

RE-EMBEDDING WORK IN A POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PROJECT: THE CASE OF BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT COOPERATIVES IN FRANCE

[Justine Ballon, Stéphane Veyer](#)

De Boeck Supérieur | « [Journal of Innovation Economics & Management](#) »

2020/1 n° 31 | pages 101 à 122

DOI 10.3917/jie.pr1.0062

Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<https://www.cairn.info/revue-journal-of-innovation-economics-2020-1-page-101.htm>

Distribution électronique Cairn.info pour De Boeck Supérieur.

© De Boeck Supérieur. Tous droits réservés pour tous pays.

La reproduction ou représentation de cet article, notamment par photocopie, n'est autorisée que dans les limites des conditions générales d'utilisation du site ou, le cas échéant, des conditions générales de la licence souscrite par votre établissement. Toute autre reproduction ou représentation, en tout ou partie, sous quelque forme et de quelque manière que ce soit, est interdite sauf accord préalable et écrit de l'éditeur, en dehors des cas prévus par la législation en vigueur en France. Il est précisé que son stockage dans une base de données est également interdit.

Re-Embedding Work in a Political and Social Project: The Case of Business and Employment Cooperatives in France

Justine BALLON

*Laboratoire Dynamiques Sociales et Recompositions des Espaces
Paris Diderot University
La Manufacture coopérative (France)
justine.ballon@manufacture.coop*

Stéphane VEYER

*La Manufacture coopérative (France)
sv@manufacture.coop*

ABSTRACT

Among the innovative organizations that have emerged to support a growing number of self-employed workers, an innovative form of worker cooperative has developed over the past twenty years: the Business and Employment Cooperative (BEC). Faced with changes in work and employment, BECs are experimenting with new working methods by seeking to promote the autonomy of entrepreneurs within a democratic productive space. In view of the singularity of changes in work, new analytical schemes are outlined beyond the notion of salaried employment. This research is based on a field survey conducted in three French BECs. It invites us to analyze the political centrality of work in BECs through the notion of activity, inspired by the pragmatist philosophical movement. From a socio-economic perspective, this cooperative action research proposes an analysis of self-employment in BECs by breaking down the activities carried out by members (trade, community and governance), by putting into perspective the contributions and limits of multi-activity.

KEYWORDS: Activity, Work, Self-Employed Workers, Worker Cooperative, Worker Empowerment, Work Arrangements

JEL CODES: J53, J540, M540, Z130

The metamorphosis of labor in the last four decades has raised questions about the disappearance of salaried employment (d'Allondans, 2005). Since the 1980s, work transformations (reduction in company payrolls, increase in atypical jobs, subcontracting and franchising) in services and the digital economy have been combined with a high unemployment rate in France (ILO, 2016). Consequently, French employment policies have been promoting entrepreneurship, and generating an increase in non-salaried workers (Leighton, Brown, 2013; Jolly, Flamand, 2017). Although permanent employment contracts remain predominant in 2016, hybrid forms of employment have increased to reach 12% of the active population in France (+1.3% per annum compared to +0.6% for total employment) (Jolly, Flamand, 2017). The 'grey zone of employment' is characterized by new configurations of work based notably on commercial contracts blurring the boundaries between salaried employment and self-employment (Supiot, 1999; D'Amours *et al.*, 2017). These configurations recall the forms of work that marked the beginning of the industrial revolution of the 19th century, such as the subcontracting system (Castel, 1995). As a result, the notions of entrepreneurs, freelancers, self-employed workers, etc. have been reconsidered in recent research. Freelancers should be distinguished from the traditional forms of self-employment as 'a second generation of self-employed workers', considering their occupations, their working conditions and their aspirations (Fumagalli, Bologna, 1997). Analyzing the evolution of entrepreneurship in the 'new capitalism', Marchesnay (2014) deems it, as a necessity, to go beyond the duality between entrepreneurship and leadership in focusing on entrepreneurs' practices, that is to say their craftsmanship. New working processes and new configurations of labor relations such as triangulation (between the client, the self-employed worker, and the collective organization) characterize the current transformations of productive organizations, which query the analysis of work, beyond a wage-earning perspective (du Tertre, 2013; Bureau, Corsani, 2015).

Considering the future of work and the issue of self-employed workers, the second global report of the international organization of cooperatives in industry and services (Cicopa) highlights the 'Freelancers Union' in the USA, but also SMart Belgium and the French BECs (Eum, 2017, p. 68). "*Cooperatives can become laboratories to elaborate a new sense of work and can work together beyond the traditional division between subordinate work (employees)*" (*ibid.*). Among the organizations of the Social Economy, cooperatives represent a conjectural and structural answer to work transformation, as a mode of regulation of the social (Demoustier, Colletis, 2012). They represent an answer to the transformations regarding post-industrial labor, its post-wage-labor organization, and its socio-political ends (Bodet *et al.*, 2013). Anchored in worker cooperative history supporting autonomy at work

in democratic organizations, French BECs constitute a more than 20-year experimentation (first created in 1995), which was legally recognized by Law No. 2014-856 of July 31 2014. From an institutionalist perspective, BECs constitute a case of Social Innovation aimed at sustainable social changes, implemented by multiple stakeholders, and allowed by a democratic organization facilitating an active participation (Richez-Battesti *et al.*, 2012).

The BECs (known in French as Coopérative d'Activités et d'Emploi) were “developed as a political project and [aimed at solving] a social problem [at the macroeconomic level], linked to a macro-economic context [underemployment, externalization, rise in precariousness, part-time work, etc.]” (Bodet *et al.*, 2013, p. 48). BECs are a type of worker cooperative (in French, *Sociétés Coopératives et Participatives*), formed by entrepreneurs who practice an autonomous business activity within the framework of a single commercial entity. The cooperative helps entrepreneurs wishing to try out and develop their own business by mutualizing support functions in a community of peers. In joining the BEC, they can obtain the statute of employee and therefore have access to French Social Protection.² In 2017, around 11 000 entrepreneurs were active in one of the 137 BECs in France.³ More than a statute for entrepreneurs, their discourse on the re-appropriation of work, on occupation as knowhow, on workers’ autonomy, offers new perspectives to analyze the nature of work.

This article aims to understand the current mutations more precisely and analyzes the second generation of freelancers’ work from a pragmatic perspective, with the notion of activity. The case of entrepreneurs in BECs constitutes an interesting angle to study the case of an innovative organization experienced in Social Economy in France. Based on the complex nature of our subject, we will adopt a pluri-disciplinary approach combining the use of philosophical, sociological and economic notions, in order to better understand the singularity of the work of entrepreneurs. This paper is centered on two main questions. How do working experiences and experiments in BECs invite reconsideration of the analysis of work with the notion of activity? Looking at their socio-political project, how can we qualify the singularity of the work of participants⁴ in the BECs?

1. This and other French texts quoted in this paper are our own translations from French.

2. The General Social Security System in France corresponds to all the collective insurance arrangements. It allows individuals and French households to face up to the financial consequences of social risks, of situations likely to provoke a reduction in revenue and/or an increase in expenditure. It covers all professions except independent workers and workers in the agricultural sector. Independent workers are covered by a special section translated as the ‘Independent Workers’ Social Security System’, with lower contributions and a correspondingly lower level of protection compared to the General System.

3. Source: Confédération Générale des Scop, 2018.

4. The word ‘participant’ in this article includes entrepreneurs and employees of the BECs.

Work is conceived as a “productive activity of goods and services, the set of conditions of this activity” (Maruani, Reynaud, 2004, p. 4). It is also an instrument of the reproduction and transformation of society, a means of political action (Freysenet, 1999). The political centrality of work and the place of subjectivity should be reaffirmed to reform the analysis of work and social relations (du Tertre, 2013). Considering work transformations, this article adopts a pragmatic approach to study work, beyond the wage-earner notion, through the heterogeneity of its activities (Bidet *et al.*, 2006; du Tertre, 2013). The notion of activity supplements the notion of work in a perspective of social transformation.

This article is divided into three parts. In the first part, after presenting the process of the cooperative action-research used to conduct this investigation, we will introduce the pragmatist notion of activity as a relevant concept to analyze the new centrality of work in organizations such as BECs. Because of the singularity of the BECs’ socio-political project and their working organization, the second part analyzes the re-embedding of different kinds of activities which comprise the work in BECs: education, occupation, solidarity, democracy.

Renew the Analytical Framework in the Socio-Economics of Work: An Approach from the Notion of Activity

The following analytical framework starts with the research methodology we adopted to analyze work in BECs, in line with the specificity of our dual position of researchers and actors. Second, we explain the relevance of the analysis of work to the notion of activity, considering the new centrality of work in a context of mutations. Finally, consideration of the socio-political project of cooperatives allows us to introduce the analytical framework we used to investigate the singularity of work in BECs.

Cooperative Action-Research with the BECs

In the large family of action-research, this cooperative action-research is based on the questions of the two authors within the BEC, Coopaname, where they were working as employees (Veyer, Sangiorgio, 2006; Ballon, Bodet, 2017).⁵ Action-research in the tradition of the French Social Economy

5. A salaried researcher at Coopaname, the first author benefited from a special contract (Convention Industrielle de Formation par la Recherche), which allows PhD students to carry out their doctoral

is a research process in social sciences. Tremendous importance is placed on the experience of the researcher in the analysis of real practices, on the involvement of the researcher in the process of objectification and formalization, and finally on the production of knowledge that is useful in action (Desroche, 1990). It was thus supplemented by Dewey's pragmatic approach: an inquiry starts with the experience of problem solving in using abductive reasoning, moving back and forth between action and research (Dewey, 1938). In this perspective, three main stylized facts have been identified: entrepreneurs' difficulties in finding business opportunities which mean the absence of a payroll, or a low payroll, employees' work overload and the place of voluntary time dedicated to the cooperative life (e.g. General Assembly, seminars). The dual aim of cooperative action-research was to provide a relevant analytical framework to consider new forms of work while increasing participants' knowledge to understand the nature of their own work and improve their working arrangements.

The study was carried out with three BECs (Coopaname, Oxalis and Arternréel) over three years (2015-2018). Work has been analyzed on participant observations (team meetings, workshops, associate member seminars, General Meetings, etc.) and forty interviews (with a panel of members representing the BECs). Nine research workshops were organized in 2016/17 with three BEC participants, in order to identify the problem at stake concerning work and to study a set of ideas to solve it. Scientific papers written by BECs' members, feature articles and discussion forums published in the non-specialized press, have also been accessed. The results of the sociological quantitative study on revenues and working time, focused on Coopaname and Oxalis, have also been used (Ballon *et al.*, 2018). Considering the singularity of work relations in BECs, based notably on the entrepreneur-salaried-associated legal status, our research has led us to consider the nature of work with the notion of activity rather than that of the wage-earner.

From Work to Activity: Analyzing the Centrality of Work

In France, Regulation Theory, which affirmed the centrality of social relations, namely the wage-labor nexus, proposed an analysis of the organization and processes of work (Saillard, Boyer, 2010). Yet the wage-labor nexus does not cover all working situations, such as the 'service economy', or the entire social relation of work, as real work exceeds prescribed work,

research thanks to private and public funding. The second author is a co-founder and former employee of Coopaname.

as the psychodynamic of work has proved (du Tertre, 2013). The nature of work and of working organizations has been transformed with the economic sector of services and technological changes (digitalization, development of personal computers, smartphones and the Internet). It is focused on workers' capacity for intelligence initiatives and subjectivity, such as communication, negotiation, exchange, circulation, etc. We have already emphasized above the increasing number of self-employed workers. Beyond the thesis which considers the end of work or even the end of salaried employment, we judge those mutations to be an invitation to reconsider the common analytical frameworks used to analyze work (Bureau, Corsani, 2015).

As a space for socialization, the time spent at work fostered social ties, established socioeconomic connections and cultural habits. Therefore, work also enabled individuals to develop their skills and creativity. *“Even if work occupies us less than yesterday, the centrality of work remains and it is the work, in its relationship to capital and as a valuable producer, which continues to structure the economic and the social”* (Durand, 2017, p. 232). Work is a social-historical category which is considered as central in capitalism, according to Marxist theory. It is based in particular on the labor relationship and the free worker selling his or her capability to work (Freysenet, 1999). Inspired by Marx's Social Theory, and the centrality of work, according to Dewey, the French philosopher E. Renault identifies three main points (Renault, 2012). First, work plays an important role in the formation of intellectual faculties. Second, it is a place of socialization where human beings realize shared activities which produce intellectual, moral, and affective effects. Last, work favors the unification of individual identity. Dewey *“attributes a role of paradigm [...] and psychological and social centrality to work”* (Renault, 2012, p. 148) giving work a crucial role in transforming society into one that is fairer and more democratic. The practice of an activity helps the human being to develop specific capacities and social recognition, clearly embodied by the craftsman. The notion of craftsmanship defined as *“an enduring, a basic, lasting human urge, the desire to do good work for its own sake”*, also implies a creative act (Sennett, 2008, p. 9). Today, the new emerging figure of the freelancer tends to embody a new form of craftsmanship where the occupation (in services and the digital economies) and knowhow become central to understanding their work (Marchesnay, 2014). The ‘maker movement’ is a good example of this new generation of freelancers (Lallement, 2015). In this pragmatist perspective, work is a place where human beings' experiences (through the resolution of problems, in a collective organization, in the process of work) contribute to developing their competencies, their capacities.

For a long time, French sociology was focused on the study of work through wage employment. The notion of ‘activity’ has opened a new epistemological perspective (Bidet *et al.*, 2006; Célérier, 2016). Pragmatic sociology considers work as a ‘*practical accomplishment*’ focusing on concrete ways to accomplish tasks and effective work, as it is carried out *in situ*: the living experiment of work (Bidet *et al.*, 2006). The notion of ‘activity’ is defined here as a set of actions performed to achieve a result linked with one’s work: training, organizing, networking, making, debating, governing, etc. In this perspective, the concept of activity allows us to study how working time is scheduled between different tasks and interactions, taking into account the subjectivity in this (Bidet *et al.*, 2006). Today, with the growing number of self-employed workers, the temporality and technicality of work is determinant in working organizations. Human work in the services economy and cognitive capitalism “is subjected to the requirements of plasticity and responsiveness” (Bidet, 2011, p. 12). Therefore, A. Bidet proposes to mobilize the concept of ‘multiactivity’, which is based on Dewey’s concept of ‘experience’ (*ibid.*). Work is understood as a time process and intertwined activities. This concept of work as an activity, or even a multi-activity, is the theoretical basis of the present article, which attempts to define work on the practical, cognitive, and subjective level in BECs. In addition, the present research will be concluded with the analysis of work in the light of the social relationship of work. It appears crucial in order to understand the intertwining of different activities and labor relationships (Célérier, 2016).

Work, viewed here as various activities, has a normative place in capitalist society. As a social connection, it fits into a labor organization and a firm that organizes its economic, strategic, and political orientations. Nevertheless, the “*heteronomization process of work*” (economic organization, division of labor) prevents workers from defining and controlling their own labor and really seeing work as an experience, instead of a constraint (Gorz, 1988). From this consideration of the political centrality of work in our societies and the notion of activity, we will now consider the singularity of work in BECs.

A 3D Approach to Work in BECs: The Singularity of Participants’ Multiactivity

Let us consider the dual nature of cooperatives’ productive activities as a twofold project articulating economic and socio-political aims. The International Cooperative Alliance defines a cooperative as “*an association that is independent, where people come together voluntarily hoping to join economic, social, and cultural needs and ambitions by such an enterprise that is*

*jointly owned and democratically controlled*⁶. Precisely, this definition relies on seven principles settled in 1995: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; members' economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training, and information; cooperation among cooperatives; concern for community. In other words, cooperatives also consider the social and cultural needs of their members and give power to their members to participate in decision-making. Cooperatives distinguish themselves from other forms of business organizations as their members combine several 'roles' (co-owners, co-managers, etc.) and the betterment of the situation of the members is preferred over producing high returns on invested capital (Bernardi, 2007). Through the principles and a legal framework, serving a project that is simultaneously economic, political, and social, the cooperative endeavors to re-embed a company's economic activities into a political project: answering the community's interests through a democratic organization serving its members. The difficulty lies in ensuring the conditions for achieving this project with the tension between a company's economic constraints and the political project. Implementing the democratic mechanism is not limited to respecting the legal status or providing the required information; it lies in the cooperative's ability to mobilize and involve its employee-members (Gupta, 2014).

BECs aim to be an answer to the transformations affecting employment, the increased precariousness of wage earners, and the emergence of a hybrid status, partway between salaried employment and self-employment (Bodet *et al.*, 2013; Bureau, Corsani, 2015). First, by providing help with the development and management of an autonomous business activity, and by mutualizing support functions so as to allow more time and energy to do the actual job. Second, BECs have an educational role: to support people (without any selection on business plans) in learning by doing to manage their own business (Draperi, 2007). Finally, BECs use salaried status in order to allow their entrepreneurs to benefit from Social Security. But at the same time they criticize the link of subordination that this presupposes (Bureau, Corsani, 2015).

A BEC is organized around the mutualized functions needed for the development of the business of an entrepreneur: accountancy, assistance and training, administration, pay and contract management. They are mostly financed by the 'contribution to the cooperative' (10 to 15% of the gross profits of the entrepreneurs' businesses). Several categories of workers can be identified: employees (mutualized functions), entrepreneurs (some of them are salaried entrepreneurs), both can become associate members. Work contracts

6. Source: ICA, Statement on the Cooperative Identity, 1995.

URL: <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

are long-term; working hours and salary vary based on each entrepreneur's level of activities, except for a 'classic employee'. The diversity of occupations is considerable, for example training, writing, gardening, web development, art therapy, assisting cooperatives, advice for a collective wind farm project, international cooperation, etc.

The results of this research show that there are three different dimensions in members' activities: the occupational dimension, the community dimension, and the governance dimension. Participants' observations and interviews have made it possible to list activities performed by cooperative participants per day and per week. These have been mapped according to the purposes participants gave to them. Participants' activities have been classified along three dimensions, an ideal-type of their activities: occupation-related, community-related, and governance-related. Indeed, the reality shows the entrenchment between the different activities. This explains the absence of quantitative data concerning the time allocated to each dimension. The results are presented dimension by dimension (occupation, community and then governance).

The first dimension identified is that of *occupation*. Economic activities, namely market-based exchanges with monetary compensation, consist of practicing an occupation or using one's expertise and knowledge (as an accountant, coach, gardener, translator, etc.). As production and work are different, two categories can be identified: businesses developed by entrepreneurs and mutualized functions carried out by employees. The first consists in both practicing an occupation and managing the businesses (marketing tasks, commercial prospecting, managing client relations, etc.). The mutualized functions are more homogeneous (executive management, partnerships, accounting, training, networking, and facilitation for internal cooperation activities, etc.). This represents most of participants' working time.

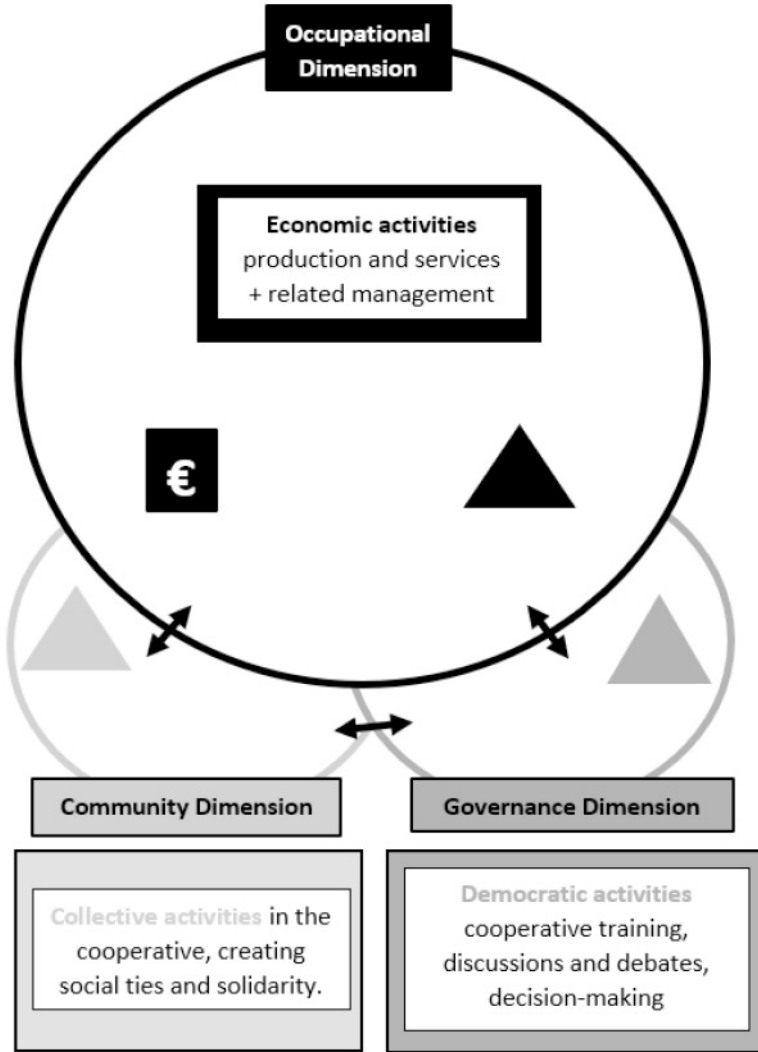
The *community*⁷ dimension binds its members together. Collective activities allow participants to break out of isolation. These activities favor encounters and cooperation among the autonomous workers, thus creating social ties and a common culture. They are mainly non-market based. Tangibly, this dimension comprises all the time required to organize and hold group events that enable cooperative members to meet one another, to discuss their activities, to share their knowledge, expertise, technical skills, methods, to help and assist one another. This includes regular meetings organized for entrepreneurs, occupational events, assistance/support programs, which can evolve towards shared or collective brands. Collective activities help build

7. Defined as a group of people living in a community or forming a political, economic or cultural association.

forms of solidarity and exchange, generally non-market-based, for entrepreneurs seeking a collective setting.

Among the members' activities, there are those that enable a democratic working space to be constructed. The *governance dimension* refers to the exercise of economic citizenship, to the right to participate in a worker cooperative's governance, making it possible to build a framework of rules that entrepreneurs chose themselves. This category includes time spent on democracy within the cooperative: decision making, preparing and conducting seminars for associate members, preparing and holding general meetings, participating in working groups on democracy-related topics, or time spent on cooperative education. These activities allow members to participate in the decisions that determine the framework for their work. It is an opportunity for individuals to give their opinions to the group – whether members choose to use this opportunity.

Figure 1 – The three dimensions of work in BEC



There are activities which are rather individual (such as economic activities) and market-based, whereas others have a collective aim. Studying entrepreneurs' work allows activities to be broken down differently compared to classic employees. The coordination of activities, for example, does not directly contribute to providing a turnover or a wage. Furthermore, the democratic activities characterize work in worker cooperatives: without the members' commitment or the conditions created by the organization to make it

happen. The analysis through the notion of 'activity' shows three intertwined dimensions of participants' work that are not only directed to economic ends.

Participants' Multiactivity in BECs

The current field survey within three BECs allows us to identify three categories of activities corresponding to the three dimensions: participants practice an occupation; they cooperate and participate in a democratic organization. A fourth category has been identified among the members' activities: education and learning. This category has the particularity of being both central in members' work and transversal insofar as it crosses each of the three categories of activities we have first identified.

The centrality of work based on education, socialization and identity allows us to analyze the combination of different activities. This part will also discuss the tensions between the activities and their intertwining, in terms of the time distribution provided for one activity or another, of remunerated activity, etc. In other words, the gap between the socio-political project and its implementation is questioned. First, transversal education and learning activities will be discussed, occupation and self-employment in a second part, then the community, and finally democracy at work.

Education and Learning

Among the cooperative principles determined by the ICA, cooperatives have emphasized the importance of education and training for their members, managers and employees in order to give equal power to members; the cooperative movement gives a central function to knowledge and learning by doing. How to manage one's own business is mostly done by 'learning by doing', by experiencing this. In a classic firm, participants emphasize the relationship based on subordination and competition, which is encouraged. In BECs, cooperation and equality between all members is strongly encouraged. Therefore, education is central in BECs. These education activities are part of the participants' work and fit simultaneously into the occupational dimension (e.g. marketing workshops), in that of governance (e.g. a seminar about becoming an associate member), and in the political one (e.g. groups of Professional Co-Development⁸).

8. An adaptation of collective and mutual training workshops created by Adrien Payette and Claude Champagne.

What makes it difficult for BECs is the diverse backgrounds of members, first in terms of occupations, participants' motivations to join the BEC (for example: as an alternative to individual entrepreneurship, to benefit from mutualized functions because of the Cooperative Statute, etc.), and lastly, concerning knowledge about cooperative history, its governance principles, etc. The BECs need to be flexible to include all participants.

Most of the entrepreneurs were employees before, which means that they do not know how to manage a business. BECs were created to help entrepreneurs to gradually master the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills needed. Workshops and individual or collective meetings with BECs' employees allow participants to acquire those competences in learning by doing and give them the capacities to manage their business autonomously. It is "*continuous and life-long learning [...] In a classic firm, there are not so many exchanges and not so much mutual learning*" explains ESA⁹, a training consultant in HR at Coopaname.

BECs' communities also provide a reflection on the place and the sense of work attached to the occupation. Indeed, the notion of craftsmanship is regularly used in BECs' participants discourses, coming from the French worker cooperative historical movement (Veyer, Sangiorgio, 2006). Their critical discourses concern the intensification of work in capitalistic firms where profit becomes more important than people and there is subordination in a labor relationship (Bureau, Corsani, 2015). "*At first, we are deformed by life in a company. It is job conditioning. We have been used to hierarchical relationships. We considered that [our referent] had additional knowledge and legitimacy, but she was not in this position*" explains ESA⁸.

Participants' knowledge concerning the cooperative system is very diverse. Therefore, BECs give an important place to spaces where it is possible to discover the history, principles, and rules of the cooperative movement. The first workshops emphasized the historical roots and the sociopolitical project of each cooperative analyzed here.

Occupation, Self-Organization and Self-Employment

The economic dimension occupies most of participants' working time, it is also the one that allows them to obtain a wage. Each worker chooses his or her own business (*e.g.* creating jewelry using a technique or with special materials), determines the organization of his or her work (hours and place),

9. In order to protect the anonymity of the members interviewed, each extract is identified by a code. E stands for entrepreneur, S for salaried employee and A for associate member. The interviews are numbered in chronological order and the type of activity is indicated.

with whom they want to work (a client, subcontractor, or co-contractor), and remuneration (based on overheads, time worked, and cash flow). ESA10, a landscape architect, did not want to work in an office because of the working conditions. The idea is to enable workers to control the conditions for practicing their occupation by collective ownership of their means of production, without a hierarchical organization, nor objectives that they are unable to decide on their own. They reject the heteronomous character of work in capitalist firms by adopting a framework for using one's own expertise (Bodet *et al.*, 2013). In this respect, work in a BEC is the opposite of industrial work. Skills and occupations are put forward by the BECs, notably in their communication tools, enhancing their members' talents on social networks.

The ability to manage one's working time, to choose one's tools, and even one's clients appeared to be very important in interviews. "*I feel independent in a collective organization*" explained ESA8. Entrepreneurs enjoy the possibility to organize their working hours based on their capacity to concentrate throughout the day. "*You manage your work according to what you have to produce*" said S3, an accountant. Despite their classic labor contract, employees who were responsible for mutualized functions explained the possibility of self-organization. S1, an accountant at Coopaname, chooses to work during times when he is more efficient (from 7.00 until 10.00). The opportunity to link personal interests with their professional work was also mentioned several times. The former S33, in charge of support at Artenréel, appreciated getting involved in specific projects according to her passion for dance.

Horizontal relationships are emphasized by more than half of the participants, making a clear distinction between classic firms and BECs. "*Each member assumes responsibilities according to her/his competencies*" ESA22. Choosing a BEC means becoming 'one's own boss', but without working entirely alone; this requires a desire and ability to organize one's work on one's own.

Work takes on meaning as part of a life project, incorporating human constraints. Members interviewed connected emancipation with the possibility of organizing their work within the framework of their lives (for example to strike a better work/life balance). E6, in charge of support for collectives at Oxalis, appreciated being able to combine his work activities at the cooperative with his volunteer work in associations. Parents with young children mentioned the flexibility of their working hours, which gives them a better relationship between professional and personal life (1/4 of the participants interviewed). This also means working more at certain periods and less at other times to carry out employment activities: ESA17, a heating engineer at Oxalis, explained that she was working less for a period of time, thus earning lower wages because she was building her house herself. Indeed, this low pay

can crystallize all the workers' efforts, to the detriment of community-based and governance activities, or even at the expense of their wellbeing at work. Some of the entrepreneurs have accepted cuts in their salary (around 50% for E8, according to a trainer at Coopaname) compared to their previous jobs in large firms: their priorities lie in other expectations than only wages (personal life, control of their work).

Each entrepreneur is responsible for his or her own remuneration, based on the turnover generated, which also represents a potentially unstable or precarious situation (Ballon *et al.*, 2018). This factor sets the entrepreneurs apart from employees of the mutualized entity; the latter have a stable monthly income. Indeed, the limit of working as an entrepreneur is to make a sufficient turnover to generate an income, which can vary according to participants' expectations. The interviews show that economic activities are not as developed as they expect them to be. The capacity to generate sufficient revenues is a limitation of the self-employed business model. E14, a writer specialized in communication, at Oxalis: *"We are entrepreneurs. Everything depends on our proactive side: our capacity to find and convince clients and then to produce. Thus, we are completely responsible for the management of our activity and for its smooth functioning; while in a classic company, we are sure to be paid every month [...], no matter. In a BEC, there is no choice, we need to be the best at any time"*. The workers earn a relatively low income: around €900 gross (before tax and contributions) per month (Ballon *et al.*, 2018). The divergences between hours worked and hours paid is significant, with periods of overwork, and unpaid work. 20% of the entrepreneurs considered that 75% of their work is paid in accordance with the answers of 232 BEC participants at Oxalis and Coopaname (*ibid.*). The difficulty comes from the capacity to find clients, to expand their business, to protect their prices in the face of multinational companies. Furthermore, some parts of economic activities are not always remunerated (commercial prospecting, administrative tasks).

"In a BEC, the fragmentation of activities is not easy to manage: you need to manage your business and its development at the same time. If the business is not working, you need to leave the BEC" recalls ESA21, a public designer at Oxalis. The tensions between practicing an occupation and the difficulties of autonomous business expansion show the limits of the re-embedding of economics in a socio-political project in a capitalist context of competition.

A Community Based on Solidarity and Cooperation

Not all participants take part equally in community activities. It depends on their priorities, their needs, the dynamic of their business, etc., especially

since those activities are not directly rewarded. However, participants show a real interest in the business model and the political project of the BEC. Indeed, among the reasons that led participants to join, the possibility to meet and possibly work with peers has often been mentioned during the interviews. ESA11 explains “*I joined an organization where I wanted to meet people and go into a cooperative which represents for me a mode of mutual aid, an exchange of services*”. ESA8 emphasizes ‘*membership of a company with the possibility of sharing. [The fact that] it is based on people and not capital. Also, the exchanges and training. The gift/counter-gift.*’ BECs reinvent shared work time in a company where entrepreneurs could all work alone without meeting others. BECs offered a community of shared interest, based on entrepreneurs’ needs (Bureau, Corsani 2018).

Employees of the mutualized entity coordinate exchanges and meetings between entrepreneurs through an ‘occupation group’, ‘informal event’, etc. “*The cooperation is an advantage because it is a reassuring frame and it makes you feel important*” explains ESA22, who has created two collective brands (with several entrepreneurs in and out of the cooperative) in Coopaname since he arrived in 2013. Those shared times create trust between entrepreneurs who would not necessarily have worked together without meeting each other. ESA36, a photographer, contributed to create and coordinate a laboratory of photography at Artenréel. The establishment of contacts allows photographers to acquire new skills together, to exchange business contracts, and to share their professional equipment. As there is only one response of a company to a call for tenders, BECs participants are also encouraged to cooperate. Cooperation also consists in reciprocity exchanges. For example, at Artenréel, ESA11, a graphic designer, explained during an interview that he had created a graphic chart for a massage therapist in exchange for several hours of massage.

Several entrepreneurs emphasized the necessity to choose in what kind of community-based activities to get involved, according to their priorities, especially the necessity to develop their business activity. “*It is something that takes time. [...] It is a risk and a tension [...] I wanted to take part in those meetings [on gender, on local currency] but at the same time: is it the priority?*” explained a former trainer in the social work field at Coopaname. The risk is to spend too much time in community-based activities, at the expense of economic activities, such as E9, an engineer in social work at Coopaname, for example. That is why in Coopaname a group of members produced a report in 2014 on the ‘contribution to the collective’ in the cooperative, with thoughts about how to evaluate it. The action-research about *Revenues and Working Times* revealed that production with other peers in BECs strengthens the

entrepreneurs' business opportunities (Ballon *et al.*, 2018). On the contrary, another risk for the cooperative is that entrepreneurs might develop their business without looking for links with the collective, or that they simply use the 'services' offered by the BEC.

In work situations, *spaces for deliberation in work* play a crucial role in formulating one's opinions and sharing them with others, in a forum for listening and consideration. Therefore, community-based activities are an opportunity for participants to collectively define their working conditions and to improve them. It allows them to learn new techniques in their occupation and to create collective brands. These spaces characterize this interconnection between the political project and the economic activities of the BECs, but also between the individual and the collective. However, the absence of a central working place does not facilitate regular meetings between the entrepreneurs. Co-working places have been developed partially in BECs, as an answer to the demands of entrepreneurs. Currently, BECs in France are evaluating the opportunity of combining the functions of a 'classic' BEC with a co-working space for their entrepreneurs, which should change this situation in the future.

BECs constitute a framework where, despite the diversity of businesses, cooperative values are supported to insure a friendly, solidarity-based and cooperation-based community where peers are working together rather than against each other. BECs promote a responsible entrepreneurship based on a horizontal labor relationship and "mutual reciprocity" (Veyer, Sangiorgio, 2006). The participants' work activities, categorized in the community and governance dimensions, create group spaces that foster social ties, cooperation and forums for discussion and decision making.

Democracy at Work

The challenge for BECs is to make members' participation in a shared governance possible, not only formally (participation and voting in general meetings) but also informally. Members create and develop their own rules and take part in the decision-making process, which enables them to more easily organize in terms of the management of their business. The democratic activities are not mandatory, but they are necessary for the cooperative to function properly and avoid the banalization process, where economic aims become more important than the socio-political project. Seminars are organized on average twice a year and there are two general meetings in the BECs studied. Associate members can participate in the organization of those days as volunteers, or only attend the meeting. For example, in November 2017,

a seminar about industrial relations that was open to every participant (and not only members) was organized in Coopaname. Artenréel organized several seminars with associate members to enforce the new rules about membership following the 2014 law. The capacity to determine the orientations and priorities of their own company, which they collectively own, constitute an important factor for participants. They emphasized either the choice they have made to join a democratic company or the discovery of a different way of working. *“I appreciate the fact that we have shares in a company. I think that it gives a stronger feeling of membership; it reinforces the spirit of solidarity. And then the fact that everybody has a say, that every piece of advice is considered, I really like this idea”* explains E14.

Most of those activities are not paid, except sometimes for the President, depending on the BEC. Taking part in democratic activities also means less time for economic activities. *“Between a General Assembly and a day of paid training: I have made my choice, I go for the paid work”* affirmed ESA30. Time-consuming democratic activities encourage minimal involvement, if any: there is a tension between the economic aspect and the community-based one (the will to take part in creating a collective framework) (Ballon *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, the complexity of the BECs does not facilitate members' involvement: during the interviews, some members stated that the BEC was *“too complicated”* or *“it takes time to understand how it works”*. The risk is that a minority of members will carry out these activities, often the founders or directors, or the employees who have a stable wage every month, i.e. a small number making decisions for the majority. These tensions between economic activities and democratic activities represent a risk of weakening the re-embedding of the economic in a socio-political sphere, which those BECs are aiming for. However, considering the means that the community and its members can offer (especially in terms of time), the democratic activities show a living and dynamic democracy with a regular rhythm of meetings. Seminars and general assemblies offer far more opportunity to speak and debate on cooperative orientations.

These collective spaces characterized by the lack of division of labor are *“not subject to specializations [...] enabling shared expression by stakeholders, as people, in other words, apart from their function alone”* (Chevallier, 2007, p. 5). It is made possible thanks to trust, which is created during the community-based activities. Indeed, the challenge is for each person to go beyond the individual work sphere, specialization, and occupation to create a society. This is a real difficulty in a collective composed mostly by entrepreneurs. The possibility to participate in collective discussions, debates and votes

which will determine the organizations, rules, and business model of the BECs allows members to control their work for real.

Work, as part of a whole, or as part of life viewed holistically, requires moments dedicated to different activities, interconnected or embedded. There is time dedicated to economic activities (with production aimed at obtaining a basic income, which can vary depending on the individual), some to governance-related activities (building a collective) or to community-based activities (building social ties, cooperation, and exchanges). BEC's members can control their work, by bringing these activities together. Indeed, each kind of dimension includes educational time: to learn how to manage their own activity, how to work together on a call for tenders, or what are the statutes of a worker cooperative.

Discussion and Conclusion

French BECs constitute an interesting field study to analyze the current socioeconomic mutations as well as innovative productive organizations, among co-working spaces and fab labs (Bureau, Corsani, 2018). Work in a BEC provides both social ties and a feeling of belonging to a group which fosters solidarity and cooperation. Moreover, it facilitates income generation for the workers, and creates a shared governance framework that is chosen collectively. Each member practices an occupation, participates in a collective, and can exercise his or her power to act. The results of this research constitute a tool to identify the tensions at work for entrepreneurs in a democratic organization. Among the organizations gathering together entrepreneurs, BECs renew a certain vision of the utopian figure of the craftsman (Sennett, 2008; Marchesnay, 2014). The 'neo-craftsman' controls his own work based on his skills: work is then defined as *poiesis*, a "sovereign action of [the human being] over matter" (Gorz, 1988, p. 93).

Our research process based on a pragmatist inquiry supplemented by cooperative research-action with the BECs' participants has allowed mapping of the activities in a two-fold analytical framework: first, three dimensions (economic activities, community-based activities, and democratic activities), second, four categories of activities. The notion of activity makes it possible to understand all the workers' tasks, by specifying the different aims they are trying to achieve according to three dimensions. Deeply embedded with one another, those three dimensions go beyond a simple sum of their different parts. Work, characterized as a whole, reflects the political centrality of work supported by BECs. The definition of work surpasses the rationalized view of work as a productive and market-based activity: it is no longer simply about

one isolated economic aspect, but instead, various activities are embedded together to form a whole. From worker cooperative principles and a critical vision of work, BECs constitute a collective organization based on solidarity, mutualization and cooperation. They offer a place where it is possible to combine different kind of activities, according to individual subjective needs and interests.

However, the challenge for BECs lies in their capacity to promote their political project, to bring life to the community given the diversity of participants, the wide variety of multiple kinds of production, and to ensure sufficient income for all their members. Indeed, only the occupational dimension generates revenues, but by combining with the community dimension, it can give rise to forms of economic cooperation that will benefit workers. If economic activities constitute most working time, the community-based and governance activities proved to be fundamental in the functioning of the BECs. This reflection also questions the place of market-based and reciprocity exchanges, which are not recognized and are counted with difficulty, but which appeared in this study as important to understand work in those cases. Furthermore, if this study focuses on the notion of 'activity', the labor relationship should not be forgotten. Entrepreneurs are dependent on clients, sometimes only one. In addition to this, if the organizations tend to be democratic, the research shows inequities between employees of mutualized functions and entrepreneurs. The employees of mutualized functions benefit from a stable wage every month, but their working contracts define their activities more. Lastly, this study based on three cases should be widened to other BECs, to analyze the place of community-based and democratic activities which vary according to their own political project. In the changing world of labor, BECs experiment with innovative working arrangements, pursuing this idea of social transformations for the betterment of the entrepreneurs' situation. The re-embedding of economic activities in a socio-political project, promoted by BECs, shows freelancers' quest for adapted work-spaces to practice their profession autonomously. The mutations of work with the increasing number of freelancers, emerging cooperative platforms, new forms of trade unions dedicated to self-employed workers, co-working organizations, or the umbrella companies' workers, invite a pursuit of research comparing work in each of those different organizations (statutes, relationship, nature of work). The process of social innovation at stake in BECs is, however, deeply rooted in a perspective of social change, aimed at creating a democratic workplace where autonomous work can become a reality (Bureau, Corsani, 2018).

REFERENCES

- D'ALLONDANS, A. G. (2005), Les métamorphoses du travail, *Innovations*, 22(2), 9-32.
- BALLON, J., BODET, C. (2017), De l'action à la recherche et vice-versa: l'émancipation par le Savoir à Coopanama, in Lafaye, C. (ed.), *Construire collectivement du sens – Les apports de François Rousseau*, Jurisasso, Paris, Dalloz, Hors-Série, 62-79.
- BALLON, J., BODET, C., BUREAU, M.-C., CORSANI, A., DE GRENIER, N., DESGRIS, A.-L. (2018), La Investigación Como Herramienta de Cambio Democrático: La Experiencia de Dos Cooperativas de Actividades y de Empleo, *Revista Del Centro de Estudios del Trabajo*, 10, 7-37.
- BERNARDI, A. (2007), The Co-Operative Difference: Economic, Organizational and Policy Issues, *Cooperative Management*, 3(2), 11-23.
- BIDET, A. (2011), La multi-activité ou le travail est-il encore une expérience ?, *Communications*, 89, 9-26.
- BIDET, A., BORZEIX, A., PILLON, T., ROT, G., VATIN, F. (2006), *Sociologie du travail et activité*, Toulouse, Octarès Editions.
- BODET, C., DE GRENIER, N., LAMARCHE, T. (2013), La Coopérative d'activités et d'emploi à la recherche d'un modèle productif, *Revue internationale de l'économie sociale*, 329, 37-51.
- BUREAU, M.-C., CORSANI, A. (2018), Collective Actions on the Margins of the Salariat, *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 24(3), 279-295.
- BUREAU, M.-C., CORSANI, A. (2015), Les Coopératives d'Activité et d'Emploi: pratiques d'innovation institutionnelle, *Revue française de socio-économie*, 15, 213-231.
- CASTEL, R. (1995), *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale: une chronique du salariat*, Paris, Fayard.
- CELERIER, S. (2016), Activité ou salariat? Nouons une controverse autour du travail. *Sociologie et sociétés*, 48(1), 35-57.
- CHEVALLIER, M. (2007), Patrimoine et lien social comme résistances à l'économisation, *7^e Rencontre RIUESS*, May 24-25, Rennes.
- D'AMOURS, M., NOISEUX, Y., PAPINOT, C., VALLEE, G. (2017), New Frontiers of the Employment Relationship, *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, 72(3), 421-432.
- DEMOUSTIER, D., COLLETIS, G. (2012), L'économie sociale et solidaire face à la crise: simple résistance ou participation au changement?, *Revue internationale de l'économie sociale*, 325, 21-35.
- DESROCHE, H. (1990), *Entreprendre d'apprendre, d'une autobiographie raisonnée aux projets d'une Recherche-Action*, Paris, Editions Ouvrières.
- DEWEY, J. (1938), *Logic – The Theory of Inquiry*, 1991 ed., Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DRAPERI, J.-F. (2007), Fondements éthiques et posture épistémologique de la recherche en économie sociale, *Revue internationale de l'économie sociale*, 303, 67-82.
- DURAND, J.-P. (2017), *La fabrique de l'homme nouveau. Travailler, consommer et se taire?*, Paris, Le Bord de l'eau.
- EUM, H. S. (2017), *Cooperatives and Employment: Second Global Report*, Cicopa.

- FREYSSENET, M. (1999), The Emergence, Centrality and End of Work, *Current Sociology*, 47(2), 5-20.
- FUMAGALLI, A., BOLOGNA, S. (1997), *Il Lavoro Autonomo Di Seconda Generazione. Scenari del Post-fordismo in Italia*, Milano, Feltrinelli.
- GORZ, A. (1988), *Métamorphoses du travail. Critique de la raison économique*, 2004 ed. Paris, Gallimard, Folio Essais.
- GUPTA, C. (2014), The Co-operative Model as a 'Living Experiment in Democracy', *Journal of Co-Operative Organization and Management*, 2(2), 98-107.
- JOLLY, C., FLAMAND, J. (2017), *Salarié ou indépendant: une question de métiers?*, Paris, France Stratégie, Note d'analyse.
- LALLEMENT, M. (2015), *L'Âge du Faire. Hacking, Travail, Anarchie*, Paris, Le Seuil.
- LEIGHTON, P., BROWN, D. (2013), *Future Working: The Rise of Europe's Independent Professionals (IPros)*, European Forum of Independent Professionals, Research Report.
- INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE (2016), *Non-Standard Employment Around The World: Understanding Challenges, Shaping Prospects*.
- MARCHESNAY, M. (2014), Repenser l'entrepreneur: de l'esprit d'entreprise à l'esprit de métier, *Innovations*, 44, 11-31.
- MARUANI, M., REYNAUD, E. (2004), *Sociologie de l'emploi*, 4th ed., Paris, La Découverte.
- RENAULT, E. (2012), Dewey et la centralité du travail, *Travailler*, 28, 125-148.
- RICHEZ-BATTESTI, N., PETRELLA, F., VALLADE, D. (2012), L'innovation sociale, une notion aux usages pluriels: Quels enjeux et défis pour l'analyse?, *Innovations*, 38, 15-36.
- SAILLARD, Y., BOYER, R. (2010), *Théorie de la régulation, l'état des savoirs*, 2nd ed., Paris, La Découverte.
- SENNETT, R. (2008), *The Craftsman*, New Haven, Yale University Press.
- SUPIOT, A. (1999), The Transformation of Work and the Future of Labour Law in Europe: A Multidisciplinary Perspective, *International Labour Review*, 138, 31-46.
- TERTRE (DU), C. (2013) Travail, "rapport salarial" et théorie de la régulation: apports et limites, *Travailler*, 29, 17-28.
- VEYER, S., SANGIORGIO, J. (2006), L'entrepreneuriat collectif comme produit et projet d'entreprises épistémiques : Le cas des Coopératives d'Activités et d'Emploi, *Revue de l'entrepreneuriat*, 5, 89-102.