



COOPERATIVES IN PRISONS

Cooperatives – What Are They?

A cooperative is an autonomous association of people united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled business.

Cooperatives include non-profit community organizations and businesses that are owned and managed by the people who use their services; by the people who work there; by the people who live there; hybrids such as worker cooperatives that are also consumer cooperatives or credit unions; multi-stakeholder cooperatives such as those that bring together civil society and local actors to deliver community needs; and second and third tier cooperatives whose members are other cooperatives.

It was estimated that in 2012 approximately one billion people were members of at least one cooperative and that the turnover of the largest three hundred cooperatives in the world reached \$2.2 trillion – which, if they were to be a country, it would make them the seventh largest.

Cooperatives – Where Did They Come From?

The birth of modern cooperative and mutual enterprise was one of the major popular responses to the industrial revolution, but the same sense of solidarity and cooperative organisation was present in many pre-modern societies including the early Christian Church, medieval monasticism and craft guilds.

Five models of cooperation can be identified arising out of the industrial revolution and continuing and developing into the modern era.

Firstly, the **consumer cooperatives** originating in Fenwick in Scotland in 1769 and Rochdale in England in 1844 – retail cooperatives owned by their customers; secondly, **labour or worker cooperatives** originating in a variety of contexts which gained ascendancy in France from 1831 onwards – commercial businesses owned by their employees; thirdly, **credit unions or mutual banks**, again emerging in a variety of contexts but becoming a major force in Germany from 1849 onwards – financial institutions owned by their customers/savers and closely related to **Friendly Societies**, mutual organizations or benefit societies composed of a body of people who join together for a common financial or social purpose.; fourthly, the joint **farmers' cooperatives** were a particular feature of late nineteenth century Scandinavian society, but like credit unions have also been a feature of many different societies worldwide – a particular form of marketing cooperative where independent producers come together to jointly market and sell their products and provide other services in common.

Cooperatives and Prisons

It is the fifth model that largely concerns us in relation to prisons. Various called the '**social cooperative**', '**multi-stakeholder cooperative**' or '**public service mutual**', this model originated in Italy in the 1970s as a totally new version of extended mutual cooperation. It is characterised by a multi-stakeholder model of governance, a model in which the representatives of a number of different interest groups all have a say in decisions and a role in the governance structure. Thus the decision-making bodies comprise not only worker members but also the beneficiaries of the cooperatives' services and representatives of the local community. This model has been widely replicated across Europe and serves as the European definition of 'social enterprise' in distinction to the much wider and vaguer UK definition.

In a prison context these social cooperatives or public service mutuals provide employment and resettlement services for their members both in prison and in the community. They are essentially 'mutual reducing re-offending services'¹, where former and serving prisoners create their own employment and provide resettlement support to each other in partnership with Prison Staff and other rehabilitation and resettlement professionals through their common membership of the social cooperative.

The role of the professional in these structures is to facilitate the promotion, development, and success of each social co-operative as equal members with prisoner members, and not just provide either expert assistance or 'offender management' for individual prisoner members².

Social Cooperatives are thus both part of the formal criminal justice system but at the same time transcend it. Just as the process of rehabilitation itself extends beyond the criminal justice system, so approaches to supporting resettlement and rehabilitation require collaborative responses that extend beyond the practices of the criminal justice sector³. Social Cooperatives provide a structure through which to deliver these collaborative responses.

Why Are Social Cooperatives So Important in Rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation and resettlement are not simply about individual offenders stopping offending. They're much more about building and re-building the positive pro-social relationships that will nurture and sustain a law-abiding lifestyle – relationships with prison staff, prisoners' family and friends, employers, and the communities to which they will return when they are released. Social cooperatives provide a structure within which these relationships can be built and re-built where all parties are all, in one way or another, members of the cooperative and contributors to its services.

At the heart of cooperation is participation by individuals in a common endeavour, through membership of an association. In the context of supporting rehabilitation, that very participation is itself an ingredient of the therapeutic process; being a member of a bespoke 'society' for offenders aimed at promoting rehabilitation aims to be one step along the

¹ Nicholson, D (2011: 18) Cooperating out of crime. CentreForum.

² Thomas, A (2004) The rise of social cooperatives in Italy. International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations, Vol 15, 2004

³Weaver (2011) Co-producing community justice: the transformative potential of personalisation for penal sanctions. British Journal of Social Work. Doi:10/1093/bjsw/bcr011

pathway towards and preparation for a more successful participation in the wider law-abiding society itself.

Employment – and specifically sustainable, well paid and meaningful employment in prison and through the gate in the community on release is also a key building block of rehabilitation. Locating rehabilitation and resettlement services in the context of working together in an employment cooperative and as part of the work of that cooperative, means that the rehabilitative effects of both employment and of rehabilitation and resettlement services are mutually reinforced. They are both more effective as a result than if they are considered and delivered as separate ‘silo-ed’ services.

Cooperatives in Prisons Reading List

Cooperatives in Prison – Why?

“Cooperating out of Crime” (2011) Dave Nicholson. Centre Forum - the liberal think tank.

<http://www.centreforum.org/assets/pubs/cooperating-out-of-crime.pdf>

“Co-producing Change: Resettlement as a Mutual Enterprise” (2012) Beth Weaver and Dave Nicholson in The Prison Service Journal. November 2012.

<http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/PSJ%20November%202012%20No.%20204.pdf>

“Can Cooperatives help in Prison Rehabilitation?” (2016) Dave Nicholson. Cooperative News. https://www.thenews.coop/106786/news/co-operatives/coops-help-prison-rehabilitation/?utm_campaign=coschedule&utm_source=facebook_page&utm_medium=Co-operative%20News&utm_content=Can%20co-operatives%20help%20in%20prison%20rehabilitation%3F

“Co-Producing Desistance” (2015) Beth Weaver. <http://www.coproducingdesistance.org.uk/>

Examples of Offender Social Cooperatives in Prison and in the Community and their Effectiveness

“Co-producing desistance from crime: The role of social cooperative structures of employment” (2016) Beth Weaver. <http://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ECAN-Bulletin-Issue-28-February-2016.pdf>

Vagen Ut <http://vagenut.coop/in-english> see also

https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/35075/1/gupea_2077_35075_1.pdf and

http://www.vagenut.coop/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/32sid_engelsk_final.pdf and

http://vagenut.coop/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Exitprocesses_and_empowerment1.pdf

Working and Forgiveness Behind Bars: Giotto in the Due Palazzi Prison of Padua

http://secondowelfare.it/allegati/2w_giotto_wp3_2015_5.5.2015-engsito.pdf

Other Examples <http://geo.coop/content/social-co-operatives-and-prison-systems>

Examples of Worker Cooperatives in Prisons

<http://base.d-p-h.info/es/fiches/premierdph/fiche-premierdph-824.html>

<http://www.alliance21.org/2003/article2562.html>

<http://www.johnhoward.ca/media/Coop%20Final%20Paper.pdf> - also provides other international examples of prison-based social cooperatives

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/project/wcms_228592.pdf