within the rhythm of life (Worker, Male, Age 35_11_Italy)
- I feel that I am well accepted by people for what I am, as a normal person and not as a former prisoner. This is a very important element to improve your self-confidence... people from the area, not only from the coop, treat me as a normal person (Worker, Male, Age 46_20 Italy)
- Working alongside older experienced men gives the young people a sense that they can do something and then they see that they're not different to anybody else who's out there working full time...just to see that they're just the same as everybody else and they can do it as well' (Professional 5 UK)
- So see [when] you get this pay, it's like – wow, I can go and buy stuff for my house...I'm able to go out for a nice meal. And that's all the stuff that normal people do. But see when you're in addiction or recovery, that's abnormal to people, to go out for meals or to spend money on new flooring or new curtains (Worker _1 UK)

The recidivism question

- In [our] experience, the recidivism rate is very low: 2-3% (Professional_4 Italy)
- I don't have a percentage in my mind but it is well known that the employment opportunities provided by the cooperative help to stop recidivism (Professional_6)
- We don't have an absolute percentage ... we can see that of the people we work with in the cooperative, 70% of people don't commit crime again, while the percentage is the other way round in the case of people that aren't involved in the coop' (Professional_8)

Value added

- Route into employment in the first instance: overcome discrimination in labour market
- Provides a protected environment: people before profit
- Holistic and individualised resettlement support for both former/prisoner and their family
- The networked and cooperative culture and practice provides a range of concrete opportunities for social integration
- Trust, reciprocity, shared responsibility and cooperation are both the premise and promise of a relational good.