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PhD Thesis

Agricultural cooperatives: promoting or hindering fairer and more sustainable food systems? The case of Spain and the UK

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Food Policy

Centre for Food Policy

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented in this thesis, except those elements specifically declared, is all my own work carried out and finished at City University London.

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Abstract

Agricultural cooperatives (ACs) are major players in the European Union, where they account for 40-60% of agricultural trade and thus are key actors in articulating rural realities and in shaping the sustainability credentials of European food and farming. Cooperatives, regardless of the sector they operate in, are expected to work for the benefit of their members, show concern for their communities (including sustainable development) and promote cooperative economies. This research analyses to what extent this is happening in the case of ACs. Evidence of how unsustainable and unequal farming in Europe is despite such a strong AC presence raises questions on the role and practices of these cooperatives. Despite their grassroots origins, concerns from civil society and a handful of scholars suggest there is an increase in top-down approaches and corporatisation trends in the sector. This research examines ACs in Spain and the UK (in the context of the EU/CAP framework), examining how the sector has evolved in both countries since its beginnings and analysing trends and factors shaping their current development. Using case study methodology, data from document analysis and 41 interviews with AC members, academics, policy makers and industry and civil society representatives are presented. The findings reveal the two countries have very different farming cooperative sectors, but their largest ACs are adapting to the EU policy context and the increasing concentration of power in the food system by following similar growth and corporatisation strategies. A reaction from social movements is however taking place both in Spain and the UK, where new innovative cooperative models are emerging. Thus, ACs can be placed in a continuum of alterity depending on the degree of embeddedness in industrial or more sustainable food practices. ACs can become disjointed and have their least political components co-opted by the dominant food system (as they fit its logistics model, trade requirements and help concentrate produce). Going beyond the economic perspective that dominates the study of ACs, this research also places a focus on emerging innovative multi-stakeholder governance models. The strategies used to protect their alterity as well as the diverse understandings of food sustainability that different types of cooperatives have and how they reproduce these through their practices are analysed. Given the insufficient explanatory potential of existing theories to accommodate a wide range of realities labelled as cooperatives in food and farming, a new theoretical framework was developed based on the findings of this research. The multilevel framework unravels the different dimensions that constitute cooperatives and their degree of alterity and commitment to sustainable food practices and the wider cooperative movement.

Key words: agricultural cooperatives, multi-stakeholder cooperatives, cooperative movement, Spain, UK, alterity, co-optation, producer organisations

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACCA – Agricultural Central Co-operative Association
AC – Agricultural Cooperative
ACF – Advocacy Coalition Framework
ACMA – Agricultural Co-operative Managers Association
AECA – Asociación Española de Cooperativas Agrarias
AOS – Agricultural Organisation Society
BSE - Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
CAP – Common Agricultural Policy
CCAHC – Central Council for Agricultural and Horticultural Cooperation
CEC – Common Land Cooperative
CMO – Common Market Organisation
CS – Cooperative Sustainability
CUMA – Cooperative for Common Use of Machinery
DEFRA – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EC – European Commission
EIP – Ecologically Integrated Paradigm
EFFP – English Farming and Food Partnerships
EU – European Union
FAC – Federation of Agricultural Co-operatives in Great Britain and Ireland
FCB – Farmer Controlled Business
FFB – Food from Britain
IAOS – Irish Agricultural Organisation Society
ICA – International Cooperative Alliance
ILO – International Labour Organisation
IOF – Investor Owned Firm
ISEC – Instituto de Sociología y Estudios Campesinos (Institute of Sociology and Peasant Studies)
LSP – Life-Sciences Paradigm
LWA – Land Workers’ Alliance
MAGRAMA – Spanish Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Environment
MLG – Multi Level Governance
MSC – Multi-stakeholder cooperatives
MVP – Manchester Veg People
NEF – New Economics Foundation
NFU – National Farmers Union
NGC – New Generation Cooperatives
OPA – Professional Agrarian Organisations
PG – Producer Group
PO – Producer Organisation
POF – Privately-owned firms
PP – Productionist Paradigm
SAOS – Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society
SAT – Sociedad Agraria de Transformación (Agricultural Processing Society)
SD – Sustainable Development
SDC – Sustainable Development Commission
SFS – Sustainable Food System
UCAE – Unión de Cooperativas Agrarias de España
UN – United Nations
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UAOS – Ulster Agricultural Organisation Society
US – United States of America
USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

WAOS – Welsh Agricultural Organisation Society
WTO – World Trade Organisation
WWI – World War I
WWII – World War II

1. Introduction: Setting up the problem

1.1 Structure of the thesis and introduction to the research questions

The history of food and farming cooperatives is intrinsically linked to the origins of the cooperative movement itself, although informal food provisioning practices based on cooperative relations long preceded the first formalised cooperative enterprises (Chloupkova, 2003; Sennett, 2012). The earliest records of cooperatives date back to 1750s France (Shaffer, 1999); soon after, other cooperatives emerged in Greece, Italy and Luxembourg (Shaffer, 1999; Naubauer, 2013). During the 19th and 20th centuries, diverse farmer cooperatives mushroomed across the European continent. By pooling resources together, farmers could maximise their purchasing power and acquire agricultural inputs of higher standards; adulteration, quality and price of food and farming inputs were shared concerns that drove the creation of both consumer and agricultural cooperatives (ACs) (Rhodes, 2012). More recently, in post war Europe, the creation of the common market brought about dramatic policy changes and started a heated period of cooperative formation following the abolition of existing marketing boards and other protective governance measures deemed to interfere with EC competition law (Davey et al., 1976). Today, ACs have a strong presence in the EU market, accounting for around half of all EU agricultural trade (Bijman et al., 2012). Producer cooperatives are key to farming, and account for a larger share of the cooperative economy than worker cooperatives (Wilson and MacLean, 2012). Agriculture is in fact the largest sector by cooperative annual turnover with more than 39% or €347 billion of the total cooperative annual turnover in Europe, followed by retail with nearly 30% or €264.38 billion (Cooperatives Europe, 2016).

ACs are promoted around the world as organisational mechanisms to increase lobby power for farmers (Fairtrade Foundation, 2011). There are many types of ACs, from machinery-sharing, to processing and marketing. A clear benefit of ACs is that not only they help farmers concentrate demand to buy cheaper inputs in bulk, but also allows them to negotiate better prices when selling produce to large buyers. Low prices are a real concern for farmers in the agricultural market since profitability of farming activities has been progressively declining for decades in favour of processing and retail sectors. Additionally, by being members of ACs, small-scale farmers benefit from access to training and technologies that would otherwise be unable to afford (Giagnocavo, 2012). Today, there are around 750,000 ACs across the world (Ortmann and King, 2007). This thesis documents the historical development and current picture of ACs in Spain and UK and how they are being shaped and misshaped by and within the European farming policy context and the architecture of global food governance. This

research is interested in the social and economic conflicts and contradictions that ACs in Spain and UK¹ are encountering and how this is having an effect in their members, social justice in the food system and the environment.

The thesis covers a wide area of empirical and theoretical ground. Theoretically, it provides a multidisciplinary review of agricultural cooperatives from economics, history, psychobiology and food policy literature as well as analysing data from European and national governments' reports.

The thesis starts by unpacking the term cooperative in this first chapter, its more common definitions in the context of agriculture, the importance of the cooperative principles and the different typologies used to categorise ACs. To put the research into a historical context, the evolution of ACs in Europe and particularly in Spain and the UK is presented in Chapter 2, considering the social, political and policy factors that at different times in history either fostered or hinder the formation of ACs. A present picture of the scale of the AC sector in the 21st century and its role in European farming is then reviewed with a particular focus on fruit and vegetable cooperatives². In this analysis, key actors and statistics from Spain and the UK are identified as to map out this contested space of the agricultural arena. Focus then shifts to the literature, offering a critical and comprehensive review of the different disciplines that have entertained cooperatives and how the way they have been studied has created a path dependent approach to measuring success in ACs.

After presenting a multi-disciplinary literature review of ACs in Chapter 3, a detailed description of the methods and the theoretical influences that informed this research is introduced in Chapter 4. To answer the research questions, case study methodology was followed and data collection was undertaken by way of document analysis, interviews and visits. As the thesis will unpack, ACs can be mapped in a continuum that starts with small, niche models and ends with highly corporate cooperatives. Based on this diversity, two initial complementary theoretical approaches were identified as suitable for framing this complex reality in relation to food sustainability: Food policy paradigms (Lang and Heasman, 2004) and New Peasantries (van der Ploeg, 2008). These theories were selected because they reflect the political, social and multi-level governance dimensions of food and farming. Additionally, the

¹ The rationale and method for selecting these two countries is explained in Chapter 4 and summarised in a table included in Appendix I.

² One of the theoretical assumptions of this thesis is the need for integrated food policy framed in an Ecological Public Health perspective that emphasises the need for a food system that is beneficial to both health and the environment and that is founded on plant-based diets (Lang et al., 2009). This approach is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

value of the multilevel framework is the complementarity it offers with regards to its levels of analysis: van der Ploeg's theory informed the organisational analytical level (the cooperative) to classify the different types of ACs according to their food production strategy (level of embeddedness in the industrial food system). In conjunction, Lang and Heasman's food policy paradigms approach elevated the level analysis of ACs to the wider food system, providing a framework to assess their relationships with other actors (e.g. policy makers and consumers) as well as implications for sustainability. These different levels of analysis informed the research process, both in the selection of case studies and the data analysis stage. Nevertheless, it is noted and acknowledged from the beginning of this thesis that neither of these two theoretical frameworks actually focus on ACs. This limitation and how this research set out to overcome this theoretical gap is introduced in Chapters 4, 7 and 9.

Given that the findings revealed ACs are based in a continuum of lower to higher integration in the dominant food system, the presentation of case studies follows a bifold structure: first, the more corporate ACs are examined in Chapter 5. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of experts' views on the European perspective in Chapter 6. Second, new emerging models of multi-stakeholder cooperation are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

The case studies in Chapter 5 highlight on the one hand, theoretical parallelisms with the conventionalisation thesis used to describe the loss of transformative power of the organic and fair trade movements (Goodman et al., 2011). On the other hand, the case studies presented in Chapters 7 and 8 reveal an emerging interest for new alternative multi-stakeholder models of cooperatives. All the case studies cover the social, economic and sustainability dimensions of the ACs presented, always framed in the context of European farming policy.

Some of the case studies that will be presented are legally incorporated cooperatives that bring together growers, buyers and eaters under the same legal entity. As opposed to conventional agricultural cooperatives with a single type of members (i.e. farmers), the multi-stakeholder cooperatives (MSCs) presented in Chapter 7 bring different groups of stakeholders as distinct membership groups under one shared cooperative enterprise to meet their diverse food-related needs. For this reason, a more cooperative-specific theoretical framework suitable to analyse the richness of these innovative governance models was required. The Open Cooperative model from the Peer to Peer Foundation was selected for this purpose, based also on its explanatory potential to take into account these MSCs' links with the wider cooperative movement, other social movements and their efforts to create more sustainable food systems.

The concept of “third space” is then used in Chapter 8 to pay attention to the strategies devised by a new generation of cooperatives in order to protect their alterity and their transformative potential. These are theorised in relation to the creation of physical and metaphorical third spaces in which new identities and ways of cooperating in food production and provision are negotiated and adopted. As this thesis argues, third space, a borrowed concept from colonial studies, can be applied as a powerful notion that adds fluidity to the alternative/conventional binary that currently has a stronghold in food studies. Additionally, it opens up a theoretical room to manoeuvre between food production and consumption issues.

Given the limitations of the economic discipline to study ACs identified by the literature review and the data collected as part of this research, the theoretical findings of this thesis are incorporated into a new framework presented in Chapter 9. The framework developed holds sufficient explanatory potential to accommodate and examine a wide variety of initiatives labelled as ACs. Considering this variety of cooperative forms and cooperative practices was not an empty theoretical exercise but an attempt to capture the richness revealed by the fieldwork. The framework is based on a process of quantification, fragmentation and appropriation of the agricultural cooperative sector by the dominant food regime that explains ACs’ loss of transformational potential. The thesis concludes with Chapter 10, summarising the outcomes of the research, reflecting on the research process, identifying areas for future research and considering implications for farming policies.

1.2. Why this research? Relevance and research objectives

Why study agricultural cooperatives? Why focus on Spain and the UK? Why is this topic relevant and worth researching? To answer these questions, this introductory section draws on Sarah Tracy’s work on qualitative quality. In her paper *Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research*, Tracy offers a contextualisation and conceptualisation of quality in qualitative research that differentiates between the research means and its ends, including what makes a ‘worthy topic’ or a topic worthy (Tracy, 2010). The author describes quality research as ‘*relevant, timely, significant, interesting or evocative*’ and also worthwhile when it is ‘*counterintuitive, questions taken-for-granted assumptions, or challenges well-accepted ideas*’ (Tracy, 2010:840). This section provides an introduction of how this research fits those criteria. This alignment is discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 10. ACs were created originally to empower farmers and tackle power inequalities in the food system. Nowadays, there are over 40,000 ACs in Europe with a turnover of approximately €350 million; ACs account for over 50% share in the supply of agricultural inputs and over 60% in

the collection, processing and marketing of agricultural products in the EU (Cogeca, 2015). Their significance not only in Europe but also across the world is undeniable. However, despite their strong presence, the European farming problem is obvious at different levels:

- There is an increasingly high market concentration at producer, processor and retail level that creates power imbalances in the food system and asymmetrical bargaining powers (e.g. UK farmers only receive around 7% of what consumers spend on food (Pretty, 2001) and around 2/3 of all food is sold by only 4 supermarkets (Morgan et al., 2015). In Europe, the top five retailers' market share at national level (not necessarily the same five in each member state) exceeds 60% in 13 member states (European Commission, 2014a).
- Concentration is also present in subsidy payments: 80% of CAP subsidies go to 20% of farmers, mainly for large, monoculture exploitations (BBC, 2013).
- Agricultural land availability and affordability is rapidly decreasing: half of all farmland in the EU is now concentrated in the 3% of large farms bigger than 100 hectares in size (European Union, 2012). At the same time, land ownership is also concentrated (e.g. 70% of UK land is owned by less 1% of the population (Home, 2009).
- Evidence on the environmental impacts of farming is piling up. Although statistics on the environmental impact of the food system vary significantly depending on the source and the method of calculation (e.g. land cleared to cultivate feed, transport, etc.), they account for in between 18-30% of all greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions related to human activity (Garnett, 2014). Another sobering statistic is that around 20% of global GHG emissions are produced by the animal husbandry sector alone (Steinfeld et al., 2006). These statistics reflect the impact of food production methods that are unsustainable both for the environment and for the farmers (UNEP, 2009).
- Concerns over agricultural labour shortages and an ageing workforce are growing every year (European Union, 2011). One third of farmers are over 65 years old and only 7% are under 35 (European Commission, 2013a).
- There is a generalised disconnection of farming from consumers and the environment. Long supply chains mean consumers are very removed from their food and the people who produce it (Kneafsey et al., 2008). Inequalities on extent and quality of consumption have fuelled the spread of diet-related diseases and food banks (Gentilini, 2013).

This picture of unsustainable and unequal farming in a Europe despite such a strong AC presence raises questions about the role and practices of these cooperatives. If ACs are

supposed to represent members' interests, why are the above challenges facing farmers becoming so acute? This research is therefore relevant and particularly timely. And why focus on Spain and the UK? Several historical and socio-economic reasons that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 make Spain and the UK two very illuminating and complementary case studies, both for their past history but also for their present social, political and policy approach to ACs (see comparative table in Appendix I). Many socio-economic changes have taken place in both countries since this PhD research started. Both Spain and UK introduced politically relevant changes to cooperative legislation. Cooperatives are not a legacy of the past, but more and more, especially since the beginning of the 2007/08 financial crisis, they seem to be a popular model for new enterprises, whether under conservative or socialist administrations (COCETA, 2012; CECOP, 2013; Co-operatives UK, 2013). These factors make agricultural cooperativism a relevant and significant topic to research. 2012 was the UN International Year of Cooperatives, from which the Blueprint for a Cooperative Decade emerged, setting up the vision for the movement up to 2020. This international focus on cooperatives coupled with the increasing interest and concerns about sustainability in food systems makes the topic of this research invaluablely timely.

Additionally, in terms of challenging taken-for-granted assumptions (Tracy, 2010), this research offers an insight into the world of ACs with findings that clash with well-established ideas or imaginaries about cooperatives and cooperative members. Evidence shows people have a positive view of cooperatives as more ethical businesses (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias, 2013), many reporting a willingness to buy more or pay more for cooperatively-produced items as they believe there is an added ethical value in the way cooperatives operate (Cooperativas Agroalimentarias, 2003). As this thesis will present, this imaginary is often no more than a halo effect in the dominant AC sector.

Understanding the trends and dynamics within the AC sector is instructive, however the utility of such an analysis is limited if it cannot be understood within the broader context of global food and farming systems in which the sector operates, as well as regarding the pressing issue of food sustainability and the wider cooperative movement from which ACs emerged. This contextualisation has been addressed through a detailed overview of the history of the movement, a review of the literature on sustainable diets and current data on food and farming and ACs in Europe (with specific figures from Spain and the UK presented in Chapter 2) and a discussion of ACs' links with other social movements in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

The UN International Year of Cooperatives was celebrated under the motto of ‘cooperatives can feed the world’. The question to ask is perhaps not whether ACs can feed the world, but at what price to consumers, the environment and farmer members themselves. The research presented in this thesis, investigates this question, trying to analyse why ACs are following a trend of growth and internationalisation and with what effects.

The cooperative movement has strong and diverse roots, and ways of cooperating in food and farming are evolving in diverse ways. The fieldwork revealed a flourishing richness of governance forms and cooperative sizes in the AC sector. This forms the crux of the research problem. Aiming to analyse the nexus between this richness and how their practices have an effect on bringing closer or further the achievement of fairer and more sustainable food systems, a set of research questions emerged. The evolution of the questions throughout the research process is documented in detail in Chapter 4, however, a summary is presented here:

RQ.1 What does the comparison between the UK and Spanish ACs sectors reveal about those countries’ food policies and current trends in the European AC sector and AC policy?

RQ2. To what extent are ACs part of a social movement adopting cooperative principles or a mere section of the agricultural economic sector? And to what extent can they be both at the same time? [While this question has been discussed in the literature in similar terms before, this research aims to explore ACs both in the context of the wider cooperative movement but also other social movements in the food system that are (in theory) grounded on sustainability and social justice principles, such as organic, fair trade, relocalisation and food sovereignty movements].

RQ3. How is the dominant AC sector in Spain and UK in the context of European farming policy contributing to multidimensional food system sustainability?

RQ4. How do these findings contribute to the theorisation of agricultural cooperatives and alternative and sustainable food systems?

1.3 Introducing agricultural cooperatives: definitions, principles and typologies

Despite earlier records of cooperative enterprises from the 1750s (Shaffer, 1999; Naubauer, 2013), the renowned Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers’ cooperative grocery store set up near Manchester (UK) in 1844 is considered the first successful cooperative (Sanchez and Roelants, 2011). This early consumer cooperative was the first one to pay dividend payments to members and to establish a well-developed set of statutes and principles (Fairbairn, 1994).

Since Rochdale, cooperatives have evolved in many ways and shapes, have flourished and failed in many sectors and have reflected the needs and principles of their societies at different times in history. This research focuses on agricultural cooperativism that has in itself a myriad of different forms. A few statistics will give the reader a rough picture of the global importance of ACs: roughly half of all agricultural products are traded through cooperatives (Bijman et al., 2012), approximately half of all British farmers and 85% of Spanish farmers are members of at least one AC and across the world, three quarters of Fairtrade goods are produced by ACs (Cooperative Heritage Trust, 2012). Next, this chapter will provide an introduction to cooperative definitions and principles and how these affect cooperative practices in real life, as well as analysing the more common typologies found in the literature.

1.3.1 What is a cooperative?

The internationally accepted definition of cooperative comes from the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA):

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise (ICA, 1995)

Key words to highlight from the ICA's definition are: autonomous, needs and aspirations as well as the ICA's focus on democracy and enterprise, aspects of the cooperative model that clashes with the capitalist economies they exist in, since basically, a cooperative is "people-centred" rather than "capital-centred". The latter is the defining feature of Investor Owned Firms (IOF) or private companies (Birchall, 2010).

The cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice and what differentiate them from IOFs. The ICA proposes seven principles based on those of the original "Rochdale Pioneers". The influence of the Rochdale' Cooperative in the global cooperative movement is still strong today, especially since the 2007/2008 financial crisis, when more equitable ways of making profit and doing business were sought by people looking for more ethical ways of trading and making a living. When discussing the ICA cooperative principles, it is pretty much obligatory to mention the Rochdale cooperators in order to understand the roots of the current ICA principles. These were the original principles agreed by the Rochdale cooperators in 1844:

1. Voting is by members on a democratic basis (one-member-one-vote)
2. Membership is open
3. Equity is provided by patrons
4. Equity ownership as share of individual patrons is limited
5. Net income is distributed to patrons as patronage refunds on a cost basis
6. Dividend on equity capital is limited
7. Exchange of goods and services at market prices

The above principles were written in 1844 when the cooperative was formed and were later accepted by the ICA in 1937, remaining unchanged until 1966. The ICA only modified the principles in one other occasion in 1995 in order to adapt them to the present context, with the final and current version going beyond the business sphere and taking into account the social character and social responsibility of cooperatives (ICA, 1995). Since 1995, the seven internationally recognised cooperative principles are:

1. Voluntary and open membership
2. Democratic member control
3. Member economic participation
4. Autonomy and independence
5. Education, training and information for both members and the general public
6. Cooperation amongst cooperatives to strengthen the cooperative movement
7. Concern for the sustainable development of their communities

Cooperatives in all sectors are expected to adhere to the seven internationally recognised ICA cooperative principles. These principles in theory are there to inform cooperatives' practices and to differentiate them from privately owned business (ICA, 2015). However, during the 1980s and 1990s before the publication of the latest version of the ICA principles, global markets, including for food trade, started to increasingly become more open, a trend that culminated with the incorporation of agriculture into the WTO in 1994/95. At that time, arguments for a simplification of the principles were put forward (Birchall, 2005) in order to "allow" ACs to attract large farmers to become more competitive. Arguments were put forward to suggest that the ICA principles were too restrictive and that they were only guidelines for members to choose from and decide which principles they wished to adhere to (Zeuli, 2004). In the US, the rapid rate of conversions of ACs to private companies led to some efforts to emphasise the differences between ACs and private companies with the aim of reinforcing the cooperative identity and highlight the cooperative advantage and the value of being member-

focused (Dunn, 1988; Barton, 1989; Toggerson et al., 1997). Nevertheless, in 1987 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2002) adopted the following three principles for ACs (Ortmann and King, 2007):

1. The User-Owner Principle: Those who own and finance the cooperative are those who use the cooperative.
2. The User-Control Principle: Those who control the cooperative are those who use the cooperative.
3. The User-Benefits Principle: The cooperative's sole purpose is to provide and distribute benefits to its users on the basis of their use.

These principles are relevant to the European case as they were imported and still adopted in the EU as it will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3. While the User principles excluded the education, community and wider cooperative movement principles of ICA, still championed them as "practices" that could facilitate a deeper application of the three principles (Dunn, 1988). However, ten years later, in 1997, the Rural Business Cooperative Service of the USDA published their research report 151 titled: "Strengthening ethics within agricultural cooperatives". The need for this report was identified after a series of meetings with industry at which ongoing concerns about the weakening ethics in farmer cooperatives were raised (USDA, 1997). This USDA research report reinforced the skimmed version of the cooperative principles, stating that:

Ethical decisions in cooperatives, then, should reflect recognition and commitment to the user-control, user-benefit, and user-owner principles. Decisions that violate these three central tenets should be viewed as unethical (USDA, 1997:11)

In 2014, the USDA published a new research report (n. 231) comparing the cooperative principles of the USDA and the ICA coming up with some interesting reflections (USDA, 2014). In this review, the USDA author, Bruce J. Reynolds, an economist, discusses how the USDA three principles were a "reduced form approach" developed through the "lens of economics" and prepared by economists to exclude values from the definition and identification of cooperatives (USDA, 2014:3). The resulting paradox is that removing values from cooperative practices in order to emphasise its economic edge, dilutes, as Reynolds pointed out, the ethical and social essence of the cooperative identity:

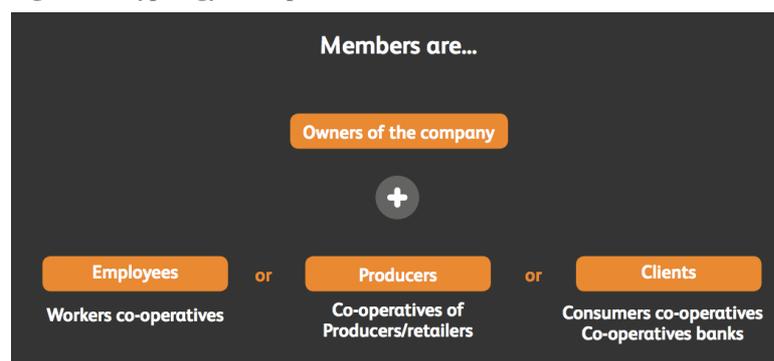
Economists avoid asserting social values, yet this cautiousness when applied to principles may exclude attributes that contribute to further differentiating cooperatives from other forms of organization. (USDA, 2014:3)

Evidence of the impact that the dilution of cooperative principles can have on members and food sustainability is discussed throughout the thesis, but especially in Chapters 5, 6 and 9.

1.3.2. Types of agricultural cooperatives

Cooperatives exist in many different sectors of the economy. From housing to banking, they have appeared over the decades to cover very diverse needs of changing societies. Since it is beyond the reach of this chapter to introduce every type of cooperative, Figure 1.1 has been used to summarise cooperatives based on the role of their members. In the case of food retail cooperatives, consumer members can act as voluntary employees; in some cases, this time commitment is a requirement of the cooperative, for example, in the famous Park Slope Cooperative in New York (Ronco, 1974; Jochowitz, 2001); in others, members exchange work for discounts on transactions with their cooperatives or simply as a way of celebrating and learning about food (Actyva, 2015).

Figure 1.1 Typology of cooperatives across sectors based on members' role.



Source: Author

With regards to ACs, many typologies, mainly coming from the economics community, have been attempted, most of them based on their ownership structures and financial models. Looking at figure 1.1, it can be said that sometimes the boundaries for agri-cooperatives are not clear, as worker cooperatives cultivating shared plots of land exist; recently there has also been a trend of new cooperatives linking producers with consumers in an attempt to set up shorter supply chains. These relatively new models will be analysed in detail in this thesis and therefore, when referring to ACs throughout the text, the term is used in an encompassing manner to include both conventional ACs (supply, machinery, processing and marketing) but also agricultural workers' cooperatives and multi-stakeholder cooperatives that bring together different memberships into the same cooperative organisation (growers, workers and consumers and/or buyers).

Table 1.1 summarises the different categorising criteria often used in the literature to classify ACs. Existing typologies often avoid categorising ACs by type of product/service or sector in which cooperatives operate, opting instead for a categorisation based on investment or governance structures. However, the last comprehensive report on European marketing cooperatives from the European Commission published in November 2012 highlighted that the character of the product, such as perishable products that benefit from processing (e.g. milk) or a swift sale (e.g. fresh vegetables and fruits) influences the investment policies of their associated cooperatives: processing infrastructure for the former example and logistics for the latter (Bijman et al., 2012). This report also revealed that the degree of specialisation of cooperatives is on average higher in Northwest than Southern Europe, a relevant point to the current study since it focuses on Spain and the UK (Bijman et al., 2012). The criteria presented in Table 1.1 were compiled by the author to highlight the many existing ways of categorising ACs. These typologies are not exclusive and can overlap.

Being informed by the cooperative principles and being co-owned by members, cooperatives are complex organisations as their main objective distances the organisation from the conventional dominant aim of firms: profit-making. The multiple stakeholders of cooperatives (members, other cooperatives and communities) as well as their praxis (democratic governance) create investment constraints. From an economics perspective, many authors have analysed these challenges, summarising them into four commonly cited cooperative problems (Nilsson, 1999; Iliopoulos, 2005):

The first three refer to investment constraints:

1. **Horizon problem:** when members prefer higher dividends now rather than investing in the cooperative for the future, basically neglecting the long-term competitiveness of their organisations.
2. **Free rider problem:** this problem is common when some members do not contribute the same as others but still enjoy the same benefits. It can also occur when new members do not increase competitiveness significantly but enjoy the work and efforts of earlier members, leaving both groups without a logical reason to make new investments or improvements.
3. **Portfolio problem:** different members will bring different products of different quality to the cooperative, creating problems around how to best market them but also for the farmers, especially older ones (the bulk of current farmers), who might prefer to invest part of their portfolios away from the cooperative in order to secure better returns and redeemable savings.

The last most cited problem does not refer to an investment barrier, but to the transactional costs of the cooperative model's democratic approach:

4. **Collective decision making costs:** arising from democratic processes, but also from lack of management training and the difficulties of monitoring a manager who often is not a member of the AC. Additionally, the “influence cost constraint” refers to the negative effect of unbalanced influences of members on decision-making (Iliopoulos, 2005).

Table 1.1 Common categorising criteria found in the literature used for the classification of agricultural cooperatives.

<u>Categorising Criteria</u>	<u>Associated typology</u>
Cooperative principles	Rochdale, traditional, proportional and contemporary principles (Barton, 1989).
Ownership and financial structure	Several variations of the dichotomy between traditional (production-oriented) versus New Generation Cooperatives (market-oriented) (Van Bekkum, 2001; Kyriakopoulos et al., 2004; Cook and Plunkett, 2006).
Type of members	Primary (members are individual farmers) and secondary (members are primary cooperatives). Secondary cooperatives normally have both economic and lobbying functions (Bijman et al., 2012).
Legal form	Association, partnership, cooperative, limited liability company, etc. (e.g. POs and SAP benefit from CAP cooperative subsidies but can have any legal form).
Ideology	More common in historical literature. From communist to libertarian, nationalistic and capitalist cooperatives, as well as those with underlying religious beliefs (e.g. Longo Mai and Israeli Kibbutzs).
Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production • Inputs supply • Processing • Marketing • Insurance
Position in the food chain and degree of vertical integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary processing • Secondary processing • Retailing (direct sales)
Degree of Internationalisation (both for business activities and geographical scope of membership)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local • Regional • Interregional • National • Transnational
Strategy	Traditional vs. entrepreneurial (Kyriakopoulos et al., 2004) Cost leadership, differentiation and organisational structure (Van Bekkum, 2001)
Degree of specialisation	“ <i>manymixed</i> ” (non-specialised) vs. specialised in one product (Spears et al., 2012)
Life cycle	From formation to dissolution or restructuring/demutualisation (Cook, 1995). A later cycle identified the following stages (Cook and Plunkett, 2006): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Genesis 2. Growth 3. Emergence of internal conflicts, 4. Recognition and analysis 5. Option choice

Source: The author

For a long time cooperatives have been championed as a global solution for farmers across the world; 2012 saw an increase in the promotion of ACs as it was the United Nations (UN) International Year for Cooperatives. In food and farming, with the increasing growth and concentration of first the processing sector and later the retail sector, along with the opening of global agricultural markets, reasons for encouraging the development of ACs include (Bijman et al., 2010):

- overcoming market failures
- accessing markets (both national and international markets)
- gaining economies of scale for inputs, concentration of production and processing
- strengthening bargaining power with suppliers and customers
- reducing transaction costs and making markets more transparent
- pooling resources to fund innovation

Nowadays, cooperatives cite counterbalancing power with retailers as a stronger reason for cooperation than economies of scale (Bijman, 2010).

1.4. Summary

This chapter has presented the structure of the thesis and has offered an introduction to the complexity of cooperation in food and farming. A summary of definitions and typologies of agricultural cooperatives in the academic literature, primarily from the economics discipline, was provided. As the numerous existing categorising criteria show, cooperatives can be studied and analysed in many ways. This assortment of “lenses” to look at cooperatives has affected the way their performance has been measured, as it will be discussed in chapter 9. The cooperative principles introduce and added layer of complexity to the *raison d’être* of ACs, pushing them beyond the traditional and monolithic profit making aim of private firms. The next chapter discusses the history of ACs in Europe, with a focus on Spain and UK, covering their development from the origins of the first cooperatives to the present day.

2. Past and present of agricultural cooperatives in Europe

This second chapter sets out the founding ideologies that fomented and influenced the first cooperative experiments in Europe. Briefly starting with an overview of the development of agricultural cooperativism on the continent, it then focuses on how, shaped by those ideologies, the history of agricultural cooperation in UK and Spain developed. The first section of the chapter ends with a comparative summary highlighting the main similarities and differences that the movement went through in both countries during the first half of the 20th century. The second part of the chapter provides an account of the growth of agricultural cooperation in Europe since the creation of the Common Market until present, analysing the importance of Producer Organisations (POs) and current figures on key cooperative sectors.

2.1 Historical background: The evolution of agricultural cooperation from the 1800s to the 21st century

This section starts with a discussion of the main thinkers that inspired the creation of the cooperative movement. This is followed by a review of the historical context in which agricultural cooperatives emerged in the UK and Spain. Two detailed timelines of key dates in the evolution of ACs in each country from their origins until 2015 were created during the process of this research and have been included in Appendices II and III.

2.1.1 Early European thinkers of cooperation: The ideologies that inspired the movement

The cooperative movement began in the early 18th century with the realisation that the power of organised cooperation had the potential to transform society and shake structural conditions causing inequalities (Shaffer, 1999). Many cooperatives were created (and still are) as a response to difficult economic situations and complex social problems affecting the lives of those involved (Fairbairn, 2004). As Fairbairn has pointed out in relation to the Rochdale cooperators, most people at the time had ‘no vote, no democratically elected government to represent them, no interventionist state to protect them’ (Fairbairn, 1994:2); in this dire context, the Rochdale pioneers found an answer in the practice of self-help and mutual help that cooperation offered them.

At the beginning of the 18th century, before cooperatives were born, two types of organisations offered European citizens a channel to participate in their free societies. Firstly, “voluntary

associations” were formed by groups of people who shared the same public or community aim (Merrett and Walzer, 2004). These associations were democratic organisations whose primary objective was to have an active participation in society. Secondly, “business enterprises” were a second type of organisation used by members to participate in business activities within the free economy, also of a voluntary character. As a result of democratic, libertarian and equalitarian thinking and the combination of these two existing types of organisations, the cooperative model started to develop (Fairbairn, 2006). Cheese makers’ cooperatives in Franche-Comté (France) were the first documented producer cooperatives, dating back to 1750s (Shaffer, 1999). The establishment of other cooperatives in different trades (farming, fire insurance, watchmakers, dairy, etc.) followed rapidly in Europe and US (Shaffer, 1999).

Two French authors were responsible for some of the earliest writings on agricultural cooperativism: Saint-Simon worked on various theories of “associations” whilst Charles Fourier published a *Treatise on Domestic Agricultural Association* in 1822 (the first one of its kind). A few decades later, thanks to the work of Friedrich W. Raiffeisen, rural credit cooperatives were born in Germany but soon were replicated in other countries also very successfully. In 1864, Raiffeisen developed the first cooperative lending bank to help small farmers. Later he founded a regional cooperative bank, a national cooperative bank and in 1877 he unified the entire system, forming the first credit union (ICA, 2012).

In the UK, adulteration was a common concern that fuelled the growth of consumer cooperatives (Rhodes, 2012). In 1884 France, the ‘*syndicats agricoles*’ were originally formed for buying manures and seeds also due to growing farmers’ concerns over the falsification and adulteration of these inputs. Soon after, these early cooperatives also introduced the sale of produce and improvements for the land (Kropotkin, 1902). Prince Kropotkin’s famous book *Mutual Aid* was highly influential at the time, arguing that cooperation, not only competition, was very common in nature amongst many species (Kropotkin, 1902). Both Darwin and Kropotkin agreed cooperation had helped higher evolution, however Kropotkin regretted how Darwin had emphasised the competitive over the cooperative behaviours that occur in the natural world. For Kropotkin, both were laws of nature. Kropotkin’s work is discussed again in more detail in Chapter 3.

1844 was a key year for the movement. In this year, the Rochdale Pioneers in Manchester started a set of collective actions that shaped the first formalised cooperative in the world, their legacy still highly influential today (Cook and Plunkett, 2006). A second significant event in that same year marked one of the earliest organised mobilisations for participatory social change: in Rodding, Denmark, the first Folk High School for peasants opened with the aim of

educating the lower classes to become active citizens and change society from the bottom (Zeuli et al., 2004).

Throughout the 20th century cooperatives became closely associated to syndicalism and communism. However, Karl Marx, one of the early communist theorists, actually believed that cooperatives and trade unions did not have *‘in fact any great social future, any part to play in the renovation of society’* being only *“embryos” of the great workers’ companies’* that Marx hoped one day would replace capitalism (Coates and Benn, 1976:21); however, Marx acknowledged that cooperatives could paved the transition to a new society (Marx, 1866).

In Europe, after the Great Depression at the end of the 19th century, governments adopted an increasing interventionist approach to agriculture during the 20th century in order to both improve yields and introduce technical innovations (Koning, 1994). This would affect the development of an independent agricultural movement over the last century, and as a result of socio-economic and political influences, the label ‘cooperative’ evolved in varied ways and with very different connotations across different European countries. As an example, Finnish agricultural cooperativism developed as a movement for independence in Russian-occupied Finland and the model still has nationalistic connotations in this country today (Bijman et al., 2012). Other European nations have seen periods where associationism was restricted as bottom-up cooperatives were considered to be a dangerous nest for dissident ideas, e.g. during Salazar’s regime in Portugal and Franco’s dictatorship in Spain (Cervantes and Fernandes, 2008). In other European regions, cooperatives went through periods of being imposed from the top down, no longer based on self-organisation principles but used as a socialist planning tool instead, as it happened during communist regimes in Eastern Europe (Bijman et al., 2012). As European level, the representative bodies of cooperatives – both for farmers (Cogeca) and consumers (Euro Coop) – have always been given importance in EU formal relations since the beginning of the Common Market, emphasising the collaborative model of the union. This influence has been reflected over time in their inclusion in committees (O’Connell, 1980; Young, 1995) and also in influencing CAP negotiations (Egdell and Thomson, 1999).

2.1.2. History of agricultural cooperation in the UK: from workers' unions to the European Union

Since the very beginnings of the movement in 18th century Europe, food has always been a core element of cooperativism (Burnett, 1985; Birchall, 1994; Garrido Herrero, 2003; Rhodes, 2012). The connection with food was especially key in the development of the UK's cooperative movement as new urban workers who had been disposed of the means to grow or forage their own food started to explore different avenues to secure sufficient, safe and affordable food provisioning. In 1851, just a few years after the opening of the Rochdale store and also around Manchester, the first worker cooperative farm in the UK, Jumbo Farm, was founded and continued to operate for 10 years (Birchall, 1994). Neither Jumbo Farm nor the Rochdale store were perceived by their originators as an end in themselves, but as means to self-provide food and funds for bigger industrial cooperation projects that could pave the way for a deeper and wider transition towards a new model of society aligned to the cooperative principles (Oakeshott, 1978; Fairbairn, 1994). The Rochdale Pioneers never bought or rented land to employ members until 1896. The Co-operative Wholesale Society (that developed from the original Rochdale store and it is now named the Co-operative Group) began farming in June 1896 when it bought the 742-acre Roden Estate in Shropshire to grow fruit for their jam factory. For decades, the Co-operative Group was the UK's largest agriculture employer and landowner until summer 2014 when the Group sold its 7,000 hectares of land, 15 farms and around 130 residential and commercial properties to the Wellcome Trust for £249m in an attempt to cover its debts (Co-operative Group, 2014). The Wellcome Trust said it would be a responsible landowner but did not sign up to the Co-operative Group's ethical guidelines (Moulds and Treanor, 2014). A campaign by a network of NGOs members of the UK Food Group asking the Co-operative Group to sell the land to small and medium scale ecological farmers or cooperatives of farmers went unheard in favour of a single and simpler financial deal. This sale ended the farming arm of the first formalised retail cooperative in history, still one of the largest consumer cooperatives in the world today.

Paradoxically, ideology rather than financial deals, was what fuelled the original Rochdale Pioneers (Oakeshott, 1978; Fairbairn, 1994). But these early cooperative experiments did not come out of a blank political and philosophical sheet. By the 1850s, a clearly defined cooperative ideology emerged out of the convergence of many influences (see Table 2.1). The first cooperative ideas date back to feudal times when peasants held land in common.

Table 2.1 Early thinkers that inspired the cooperative movement

Thinker	Theoretical perspective	Period	Key Ideas relevant to the emergence of cooperative movement
J. J. Rousseau J. S. Mill	Participatory democracy	18th c. (JJR) 19th c. (JSM)	- Citizen participation is essential for democracy, not just in voting, but in other spheres of society
Charles Fourier	Utopian Socialism (Fourierism)	Late 18th c. - Early 19th c.	- A new, fairer society based on <i>phalanges</i> (agricultural communal associations of producers).
William King	Utopian Socialism Economic Philosophy	Early 19th c.	- Focus on consumer cooperatives to change habits, as shopping is an everyday activity. - Concept of 'habit' as a barrier but also as a way of promoting long-term cooperation.
Charles Dunoyer	Economic Philosophy	Early 19th c.	- In 1830 French liberal economist Dunoyer published a <i>Treatise on social economy</i> that advocated a moral approach to economics, being the first time the term 'social economy' appeared in economics literature.
Robert Owen	Utopian Socialism (Owenism)	19th c.	- Use of cooperation to create a New Moral World. - Capital does not create value, labour does.
Karl Marx Friedrich Engel	Communism	19th c.	- Cooperatives only useful as a transition to communism.
George Holyoake	Secularist Owenism Chartism	19th c.	- Cooperation as prevention of class war and stabilisation of society
Pyotr Kropotkin	Anarchism Evolutionary theories	Late 19th c. - Early 20th c.	- Mutual aid in nature: not just competition, but also cooperation
Robert Blatchford	Social Imperialism Economic Nationalism	Late 19th c. - early 20th c.	- Britain for the British - Industrial cooperation for the common good
George D.H. Cole	Libertarian socialism Participatory Democracy	Early 20th c.	- Cooperatives are a key area for practical anarchism - Alternative to oppressive power relations

Source: Author

More modern influences include the Chartist movement, Adam Smith's concept of the 'moral economy', Cromwell's Commonwealth³ and the concept of 'commonweal' (reinforcing the idea of common resources and the welfare of the public). Robert Owen added moral and community dimensions to the cooperative thinking that was developing at the time. Although still in an authoritarian manner, Owen put his theories to action in an attempt to improve the wellbeing of the working class through his social experiments in New Lanark (Scotland) and

³ The Commonwealth period ran from 1649 onwards when England and later Ireland and Scotland, were ruled as a republic following the end of the Second English Civil War and the trial and execution of Charles I.

less successfully, with the New Harmony community in Indiana (US) (Birchall, 1994; Rhodes, 2012); William King and the Rochdale Pioneers added the democracy, self-help, self-management and mutuality elements to the movement (Rhodes, 2012). Class consciousness also fostered the development of the cooperative movement. According to Thompson's account in *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thomas Paine's work *The Right of Man* (1791) was the foundation of the working class movement and the beginning of a way of thinking that acknowledged the rights of man over the church and flag (Thompson, 1991; Glasman, 1996).

The enclosure process also unintentionally manufactured a "radical agrarianism" phenomenon that spread from the 1770s up to mid-1800s and was based on the emergence of "land consciousness", parallel to the development of "class consciousness" (Glasman, 1996). Despite happening in a time of urbanisation and industrialisation, both the working class radical politics of Chartism's early socialism and the cooperative movement shared conceptions of nature, land and the environment as their common denominator, fighting against the commodification of society and nature brought about by the enclosure process (Glasman, 1996).

Robert Blatchford, famous for his social nationalist ideas and his book *Britain for the British*, refuted the claim that it was cheaper for the UK to buy food in the international market than to grow it nationally in his chapter "Can Britain feed herself" (Blatchford, 1902). The title of this chapter has been reused several times to name books and articles asking the same question of late 20th and early 21st century UK (Mellanby, 1975; Fairlie, 2007; *The Land*, 2012). But at the time Blatchford wrote his book, investment was being redirected from farming into the development of industrial activities, leaving behind acres of uncultivated land and millions of idle unemployed workers. Blatchford discussed the issues of "intensive cultivation", the difficulty of accessing land and food security in times of war as well as of food availability and affordability by industrial workers on very low wages (Blatchford, 1902:116). Blatchford presented cooperatives as the living example of working socialism (Blatchford, 1902). Those early concerns over the commodification of food, the industrial appropriationism of "natural" food production methods and resources and between cheaper imports and domestic production are still very present today and represent core debates in the AC sector as it will be discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 9.

However, despite having a strong ideological basis, it was only after the Rochdale store was established that political lobby for a specific cooperative legislative framework took off in Britain (Rhodes, 2012). It was not until 1852 that the cooperative legal form entered the law for the first time in history (Zeuli and Cropp, 2004). The Christian socialist movement and the

liberal economist J. S. Mill partnered to lobby for favourable legislation to remove barriers to saving for the working class, resulting in the 1852 Industrial and Provident Society Act (also known as Slaney's Act); it is interesting to note that the legislation did not include the word cooperative in its name; additional measures followed in 1893, 1952, 1961 and 1965 (Coates, 1976).

Cooperativism in agriculture continued to develop after the initial Jumbo Farm experiment. Led by Edward Owen Greening, the first supply AC in England was formed in 1867. Called the Agricultural and Horticultural Association (AHA), its main function was to bulk buy seeds and fertilisers for members, in an effort to combat both high prices and adulteration of inputs (Rhodes, 2012), a function that carried out successfully for 50 years until it closed in the middle of World War I (WWI) (Morales Gutierrez et al., 2005). Greening was a promoter of cooperation who knew many of Owenites (followers of Robert Owen), including Holyoake, and went on to play a key role in setting up the International Cooperative Alliance. Greening counted on the backing of many Christian socialists. This type of socialism developed after the failure of Chartism and when the conflict between Christian principles and business activities became obvious. The influence of religious groups in the development of the cooperative movement is worth noting. Quakers had an active role in promoting cooperation and lobbying for a suitable legislative framework. However, it has been argued that it was not so much that the religious beliefs of Quakerism led directly to entrepreneurialism and the setting up of cooperative business, but rather that the network in which the Quaker community lived, fostered trust and exchange of information as well as key financial resources (Spear, 2010). Moreover, many Quaker families lived in Manchester, a region in which many cooperative enterprises developed, and the "politically neutral" world of business was an area in which they could freely participate and thrive (Spear, 2010).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, fighting adulteration was a shared objective of both early consumer and agricultural cooperatives. Given Greening's circle of influence and networks, it is not surprising that the AHA replicated the model of existing successful consumer cooperatives (Knapp, 1965). Greening introduced a more formal model than previous attempts to empower farmers through cooperation had done, and the AHA operated for almost 50 years (Knapp, 1965).

Legal factors such as inheritance laws and the transformation of the public land by rich landowners in the late 18th through 'enclosures' triggered the acute concentration that defines UK farming today and acted as a deterrent of widespread cooperation in farming. The reduction in the number of both farms and farmers happened at the same time as agriculture was being

transformed into an economic and commercial sector, converting farmland into increasingly larger and more efficient units. This transformation noticeably decreased farmers' marketing needs and motivation to cooperate. In contrast, as will be discussed in the next section, Spain's numerous smallholdings faced very different technical and marketing needs and farmers felt a more immediate need to pull their produce together to be able to access markets.

Back in the UK, the more popular retail cooperatives evolved to serve a classless consumer and left class conflict out, as everybody in urban areas was a consumer of certain goods and shared the need to shop. Two factors, the focus on consumption fostered by the industrial revolution and the distancing of the population from previous more food self-sufficient lifestyles replaced by a reliance on the market, strengthened the importance of consumer over producer cooperatives (Rhodes, 2012). Development policies for the colonies were however quite the opposite; in colonised countries, the focus fell on fostering cooperation at the production level to secure the food imports needed by their increasingly industrialised mother country (Rhodes, 2012).

In Britain, government regulation of exports and imports of corn was well established long before the 19th century (Schonhardt-Bailey, 1996). But in the years coming up to 1846 when the Corn Laws were repealed, the conflict between the declining landed aristocracy and the rising manufacturing and export industrialists escalated. The latter wanted to repeal the Corn Laws to facilitate the exports of British products by improving foreign grain sellers' foreign exchange and thus, their purchasing power. Industrialists also expected the repeal would introduce more competition in the sector, resulting on access to cheaper food for their workers, who were considered another "input" needed to continue the development of the industrial revolution. Agricultural elites, by contrast, wanted to maintain the inflated prices that the Corn Laws had offered them so far. William Peel, Prime Minister at the time, decided to repeal the Corn Laws to appease the industrial and working classes (Schonhardt-Bailey, 1996). Peel reduced duties for both many manufactured and food products and offered some incentives to the landed aristocracy to lessen their financial loss, including the consolidation of a major road network and loans at low interest rates for agricultural improvements (Schonhardt-Bailey, 1996). This development into free trade fuelled the adoption of High Farming (modern growing techniques) during the period from 1840s to 1880s (Prothero et al., 1961).

By the end of the 19th, the importance of farming to the economy had already dramatically decreased and the sector employed no more than a quarter of the population (Hobsbawm, 1999). As a result, a significant proportion of the redundant peasant workforce moved to cities, reducing the amount of labour available to rich landowners. This higher demand for land

workers raised agricultural wages for almost the first time in history as well as eliciting an interest in labour-saving farming methods (Hobsbawm, 1999).

Beatrice and Sidney Webb defined agriculture at the time as *'the most remarkable decline of an unregulated and self-supporting industry'* (Webb and Webb, 1897:761). It is interesting to notice how as early as 1897 the Webbs already referred to UK agriculture as *'another industry'*. Wealthy landlords acted as *'shock-absorbers'* of crises for farmer tenants and kept their political temperature low (Hobsbawm, 1999). In contrast, Spanish peasants they did not have an alternative industrial sector that could absorb them until much later on (Garrido Herrero, 2003). As a result, the number of ACs in the UK remained insignificant at the beginning of the 20th century. Authors have listed further factors that caused this poor development, including the traditional attitude of conservative farmers (Rhodes, 2012) and resistance of landlords (Rayner and Ennew, 1987) as well as the fact that markets were inundated with cheap imports and land value decreased in parallel to the decreasing importance of farming to the national economy (Rhodes, 2012). However, this picture changed at the beginning of the 20th century, when many ACs started to develop and each country in the United Kingdom established its own body to encourage the formation of new cooperatives (Knapp, 1965).

Towards the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Horace Plunkett, the son of an Irish peer, became a key figure in the farming cooperative movement in Ireland (where he led efforts to support small catholic farmers) and later also in England. In 1894 Plunkett supported the creation of the first federation of cooperatives in Ireland under the name of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS). He also stimulated England's interest in cooperation, resulting in the establishment of the British Agricultural Organisation Society in 1900 for England and Wales. Plunkett went on to found the Plunkett Foundation in 1919, a charitable organisation still supporting rural communities today. Similar to Spain, it is interesting to highlight the more agricultural character of early cooperation in Ireland, where Plunkett's work started, compared to the consumer focus the movement took in the UK. Similar stages of development facing the two countries and a shared Catholic ethic meant that agricultural cooperation in Ireland resembled more that of Spain's, as it will be discussed in the next section.

In 1901, the British Society merged with the National Agricultural Union and was registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act under the name of Agricultural Organisation Society (AOS). The cooperative was designed to *'secure cooperation of all connected with the land, whether as owners, occupiers or labourers, and to promote the formation of Agricultural Cooperative Societies for the purchase of requisites, for the sale of produce, for agricultural*

credit, banking and insurance, and for all other forms of cooperation for the benefit of agriculture' (Knapp, 1965:12). It is worth pointing out that the AOS was initially supported by donations and member subscriptions, a reflection of the self-help character of early agricultural cooperativism and its independence from government.

The National Farmers Union (NFU) also supported ACs, especially after the dissolution of the AOS. However, as Joseph Knapp has documented in his detailed and one of the only accounts of the history of agricultural cooperation in England, the NFU failed to give full recognition to agricultural cooperation as an independent self-help business activity of farmers (Knapp, 1965). In fact, representative cooperative organisations and the NFU had a conflictive relationship, competing to be the voice of farmers from the late 1920s until the late 1960s when the UK started to prepare to join the EU (Morales Gutierrez et al., 2005). During the first half of the 20th century, the cooperative movement in the UK did not have much interference from the government or support either. During the inter wars period however, a different policy context was created by the government and the National Farmers Union with the introduction of compulsory marketing schemes and efforts to further modernise farming (Morales Gutierrez et al., 2005). During this time, the UK government introduced the Agricultural Marketing Acts of 1931 and 1933, probably as a response to the slow development of ACs. These acts announced the creation of four marketing boards for the milk, bacon, hop and potato sectors. (Morley, 1975; Rayner and Ennew, 1987). Other boards were established after the World War II (WWII). Most of the boards, with the exception of the Bacon Board, survived until the mid-1990s. The existence of the marketing boards within many sectors has been identified as the main reason that removed the perceived need for bottom-up cooperative action in UK farming (Rayner and Ennew, 1987).

The post war period started the era of the Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives in Great Britain and Ireland (FAC). The FAC was formed in 1949 as a central body to co-ordinate the work of existing federal agricultural organisations throughout the British Isles. The FAC consisted of the Agricultural Central Co-operative Association (ACCA), the Welsh Agricultural Organisation Society (WAOS), the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS), the Ulster Agricultural Organisation Society (UAOS), the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS), the Agricultural Co-operative Managers Association (ACMA) and the Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies (Knapp, 1965). During the 1950s, the FAC acted as a political lobby but also provided training, managed relations between cooperatives and marketing boards, collected statistics, coordinated trade between cooperatives in the various member countries and promoted international cooperative relations (Knapp, 1965).

By the 1960s, the AC sector in England had already started a process of consolidation that continues today, creating fewer but larger cooperatives competing for a higher share of their markets. This could be seen as a response from the farming community to the fast development of and level of concentration in the processing and retail sectors. In 1965, Joseph Knapp was commissioned by the then government-funded Agricultural Central Cooperative Association to carry out a review of agricultural cooperation in England. Knapp highlighted the difficulty of achieving economies of scale while still engaging farmers as members and owners rather than mere customers of cooperative services (Knapp, 1965). The report was commissioned because UK farmers were concerned with the fast degree of vertical integration of English food production and the exponential growth of industrial farming units, specially '*giant beef-lots and egg production units*' (NFU, 1964 in Knapp, 1965). In this report, lack of research on agricultural cooperation (at government, university and industry levels) was identified by Knapp as one of the major weakness of the sector (Knapp, 1965).

The 1967 Act was part of the preparations to get the UK ready for its entry to the European Community by bringing changes to existing support mechanisms. The most dramatic measure that went on to shape the growth and development of the AC sector was the move from compulsory Marketing Boards to voluntary cooperation needed to comply with EC competition law (Davey et al., 1976). The Agriculture Act from 1967 called for the creation of the Central Council for Agricultural and Horticultural Cooperation (CCAHC), which boosted cooperation in agriculture. However, a few years later the Agriculture Marketing Act of 1983 called for the creation of Food from Britain (FFB), which subsumed CCAHC and operated until 1993 (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, 2010; WAOS, 2011). With the creation of FFB, as it will be discussed later in this chapter when examining the AC sector in Britain today, government support for ACs in the UK (with the exception of Scotland) started to focus more on 'collaboration' than 'cooperation' per se (EFFP, 2004).

2.1.3 History of agricultural cooperation in Spain: Anarchism, Francoism and the Catholic Church

Agricultural cooperativism in Spain developed from informal agrarian associationism, with agrarian unions being the first cooperative experiments in the country (Campos and Carreras, 2012). At the social and political level, two factors awakened peasants' awareness of their rights and of class and power inequalities: the introduction of universal male suffrage in 1890, and the diffusion of revolutionary ideologies during the Napoleonic occupation of the early 1800s and of Bakunin's anarchist ideas in the 1860 (Hermi Zaar, 2010). Moyano Estrada has

explained how early associationism was framed in these wider ideologies (such as Marxism, socialism and Catholicism) that exceeded the limits of the agricultural world (Moyano Estrada, 1988). Both the strongest anarchist union – CNT (National Workers’ Federation) – and the socialist union – FNTT-UGT (National Federation of Land Workers) – fostered the creation of cooperatives for the communal cultivation of land as it constituted a channel for the collectivisation project core to their vision and campaigning (Paniagua, 1982).

The development of intensive monocultures introduced a narrower focus in the mission and purpose of ACs (Moyano Estrada, 1988). In Andalusia, in 1930, 60% of male labour was still at the mercy of big landowners; high levels of unemployment and massive land ownership disparities generated the strongest rural anarchist movement in Europe (Simpson, 2003). The empowering of peasants threatened the status and security of landowners (Planas Maresma, 2008). However, the high level of illiteracy across the country at the time hindered not only the take-up of agri-technology but also the development of a strong cooperative sector (Planas Maresma, 2008). With regards to economic factors, expensive and unsuccessful wars in South America attempting to retain control over colonies in the new continent put Spain into a difficult economic situation. On top of that, other factors such as several pests (e.g. “floxera” and “mildiu”) that affected vineyards (that were already a cash crop at that time) and the end of the trade treaty between France and Spain (1892) only worsened the situation. In the middle of an economic crisis and lacking an alternative economic sector or urban areas keen to absorb their labour, Spanish peasants and small farmers found themselves without any bargaining power, in a state that could lead to either revolt or cooperation. However, none of the two happened successfully.

The lack of social and financial capital meant that although many attempts to start cooperatives took place, many were short lived (Garrido Herrero, 2003). Several authors (Garrido Herrero, 2007, Planas and Valls-Junyent, 2011) have linked their short life span to the poverty of the members; even when members pooled their resources together, the total amount of funds was still negligible and not enough for the kind of investment needed to set up a viable AC). This paradox highlights the tension between the ‘open door’ character of cooperatives and the actual social and financial capital required to make them succeed. This tension was clear in early Spanish cooperatives and their failure reflected the widespread deprivation and levels of illiteracy suffered by the peasantry.

From the top-down perspective, the first national cooperative organisation, namely the National Committee for Spanish Cooperatives, was set up in the mid-1890s (Bartlett and Pridham, 1991). With regard to agricultural cooperation, the Royal Decree of 1886 for Cámaras Agrarias

(Agrarian Chambers) was the first one to legislate agricultural cooperativism combining the Law of Associations of 1887 with the competence to develop cooperative activities as well as advising government on the needs of the agricultural sector. However, only 30 associations were created within the first decade of the legislation being introduced. Some authors have suggested the low number was due to the fact these Agrarian Chambers encouraged a conservative and corporative model of cooperation that emphasised the traditional values of a romanticised agrarian social class in an attempt to reduce radical ideologies and interclass conflict (Garrido Herrero 2003) and did not even recognise under the one-member-one-vote cooperative principle (Planas Maresmas, 2008).

Garrido Herrero (2003) has argued that the ambiguous 1906 law was ingeniously created to allow agricultural syndicates to be both syndicalist and cooperative. This allowed the top-down syndicates to claim they were working to meet peasants' needs, while in fact their main focus was on economics activities to cover immediate and basic essentials of the farming population to act as a deterrent for Marxist ideas/movements. Many peasants and smallholders developed a preference for the local agrarian syndicates created under the 1906 law over the conservative Agrarian Chambers as the local syndicates offered them fiscal benefits. However, some of the more socialist, republican or anarchist agrarian cooperatives refused the government's model of cooperation and opted to remain unincorporated (Garrido Herrero, 2003). This dual cooperativism (co-existence of 'rich' and 'poor' cooperatives) has been documented as another factor that weakened the movement at the time (Planas and Valls-Junyent, 2011).

The most economically successful ACs during this early period were those supported by the Catholic Church (Garrido Herrero, 2003). Many authors have defined Catholic cooperatives as paternalistic, religious and anti-revolutionary and with a double objective: "*saving*" peasants from the effects of anarchist and communist ideologies and providing economies of scale to help them stay away from revolt-prone hunger (Simpson, 2003; Garrido Herrero, 2003; Gil, 2004; Giagnocavo, 2012). Set up to maintain the status quo (Hermi Zaar, 2010), no attempt to create an alternative cooperative economy, let alone society, was part of their agenda. As Simpson has described:

the absence of a democratic political tradition, which involved the active participation of smaller farmers, left the cooperative movement being controlled by the larger landowners, whose interests naturally differed (Simpson, 2003:230)

Furthermore, Planas Maresma (2008) has identified four reasons big landowners were keen to join ACs and encourage the development of legally incorporated agrarian associationism in Spain:

- Cooperatives could serve as a tool to reinforce collective action as they had the potential to become the first forum for agrarian interests and the “agrarian class” consciousness that was emerging parallel to that of urban/industrial classes.
- AC could serve as a tool to increase the social legitimacy of the land-owning classes, which was starting to be questioned. Their active role in the apparent “classless” cooperative movement helped them project a fresher image linked to the agrarian modernisation process that was taking place.
- Landowners had growing concerns about their inability to stop the influence anarchist and communist ideologies were having on peasant populations and tried reduced their effect. On the one hand, they attempted this by encouraging small farmers to join cooperatives; with this method, rich landowners stopped peasants from being politically inactive and took advantage of their numbers to increase their lobby power. On the other hand, by having them in their own cooperatives, peasants could be “controlled” and prevented from creating more radical cooperatives.
- AC could also be a tool to fuel the technological development of their own land in an attempt to ensure more competitive yields and thus, their rents.

In contrast, Planas Maresmas (2008) has pinpointed two main factors that underlined peasants’ motivation to join cooperatives dominated by big landowners: as a way to survive the crisis that the agricultural sector was experiencing and to achieve reduction of costs associated with new growing methods and equipment. Peasants, according to Planas Maresmas, joined ACs mainly for financial savings, and if these were provided, their motivation or legitimacy to complain about the managing style of the cooperative was reduced. Nevertheless, it is still worth noting that though lower in numbers, cooperatives of other ideologies existed, e.g. socialist and communist (Garrido Herrero, 2003), especially after 1920 when the number of catholic syndicates peaked and started to decrease (Hermi Zaar, 2010).

Official recognition of the cooperative model as such had to wait until the fall of the monarchy in 1931, when the first act permitting the formation of cooperatives in any business activity or sector was introduced, which lasted throughout the 2nd Republic until the end of the Civil War in 1939 (Julia and Melia, 2003). With the outbreak of the Civil War in July 1936, their number increased rapidly, especially in Aragon and Catalonia where the tradition of the anarchist movement was strong. In the countryside, many rural estates were expropriated and cooperatives formed to cultivate the land.

By 1937 over 2700 cooperatives had been created but by the end of the civil war in 1939, Franco's regime brought this process of development to an abrupt end. The patrimony of the unions and cooperatives associated with the socialist and anarchist movements was seized, while at the same time, many catholic-agrarian organisations were incorporated in the new structure of the regime (Majuelo and Pascual, 1991). Some cooperators moved to South America, where they spread the movement's message and set up successful cooperatives (Birchall, 1994). Franco's authorities assassinated outspoken cooperators that were not able to or decided not leave the country (Giagnocavo, 2012). The addition of a representative of the regime and a representative of the church in each cooperative board was made compulsory.

The final alignment of cooperatives to Franco's dictatorship was completed with the 1942 Act (Julia and Melia, 2003). This Act remained in force for the next 32 years and made cooperatives subject to rigorous legal control. Despite the development of the cooperative sector being inhibited by this legislation, it did not prevent the creation of Spain's most famous industrial cooperative in Mondragon in 1956, still operating today. The creation of a cooperative in Zúñiga (Navarra) in 1959 that was run like a capitalist firm can be said to mark the birth of 'commercial co-operation' in Spain (Majuelo Gil, 2001). Coupled with the development of industrial agriculture, cooperation started to move away from its original focus on people, to a focus on 'enterprises' and business. The desire to develop an export sector for Spanish agriculture followed soon. In 1975-76, three experimental farms were set up in Almeria, fully financed by a cooperative bank. This was the beginning of the development of greenhouses and ACs in that region, that has achieved an inconceivable scale today, exporting around 80% of the produce cultivated in the area (Giagnocavo, 2012). The case of Almeria and its close relation with the AC sector is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Franco's death and the return to democracy in 1975 brought about swift improvements in the cooperative movement in Spain (Barke and Eden, 2001). In 1977, the Freedom of Association Act was approved and political parties, trade unions and employer organisations regained legal status. One year later, in 1978, the Spanish Constitution was enacted. A specific article of the new democratic constitution, number 129, explicitly stated the support the government should grant to cooperative societies by introducing appropriate legislation and also supporting workers to access means of production (Barke and Eden, 2001). Democracy brought a period of transformation and opening for ACs and with political devolution, legal responsibility for ACs was transferred to the newly established regional autonomous governments. However, as discussed above, many leaders in the cooperative movement during Franco's period were closely linked to the regime at the local level, often being also part of the political elite (Majuelo and Pascual, 1991). Some authors have argued this was the reason why the development of the

more recent cooperative movement was disconnected from workers' union movements (Majuelo and Pascual, 1991). Additionally, during the democratic reform of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the new government encountered economic, bureaucratic and political barriers (due to the ruling classes from Franco's regime wanting to retain power), slowing down the dismantling of the former regime's top-down cooperative structure. In the 1980s, political devolution changed the legal arena and policy context for cooperatives:

With political devolution in the 1980s, legal responsibility for co-operatives was assumed by the newly established regional autonomous governments and, by 1985, laws had been passed by governments in the Basque Country, Catalonia, Andalusia and Valencia. By this time the co-operative movement in Spain was one of the largest in Europe, second only to Italy (Barke and Eden, 2001:202).

Indeed, the number of ACs of both first and second degree (the latter are federations of ACs) grew exponentially and by 1984 the sector agreed on the need to create an umbrella body that represented them at the national level (Maté and Carlón, 1984). Soon after, the Confederación Española de Cooperativas Agrarias was created. In 1986, Spain joined the EU. Three months later, unhappy with the governance structure of the Confederación and its lack of solidarity with its member organisations, a group of regional 2nd degree ACs formed the Asociación Española de Cooperativas Agrarias (AECA) while others formed the Unión de Cooperativas Agrarias de España (UCAE) (El País, 1986). The effort to make cooperatives more business-like was increased when Spain joined the European Common Market in 1987; that year a new national law that recognised cooperatives as businesses as opposed to a non-for-profit organisation was introduced. In 1989, the two main representative bodies for ACs, AECA and UCAE, merged to establish a new Spanish Confederation of Agrarian Cooperatives (Cooperativas Agroalimentarias, 2016). In March 1990, the Confederation acquired legal status and became recognised by COGECA in Brussels (Cooperativas Agroalimentarias, 2016). In 2009 the Confederation changed its name to Cooperativas Agroalimentarias (Agri-food Cooperatives) to reflect the "modern" face of competitive ACs adapted to new markets (Cooperativas Agroalimentarias, 2016). In the six-year period immediately after the incorporation of Spain into the EU, an ongoing process of mergers in the agri-food industry took place, driving further consolidation in the sector (Serrano et al., 2015).

The most recent cooperative law from 1999 (still in force) emphasises the business side of cooperatives, contrasting with the ICA definition that also specifies cultural and social needs. In the current legal framework, agricultural cooperatives are seen as associations of farmers that pursue economic benefits, disconnecting the cooperative model from its traditional

solidarity roots (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). Similar policy developments are taking place in current years too as it will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.1.4 Conclusions from historical background

This first part of the chapter has discussed the beginnings of agricultural cooperation in Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries, focusing on two countries that at the time had a very different socio-economic context: UK and Spain. Existing evidence shows that through history, social change has been brought about by people organising themselves to correct a perceived inequity. Consumer and producer cooperatives are an example of this agency and soon became an international phenomenon. They quickly proved to be a successful mechanism to meet the needs of groups of individuals facing challenging circumstances and struggling to access food and the land and inputs to produce it.

In the UK, early ACs developed around price and quality concerns over food inputs during a time of fast technical innovations in agriculture and the development of a new industrial sector. In Spain however, cooperation was used as a social tool by opposite ideologies; on the one hand, the Catholic Church promoted cooperatives as a more acceptable option than anarchism; on the other, the anarchist and socialist movements saw cooperatives as the democratic way of organising work that would free the working class. While Spain was struggling to maintain its empire fighting revolutions in South America, Britain was relying on its colonies to feed its urban workers and was focusing on a different type of revolution: the industrial one. These two different starting points set the pace for the distinct paths of development that the AC movement followed in each nation.

The fact that the sector employing the bulk of the workers in the UK was industry, not agriculture (Birchall, 1994) meant that farmers' demands soon became irrelevant to the majority of the workforce. As a result, UK cooperativism flourished in retail, as the bulk of the working population was formed by industrial workers who had to buy their food and other goods. Peasants became consumers. In Spain, however, the movement had more political weight due to the still high proportion of the population living off agriculture at the time and the spread of anarchist and communist ideas. The lower capital requirements of consumer cooperatives facilitated their success in the UK, both in terms of turnover and membership numbers. ACs on the other hand required higher initial investments, a constraint that reduced poor farmers' capacity to cooperate and shortened the longevity of many ACs.

Christian religious groups were promoters of cooperation in both countries, mostly ACs in Spain and consumer/industrial cooperatives in the UK (Quakers), but also key in the agricultural sector. In the UK their influence was clear at the legislative and entrepreneurial level. In Spain, the Catholic Church used cooperatives as a poverty alleviation tool but also as a control tool to stop peasants from rioting against inequalities. UK Quakers had a more empowering idea of cooperatives compared to the poverty relief role that characterised ACs organised by the Spanish Catholic Church. Catholic ACs were designed to improve peasants' conditions in an effort to refrain revolts and the possibility of a French-like revolution (Simpson, 2003). Initially in the UK, ACs had a focus on self-help and democracy, which then started to weaken in the first decades of the 20th century when the sector had a complicated relation with the NFU. Later, the compulsory Marketing Boards also removed the vision and need for bottom-up and voluntary cooperativism. This rigid version of top-down compulsory agricultural cooperation was taken to the limit in Spain during the Franco regime, when the inclusion of a representative of the regime and the church was mandatory in every cooperative board Bernal et al., 2001).

Disparities in farmers' need for marketing were another factor affecting farmers' incentives to cooperate in each country. The UK had 367 supermarkets by 1960, compared to Spain with only 44 stores in 1962 (Guerin, 1964). In the UK, a much bigger average farm size and a higher degree of development of the national retail sector at the time – with a higher degree of vertical integration – decreased UK farmers' need to cooperate in comparison to their Spanish counterparts that had to find a way into the market for their products. The effects of multilevel governance manifested themselves during the paradigm shift in agricultural cooperation that took place in both UK and Spain when the countries had to get their agricultural sectors ready to join the EC, replacing their mandatory bodies with voluntary organisations in order to comply with EU competition law. The changes were even more dramatic for Spain, where after many decades of autarky the country opened its borders and swiftly became a key exporter for the European market.

2.2 Agricultural cooperation in the 21st century

In this section, current data on ACs in Spain and UK framed in the European context are presented. First, a short introduction of agriculture in the EU and the CAP will be provided. Next, the raise of Producer Organisations (POs) and their effect on ACs will be considered. The following two sections will discuss recent data of ACs in UK and Spain; the final section will examine the fruit and vegetable (f&v) cooperative sector that this thesis focuses on, in

alignment with the theoretical framework of ecological public health. A comparative table with country and agricultural statistics for Spain and the UK can be found in Appendix I.

In December 2012, a detailed review of ACs in the European Union was published. The European Commission commissioned Wageningen University to lead in this project, named '*Support for Farmers' Cooperatives*'. As well as a final report, the project generated 78 background reports with the aim to support 'the policy making process' and the Commission's efforts to encourage the creation of agricultural producer organisations in the EU (Wageningen, 2013). Given its depth and spread, data from these reports will be drawn on to discuss the current picture of cooperativism in EU farming and in specific, Spain and UK; the main project publication will be referenced as 'Bijman et al., 2012' as those were the authors who wrote the synthesis report. The country reports will be referenced separately.

2.2.1 Agriculture in the European Union: the CAP and the rise of Producer Organisations

The CAP and ACs in the EU

Agriculture, fishing and forestry account for 1.8% of European GDP (European Commission, 2012b) and 5% of employment (European Commission, 2013a). Agricultural policy is framed by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Following food shortages during and after WWII, the CAP was created to ensure European citizens could enjoy affordable food and farmers make a living. When the Treaty of Rome was signed on 25 March 1957 it already contained the most important framework provisions for the adoption of the Common Agricultural Policy. At the time, policy approaches based on and promoting agricultural exceptionalism (the idea that food production is different from other economic sectors and as such deserves government support) shaped the development of the state-assisted paradigm in the USA and Europe (Skogstad, 1998).

The Treaty did not stipulate any specifics with regards to the relationship between the European Community authorities and the representatives of the agricultural sector, but the European Commission soon expressed its desire for close cooperation with sector representatives. Aware of the importance of the Community for their sector, farmers' organisations soon organised and on 6 September 1958, the first European representative farmers' organisation, Copa (Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations), was created (Cogeca, 2015). One year later, on 24 September 1959, Cogeca (General Committee for Agricultural Cooperation in the European Union) was created as the European umbrella organisation for ACs, also including fisheries cooperatives. When Cogeca was formed, it was made up of six members. Currently,

it has 30 full member organisations and one affiliated member from across the 28 EU Member States. In addition to that, Cogeca has another 36 partner members (including 10 coming from non EU Member States) (Cogeca, 2015).

First introduced in 1962, the CAP is one of the oldest policies of the European Union and was the EU's first and, for many years, only fully integrated policy (European Commission, 2012a and 2013b). The first objectives of the CAP still current today were increased food security, market stabilisation and product support. From the 1992 reform, the CAP also tried to achieve income and budget stabilisation, increased competitiveness and also started to look at environmental objectives. From the Agenda 2000 onwards, there has been a clear emphasis on sustainability as a policy concern on top of all the other objectives (European Commission, 2013b). The evolution of the CAP has witnessed a clear policy stretching, by which farming policy is expected to cover many objectives including economic objectives, land management, environmental concerns, rural development, etc. (Feindt and Flynn, 2009).

Every CAP reform cycle generates heated negotiations and public debate about the extent and role of farming subsidies. Nevertheless, agriculture only receives less than 1% of public expenditure in the EU (Copa-Cogeca, 2012). Large differences amongst member states exist, but across the board, ACs are key actors in the EU food system, supplying over 50% of agricultural products and over 60% in the collection, processing and marketing of agricultural products (Cogeca, 2010). The average market share of all ACs in the EU is 40% or higher if including the trade of 'hybrid cooperatives' (that allow non-farmer investors) into the calculation (Bijman et al., 2012). In fact, producer cooperatives are key to farming and account for a larger share of the cooperative economy than worker cooperatives (Wilson and MacLean, 2012). There are tens of thousands of ACs in Europe, with Cogeca counting around 40,000 cooperatives on its books (Cogeca, 2015). European ECs employ around 600,000 workers and have 9 million members (Tortia et al., 2013).

The extensive 2012 report commissioned by the European Commission into agricultural cooperatives in the EU sketched a few outlines of the main differences across member states: in Northern Europe, ACs have become increasingly corporate; in the South, the sector is, on average, still quite atomised and localised; in the East, farmers are still reluctant to trust the cooperative model after the socialist experiments of their countries' recent history (Bijman et al., 2012). The largest European ACs are Dutch (Coforta/The Greenery), Italian (Conserve Italia), German (Landgard) and Spanish (Anecoop) (Bijman et al, 2012:51). It is not black and white but the tendency is that in the North there are bigger and more consolidated single sector ACs, even multinational cooperatives; in the South, more local, even multisectorial

cooperatives but still headed by a few big ones at the top accounting for most of the cooperative trade (Bijman et al., 2012). The overall trend seems to be an increased degree of concentration, resulting in fewer but bigger cooperatives, and a growing number of transnational ACs with members in more than one country (Bijman et al., 2012).

The EU common market has increased food trade amongst member countries and as a result, regional (EU) trade is shaping the increasing global character of agricultural cooperatives. Many cooperatives have international activities, however, there are still only a small number of transnational cooperatives (46) with members in more than one country (Bijman et al., 2012). Appendix IV includes a table published by Copa-Cogeca (2015) with detailed statistics on numbers of ACs, members and turnover across the EU member states.

The rise of Producer Organisations (POs)

POs are economic organisations of agricultural producers (or fishermen) with characteristics similar to those of cooperatives. The term is common in the literature on transition countries and development studies (Bijman et al., 2012). A PO may have the legal form of a cooperative, but in many cases it has not. This can be either because the legal requirements for cooperatives pose many restrictions on the activities and the structure of the PO, or, in the case of countries that used to have a socialist state economy, such as Poland or Hungary, because the term cooperative still has negative connotations (Bijman et al., 2012). This is mainly due to the ‘communist legacy’, a term used to refer to a distrust of all types of cooperation that ensued from the enforced collectivity of the socialist era and that has discredited most attempts of cooperative endeavours (Bijman et al., 2012).

POs normally focus on new varieties or high quality (e.g. organic) products and regional specialties (Bijman et al., 2010). Another practical distinction between a cooperative and a PO is that the latter usually has a more focused objective, mainly the joint selling of members’ products. Also, a PO is usually positioned at the upstream part of the food chain. Thus, a PO is often involved in joint bargaining with customers, and much less with processing of members’ products. A common definition of a PO accepted by the European Commission is: ‘a rural business, owned and controlled by producers, and engaged in collective marketing activities’ (Bijman et al., 2012:19). However, the EU legislation explicitly states that a PO can adopt any legal entity or can be clearly defined as part of a legal entity. Thus, other organisations than cooperatives are also recognised as POs.

Even though POs were already included in EU legislation as early as 1972 they became well known (especially in the f&v sector) when the Common Market Organisation (CMO) for Fruit & Vegetables was introduced in 1996. The aid scheme for producer organisations was already compatible with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules before the 2013 CAP reform (Cogeca, 2009). The CMO monitors agricultural markets in the EU and covers approximately 90% of EU output (European Commission, 2013c). The number of POs that became members of an Association of Producer Organisations (APO) doubled between 2000 and 2006. The largest associations of POs are found in Belgium and Italy (Cogeca, 2015). The importance and impact of POs in Spain and the UK is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

The EU tries to achieve produce concentration through its policies in order to improve farmers' competitiveness and increase their bargaining power (European Commission, 2014b). In order to access EU subsidies, f&v POs are required to adopt democratic decision-making similar to cooperatives. However, in other sectors in which the PO model was introduced at a more recent date such as in hops, olive oil and table olives (for which POs were recognised in 2007) and in the dairy sector (POs recognised in March 2012), POs are only described in terms of their function in increasing farmers' bargaining power with no mention to ownership or governance models (Bijman et al., 2012). For this reason, POs become a competitor form of organisation having an impact in the development of the agricultural cooperative movement, as it will be discussed when presenting the findings of this research.

POs are normally included in EU reports of agricultural cooperation even though not all POs are registered cooperatives. Accurate statistics are not available due to the existence of POs with governance models similar to cooperatives and many hybrids between cooperatives and private companies (Bijman et al., 2012). In countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands, known for the large, more corporate-like cooperatives, the market share of POs in marketing fruit and vegetables is higher than that of formal cooperatives (Bijman et al., 2010). In Belgium for example, the historic 'one member-one vote' principle is not mandatory and it is followed by only 66% of existing cooperatives and an enterprise does not need to respect the ICA principles to be considered a cooperative either (Cooperatives Europe, 2016). The legal model is flexible and convenient, so it is a popular choice for people setting up a business in this country. However, the National Council of Cooperation, an organisation representing only cooperatives that respect the seven cooperative principles, has concluded that from the 26,626 cooperative enterprises that are currently registered under the Belgian law, only 534 are identified as true cooperatives (Cooperatives Europe, 2016).

The main differences between a PO and an AC relate to three areas: a) the objectives each organisational model are seeking to achieve; b) the implications of competition law for each; and c) the legal structure. With regards to the organisational objectives, the EU Regulations and Member State guidance notes prescribe a more limited list for POs than for ACs: concentrating supply and marketing members' produce, adapting production to the requirements of the market, improving the product and rationalising the mechanisation of production. In the UK, the Rural Payments Agency requests that POs achieve one or more of the following: planning production, improvement of quality, boosting the value of products, promotion of products, environmental management and crisis prevention (EFFP, 2014).

A second difference to consider is how POs fit in current competition law. In June 2013 the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council reached a political agreement on the CAP. One of the key elements of the CAP reform was a significant modification of the application of competition rules in the agricultural sector. The sales of POs in the olive oil, beef and veal and arable crops sectors were exempted from the application of competition rules. The benefit of this derogation from standard competition rules is only granted if certain conditions are met: the PO should offer members the integration of activities other than joint sales and this integration should be likely to create efficiencies significant enough to offset the possible negative effects of joint selling (European Commission, 2014b). While ACs are registered as cooperatives (legal forms vary significantly in each member state), the framework under which a PO might be established is not specified as long as the statute is consistent with its objectives (EFFP, 2014). Therefore in terms of the legal structure of a PO or AC there is no difference in how they can, or should, be formed. The effects the different rules for POs and ACs have on the AC sector were brought up by research participants and will be discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Finally, Producer Groups (PGs) are a similar type of farmers' associations found in the new Member States and in the Mediterranean countries of the EU15 (Greece, Spain, France, Italy and Portugal), where they represented 58% and 40% in 2006 respectively. This type of organisation is used during a transitional period in order to allow PGs to meet the requirements for being recognised by a FVPO (Cogeca, 2015). The next two sections focus on the current state of the AC sector in the UK and Spain today.

2.2.2 UK agricultural cooperation in the 21st century

As mentioned earlier, statistics for ACs in the UK are scarce and often out-dated, a discovery that other authors have encountered too (Morales Gutierrez et al., 2005 and Spear et al., 2012). Spear has pointed out how the lack of reliable data on ACs is also due to inconsistencies in industry classifications (Spears et al., 2012). Besides, the Plunkett Foundation used to collate annual statistics on ACs in the UK but lack of funding forced them to stop this exercise in 2001. In this section, most of the statistics used were drawn from the aforementioned European Commission country report for the UK (Spear et al., 2012) and complemented by a recent Co-operatives UK's report on ACs from January 2016. The latest figures suggest that there are 621 ACs registered in the UK (Co-operatives UK, 2016), approximately 200 more than previous recent records (Spear et al., 2012). This increase is probably not due to a growth in the number of ACs but to a more detailed method of collating statistics. The largest agricultural sectors are dairy, and then cereals followed by vegetable production (Spear et al., 2012). Data from 2006 shows that dairy and cereal farmers were the most likely to market their produce through ACs, followed by general cropping and horticulture and farmers with mixed farms (EFFP, 2014). It is important to point out that small-scale farm businesses in the UK are less likely to form part of FCBs (EFFP, 2004).

As part of their work for the 2012 EC report, Spear and colleagues analysed the Farm Structure Survey of Eurostat and concluded that most agricultural sectors have witnessed a decline in the number of farms, apart from the f&v sector that has remained fairly stable and is formed by a heterogeneous picture of small and large farms. The farming crises of BSE (mad cow disease) and Foot and Mouth disease hit UK farming hard from the late 1990s up to 2001 and highlighted the vulnerability of the sector. In 2001 the UK government set up the Curry Commission to analyse the factors that contributed to the crises and lessons learnt. The final report published by the Commission was titled *'The Future of Farming and Food'* (Curry, 2002) and it informed most of the agricultural policy during the last Labour administration until 2010. Following the report's recommendations, the English Farming and Food Partnerships (EFFP) body was set up to encourage collaboration in the farming sector and work with existing ACs. However, it is worth pointing out that EFFP focused on promoting 'farmer-controlled' and/or 'farmer-owned' businesses, without linking to or mentioning the cooperative movement. Since the publication of the Curry report, government efforts have focused on 'collaboration' rather than on 'cooperatives' as such (Curry, 2002; EFFP, 2004). In addition, there was an emphasis on vertical collaborations within supply chains to compete against imports and to be better aligned to large supermarkets' supply requirements.

Food from Britain (FFB), the body that replaced the Agricultural and Horticultural Cooperation in 1983s, continued to exist until 2009 (Food from Britain, no date). Described as a ‘quasi-governmental agency’, FFB was officially presented as the vehicle for funding a revival of ‘regional food’. However, FFB received criticisms from civil society organisations because instead of reconnecting British farmers with British consumers, FFB was operating as an export agency, mainly focusing on fostering export activity (SpinWatch, 2005).

Currently, agricultural cooperation work is not explicit in DEFRA’s agenda, with support being more based on words than on money or resources (Spear et al., 2012). Despite not being on the policy agenda, DEFRA commissioned a survey in 2013 to learn more about ACs and POs with the aim to improve competitiveness of the horticultural sector in the UK. Despite being advertised to thousands of farmers on the NFU website, only 38 respondents answered the survey (EFFP, 2013). Further details about this survey are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

The Curry report continued to be the basis for the Labour administration’s food and farming policies until 2010 when the Coalition Government took power. A few months later, in October 2010, the UK government discontinuing funding for EFFP, which became subject to a management buyout, privatised and renamed European Farming and Food Partnerships.

In Scotland, the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS) has continued to provide support and development services for ACs since 1905. SAOS receives around 25% of its income from government funding and the rest from members’ fees and service delivery. The success of SOAS has put Scotland ahead of England and Wales in terms of cooperativism in farming (Spears et al., 2012).

In Wales, the WAOS was founded in 1922 as the central body for Agricultural Cooperation. WAOS has not been supported financially by the government since the mid 1980s; WAOS was funded again from 2000 to 2010, but as in England, funding was mainly targeting ‘farmer-owned’ ventures rather than specifically promoting ACs. After government funding run out, WAOS was transformed into a workers’ cooperative that enables voluntary and joint assurance and quality marketing, operating as an agri-food consultancy enterprise financed exclusively from fees earned (WAOS, 2011). Currently, the Wales Co-operative Centre covers, but does not specialise on ACs; this Centre is mainly funded by the European Regional Development Fund and Welsh Government, with additional funding from Comic Relief and the Nationwide Foundation (WAOS, 2011).

In summer 2012, the Welsh Government announced a Co-operative and Mutuals Commission that was put in place to make recommendations on how to grow and develop the cooperative and mutual economy in Wales in order to create jobs and wealth (Burge, 2012). In February 2014 the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport launched the Commission's report, which discussed and documented the contribution that cooperatives and mutuals make to the Welsh economy. The Commission concluded that agriculture, forestry and food processing are *'vitaly important sectors that need support to innovate and diversify in the face of significant economic pressures'* (Welsh Co-operative and Mutuals Commission, 2014:34). In terms of financial support, the Commission recommended the creation of a grants and loan fund – Co-operative and Mutual Finance Wales – dedicated to cooperative, mutual and other social enterprises and administered by existing financial intermediaries and accessed via Social Business Wales. These findings indicate a renewed interest in cooperatives in Wales; it remains to be seen if this interest will inform Welsh Brexit policies, and if so, what the impact on ACs might be.

In Northern Ireland, the Ulster Agricultural Organisation Society (UAOS) that earlier in the 20th century was part of the Federation of Agricultural Co-operatives in Great Britain and Ireland (FAC), no longer exists. Despite the relatively high contribution of agriculture to Northern Ireland's economy, UAOS was denied more financial support for ACs recently after claims pointing out they had been severely underfunded went unheard (Spear et al., 2012).

2.2.3 Spanish agricultural cooperation in the 21st century

As discussed in the historical section, the end of Franco's dictatorship and the adoption of democracy brought a period of transformation and opening for ACs in Spain. In the 1980s, with political devolution, legal responsibility for ACs was transferred to the newly established regional autonomous governments, a development that still exists and complicates the remit of national policies (e.g. national law might only affect supra-autonomic ACs, which are those operating in more than one of Spain's 17 'autonomous communities' with strong regional governments).

Spain was one of the last Eurozone countries to modernise its agriculture, but soon went through similar intensification, industrialisation and technological developments as UK farming had experienced decades earlier. Nowadays, Spain is a key food producer and exporter in the EU market (Bijman et al., 2012).

In the 2000s, the development and consolidation of ACs continued. In 2009, the CCAE (the Spanish Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives) changed its name and became Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias to project a modern and more business-like image. Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias represents around 3,800 ACs integrated in 16 territorial unions and federations (FUTs) and Agrocantabria (a 2nd degree AC in the region of Cantabria) (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias, 2016).

According to Eurostat data, agriculture accounted for 2.45% of Spanish GDP in 2010 and despite a constant decrease in the number of farms in Spain (at an average of 3% across sectors from 2003 to 2008), this rate is still below the 8.3% EU average. This picture links with the still traditional atomised character of Spanish farms, which, as it will be discussed later, is also reflected in the atomisation of the cooperative sector. Productionist discourses blame this atomisation as one of the main barriers to improving competitiveness in Spanish agricultural cooperation. Small farms means more farmers, which in turn mean more complex heterogeneous members in ACs and a reduced bargaining power when dealing with the highly concentrated retail sector.

As with the UK, the entry to the European Union shaped Spanish agriculture, farmers' incentives for cooperation and in the case of Spain, a growing approach to exports after a period of autarchy during the Franco's dictatorship years. Nowadays, according to OSCAE (the national body monitoring cooperativism in agriculture), 31% of Spanish cooperatives are involved in export activities and around 26.5% of agricultural cooperatives' income comes from exports, a trend increasing year on year (OSCAE, 2015). In the 1980s, with the return to democracy and the entry of Spain in the EU, the number of cooperatives increased by four. However, despite the higher number of cooperatives, 27% of them account for 86% of cooperative trade. The remaining 73% have less than 5 million euro activity, a low level compared with the EU average above 10 million euros (OSCAE, 2015). As a result, cooperatives in Spain are perceived as weaker than in the rest of the continent due to the high number of existing cooperatives, most with very low averages in terms of number of members, paid workers and share of trade (Gonzalez and Benito, 2001). However, cooperatives enjoy a high level of trust by Spanish farmers, and are perceived as an extension of their farm, perhaps because due to the atomisation of the sector, they are still embedded in the fabric of the local communities and social relations.

The degree of associationism – a common term used in Spain to refer to farmers coming together to cooperate – increases with the following variables: the higher the level of education, the lower the age of the farmer and the bigger the farm, the more likely the farmer is to cooperate

(Gonzalez and Benito, 2001). Moyano Estrada (2001) has mapped agricultural associationism in Spain along a political continuum, where federations of cooperatives fall in one extreme, lobbying for general interests of members, and specialised associations, such as marketing cooperatives, fall in the other extreme, focusing on specific objectives (Moyano Estrada, 2001).

In contrast to the UK, cooperative law in Spain is very complex. Spain is the European member with most pieces of cooperative legislation (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). The country has a double layer of legislation: a state law for cooperatives active in two or more autonomous communities and a second layer at the autonomous community level with devolved powers and legislation for those cooperatives operating in one single region. This myriad of laws that get updated and approved at different times complicates the legislative picture enormously. The result is a weak national framework, frequently criticised for being inadequate and unable to adapt to an increasing competitive and globalised food sector. However, there are no plans for a national overarching legislation as the negotiation process required would be too cumbersome (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). The Basque Country is said to have the most advance legislation, but the region does not have a high concentration of ACs, so not many farmers benefit from it.

Additionally, Spanish cooperatives have a well-defined structure with three mandatory corporate bodies: General Assembly, Management Board and a (weak) external regulatory body called 'Intervenors'. The legal framework dictates the governance structure of cooperatives with little room for change, but it allows non-members to join the Management Board as well as patronage-proportional voting (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). Historically, the influence of IOFs' models has been clear in Spanish cooperative governance (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012), but since 1999, cooperative legislation has not been amended at the same pace and, as an example, gender policies have not yet entered cooperative legislation.

Other factors affecting the governance of AC is the atomised character of the sector and the existing legislation that encourages localism and excessive concentration of power by the presidents of many small and medium cooperatives (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). For this reason, the government and big players in the cooperative sector are putting a big emphasis on mergers; their efforts have been translated into policy and materialised in the form of a national law. In 2012, the year the UN was celebrating the International Year of Cooperatives, a new Law for the Integration of Agricultural Cooperatives was proposed and approved a year later. This Law was design to encourage mergers in order to foment the

consolidation of a very atomised sector. Chapter 5 presents new data on the details and effects this new cooperative law is having on the AC sector and on farmers.

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 list the top 10 ACs in Spain and UK. Data by turnover for the UK are dated from 2010. A more recent report from Cogeca includes other statistics from the British AC sector (excluding turnover), highlighting again the lack of reliable and centralised data available (Cogeca, 2015). More statistics for each country can be found in Appendix V. No UK or Spanish ACs are listed amongst the top 50 EU ACs by turnover. Only six Spanish ACs and three UK ACs made it to the top 100 in 2014 (Cogeca, 2015). For Spain, Coren was listed as number 57; Capsa as 76 followed by Group AN in position 78 in 2014 followed by DCoop (n. 86) and finally Anecoop listed as 94. While UK's First Milk appeared as number 71; Fane Valley was number 75 and United Dairy Farmers was in position 90 (Cogeca, 2015).

Table 2.2 Top 10 UK Agricultural Cooperatives by turnover

Company	Sector	In £ Million
First Milk	Dairy	563
Openfield Group	Grain, inputs and marketing services	481
United Dairy Farmers	Dairy	400
Mole Valley Farmers	Agricultural Supplies	281
Fane Valley Cooperative	Meat and milk processing, Supplies	280
ANM Group Ltd	Food and Livestock Marketing	224
Anglia Farmers Ltd	Crop Marketing and Supplies	166
Atlas Fram Group	Crop Marketing and Supplies	139
Countrywide Farmers	Agricultural Supplies	123
Woldmarsh Producers	Agricultural Supplies	88

Source: Adapted by author from Cogeca (2010)

Table 2.3 Top 10 Spanish Agricultural Cooperatives by turnover

Company	Sector	In € Million
Coren	Agricultural supply, processing and export	982
Grupo AN	Agricultural supply, processing and export	673
DCoop	Agricultural supply, services, export	565
Anecoop	Marketing of fruit and vegetables, services, export	539
Covap	Meat, supply, credit, services, export	373
Cobadu	Meat, milk, supply, services, shops	231
Unica group	Vegetables, processing, shops	202
Acor	Sugar, feed, petrol, services	200
Actel	Cereals, fruits, dried fruits, olive oil, agricultural supply	200
Camp D'Ivars D'Urgell	Cereals, meat, feed, services, credit, agricultural supply, shops	190

Source: Adapted by author from OSCAE (2015)

2.2.4 Fruit and vegetables cooperatives in Europe

As discussed in the introduction, this research studied agricultural cooperativism across farming sectors but with a focus on fruit and vegetables (f&v). The rationale for this decision was based on one of the theoretical assumptions of this thesis relating to the need for integrated food policy framed in an Ecological Public Health perspective that emphasises the importance of plant-based diets as beneficial to both public health and the environment (Lang et al., 2009; Rayner and Lang, 2012). The f&v sector is of strategic importance and contributes to providing a healthy diet to 500 million European consumers. It currently represents close to 17% of the total value of agricultural produce in the EU and involves approximately 1 million farms (Cogeca, 2009).

However, the value of production in the EU27 has dropped on average by 10.8% for market garden produce and 13.6% for fruit between 2003 and 2009, compared to 2003 levels (Copa-Cogeca, 2009). Even though Europe is one of the world's largest producers of f&v alongside India, the EU actually has a deficit and is also the second largest importer (Cogeca, 2009). As it will be discussed in Chapter 5, the effect of multilevel governance is clear in the European f&v sector: the CAP dictates strict marketing and quality standards despite the sector receiving hardly any subsidies since the f&v market has been increasingly liberalised (Cogeca, 2009; Bijman et al., 2012). The almost complete liberalisation of fruit and vegetable imports to the EU has been formalised in bilateral free trade agreements between the EU and third countries exporting fruit and vegetables to the EU. Cogeca blames these trade agreements for the slower rate of exports from the EU than the rate of imports, creating a trade deficit for the majority of fresh produce that went from 7.4 million tonnes (6.1 billion euro) in 2002 to 9.8 million tonnes (8 billion euro) in 2007 (Cogeca, 2009).

In 1996, the f&v CMO was transformed, changing its original intervention strategy of using subsidies as defensive instruments into a more proactive approach focused on marketing and rebalancing producers' power (Bijman et al., 2010). Taking advantage of this legislative paradigm shift, many POs emerged in the late 1990s. This policy shift converted f&v production into a highly regulated but unsupported sector, creating a suitable context for the emergence of POs as organisations with a strong marketing function.

In the UK, the f&v sector is characterised by low margins and a high need for investment, although still showing some growth in glasshouse farming. F&v ACs count 924 members and 229 employees (full time equivalent) (Co-operatives UK, 2011). Out of all ACs, f&v cooperatives are the ones with more international activity, as demand for year-round supply has encouraged business abroad with producers from other countries (mainly in Southern Europe) that complement seasonal produce in Northern European countries (Spear et al., 2012). Spear and colleagues (2012) have found three f&v cooperatives in the UK with this kind of trading profile. It is worth mentioning that these three cooperatives have Spain as one of their host countries from which they purchase produce (Spear et al., 2012). However, these three UK cooperatives are still considered international (as they trade internationally but membership is still restricted to UK producers) as opposed to transnational, when farmers in different countries are able to join the AC as members (e.g. Arla in dairy farming). Statistics show that globalisation for UK ACs has largely taken place in the areas of processing and distribution, although not normally accompanied by globalisation of ACs' membership (Cogeca, 2015).

There are also four overseas f&v cooperatives (two from the Netherlands and the other two from France) with activities in the UK, but as with the previous ones mentioned, the membership is still restricted to the country of origin, with a focus on processing and distribution (Spear et al., 2012). In the UK POs have had a low uptake of the EU Fruit and Vegetable Scheme that supports the sector as many growers did not meet the structural and operational practices required to access the funding, especially in areas where farmers may not have overall control such as marketing and packaging (Spear et al., 2012).

In Spain, the picture of f&v production for ACs is different; in terms of output, f&v is the most important agricultural sector in the country. In the context of agricultural cooperation, f&v ACs account for about 20% of total turnover for cooperative trade and almost 50% of the f&v sector (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). According to Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias' data from 2011, twelve of the thirty largest cooperatives in the country were involved in the f&v sector (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias, 2011). In Spain, there are 697 POs (of which 307 are cooperatives for f&v) representing one third of the market. Currently, POs are thought to have low entry requirements for producers and production standards (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). The growth of POs is discussed in more depth in Chapters 5 and 6.

According to Eurostat statistics, Spain had 225,080 f&v farms in 2007, of which 183,000 were fruit and citrus fruit farms and 42,080 were horticulture ones. This reflects the export trends in the sector (mainly in EU due to shorter distances required). With a marked export character, the Spanish f&v sector is the 2nd largest in Europe (only after Italy) and the first in worldwide exports (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). The perishable character of the produce, which requires good logistics and rapid sales, has shaped the development of the sector. These two factors, logistics and speed, have pushed prices up and introduced a huge variation between prices paid by consumers and payments received by farmers. This variability in prices is also due to supermarkets' strategies on f&v, often priced low to attract consumers through the door regularly (due to the perishable nature of the produce).

F&v farms in Spain are still generally small to medium size. Despite being regionally heterogeneous, Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot (2012) have identified that generally in the South (where production is concentrated and export strategies are common), farmers use more intensive methods, while in the North and the central regions of the country, Spanish farmers have a more diverse approach involving different crops and products. Overall, f&v farms are key in terms of employment creation, as they are quite labour intensive. In general, the concentration of the f&v production is reflected in the low level of utilised agricultural area compared to sugar, meat and dairy production (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). This

factor links with the ecological public health approach that calls for an increase in f&v consumption that comes with associated environmental benefits such as reduced land use for intensive production of meat and livestock feed.

Sales of f&v are increasing, with a particular growth trend in processed produce and niche markets (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). The effect of multilevel governance discussed for the UK is also clear in the f&v sector in Spain, as the CAP dictates strict marketing and quality standards despite the sector receiving hardly any subsidies and being exposed to market fluctuations; thus the market has been dramatically liberalised, which in turn has promoted a race around increasing technical sophistication and specialisation. Nevertheless, despite many advances and investments, obsolete infrastructures are still common in Spanish f&v farms. Apart from low rural incomes, an additional reason for this obsolescence was the housing bubble that created the financial crises of 2007/08. During this period, land had a higher value if sold for property development than as farmland. In this context, investing in infrastructure did not seem a priority as many farmers were considering selling (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012).

Despite large retailers accounting for often up to two thirds of food sales in many EU countries, f&v sales in Spain seem to have retained a preference for a more traditional retail channel. Sales of vegetables through SMEs and/or family owned businesses account for 42% of purchases, exceeding those of large distribution chains at 40% (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). Finally, the renewal of the EU-Morocco agricultural protocol has increased competition for Spanish farmers. This agreement has started a debate about quality, similar to the situation of pig, chicken and egg producers in the UK that have to compete with products from other countries with lower welfare standards. This trade agreement has also been highly criticised by NGOs as it takes advantage of Morocco's natural resources without offering EU membership to the country as well as damaging the North African's country's small holder agriculture in favours of large agribusinesses focusing on intensive monoculture (Pravda Ru, 2013). The effects of the globalised activities of European ACs in developing countries are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

2.2.5 Summary

The first section of the chapter offered a historical account of the development of cooperative ideology and ACs in Europe, paying special attention to the specific cases of Spain and UK. This second section of the chapter has discussed current trends in the EU AC sector with a focus on the f&v ACs and considering the differences and similarities in Spain and the UK. The effect

of multilevel governance (MLG) has been clear in both countries over the years, as preparations for integration in the EU common market started a paradigm shift in national models of agricultural cooperation. For the UK, joining the EU meant the end of the marketing boards, whilst in Spain, the sector had to open to international markets after decades of autarky under Franco's regime. Currently, the CAP continues to encourage and recognise the value of cooperation in agriculture but is supporting more liberalised POs over the stricter and more socially-committed ICA cooperative model. The emergence and growth of POs has been discussed, providing an introduction to how POs have affected the AC sector, a topic that will be explored in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

This section has also reviewed how government support and funding for ACs in both UK and Spain has varied over the years. The AC sector went through a process of transformation when both countries joined the EU. In Spain, a clear export strategy and the need to access international markets strengthened the role of cooperatives. The number of ACs in Spain is very high compared to other EU countries (approximately 3,000 in 2012), but this is expected to gradually change after a new legislation to facilitate mergers was introduced in 2013. However, there is already a strong level of market concentration: 16% of Spanish cooperatives trade 75% of the total trade. Mergers are seen as the solution to improve the competitiveness of the sector (OSCAE, 2015). This trend towards consolidation has also been taking place in the UK, mimicking the processing and retail sector.

With regards to legislation, clear differences between UK and Spain have been highlighted, reflecting the different degree of importance cooperatives represent for the economy of these two countries. In Spain, an extensive legislation specific to cooperatives has been developed over the years, while the UK only has a special provision under the Company Code. In most of the UK, the disjointed array of policies focusing on collaboration since the influential Curry report has only achieved a fragmented impact. The exception has been Scotland, where the convergence of policies has resulted in a strong agricultural cooperative sector. In the UK, the existence of state Marketing Boards until relatively recently and the early development of a highly concentrated retail market created a policy context that lowered farmers' motivation and need to form bottom-up cooperatives. After providing a historical account of the development of the AC sector in Spain and the UK within the EU context from an industry and policy perspective, the next Chapter presents a multidisciplinary review of the academic literature, discussing how different disciplines have studied ACs. The impact that the theoretical and methodological approaches used by these disciplines has had in ACs and more generally in farming policy is also examined.

3. Theorising cooperativism: a multidisciplinary research topic

Chapter 2 has introduced the early thinkers of cooperation and the ideologies that gave way to the emergence of the cooperative movement. Since then, cooperatives have been the object of study of many disciplines. This chapter consists of three sections that unpack that multidisciplinary. The first part describes the process used to collate relevant publications. The second section examines the academic literature that deals with ACs, divided by discipline and thematic stream. The chapter ends with a final section that provides a synthesis of the literature around sustainable food systems, discussing the links between sustainability and ACs. At the end of the thesis, Chapters 9 and 10 link back to the literature review, sharing reflections on the value of a multidisciplinary approach to the study of ACs identified by this research.

3.1 Methodology used for systematically identifying, collating and reviewing literature

This section provides a summary of the different types of academic and grey literature on ACs reviewed with the aim of identifying the main theories around cooperativism in food and farming. The sources were then categorised according to two criteria: discipline and thematic stream. The collation of the literature followed twelve strategies:

1. Systematic searches were carried out in the following databases: Ebscohost, Jstor, Ovid Online and Scopus; no time constraint was used in the year of publication as the aim was to document the development of the agricultural cooperative movement in Europe from its early beginnings.
2. Proactive searches were conducted on authors/organisations whose work was identified a priori as being of particular relevance (e.g. Birchall, Co-operatives UK, Cooperativas Agroalimentarias and Plunkett Foundation).
3. Bibliographies published by the above authors were screened and the most relevant references were followed up on.
4. Publications specific to the cooperative movement such as *The Journal of Cooperative Studies* (UK) and the *Revista de Estudios Cooperativos* (Spain) were reviewed.
5. Additional readings were also recommended by actors involved in the AC sector during initial informal conversations/ email correspondence.

6. Further texts were identified while attending Prampolini Reading Group sessions. This multidisciplinary academic reading group, which the author used to co-organise, met monthly over two years to discuss selected readings on cooperatives.
7. A visit to the National Cooperative Archive in Manchester, which holds the collections of the Cooperative Union and the Cooperative College archives (the merger took place in 2000) along with further collections deposited by cooperative societies, was carried out. Records found during the visit uncovered interesting historical information presented in Chapter 7.
8. A visit to the Plunkett Foundation was also carried out; nowadays, this charity encourages and supports community ownership projects, but Plunkett has a long history of supporting AC since it was founded in 1919. Their work with ACs lasted for nearly 80 years and included the collation of annual statistics to monitor the growth and development of agricultural cooperativism both in the UK and abroad; data were periodically published in their annual Agricultural Cooperation Year Books, remarkable sources of social and financial information on ACs that came to halt in 2001 due to lack of funding. The Foundation's invaluable library (that is applying for funds to secure its collection in a digital format) holds the most comprehensive record of international agricultural cooperation in the world. Due to the large amount of Year Books that were published, it was decided to review those that included a chapter on the two countries under study, namely, UK and Spain. These included the Year Books from 1938, 1954, 1955, 1961, 1966, 1967, 1973, 1985 and 1988.
9. Grey literature was reviewed given that it represents the main source of detailed statistics on ACs. For both countries, European Union-funded projects and industry representative bodies' reports (Co-operatives UK in UK and *Cooperativas Agroalimentarias* in Spain) were found to be the major source of current statistics both at the national and EU level. In Spain, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment (MAGRAMA) funds the Socioeconomic Observatory of the Spanish Agrifood Cooperativism (OSCAE), a body that closely monitors the AC sector and publishes regular reports. Google searches and direct visits to these organisations' websites were carried out to find relevant publications and annual reports.
10. Participation in relevant listservs and subscription to e-newsletters proved to be an effective way for ensuring that all relevant actors and perspectives were considered; this strategy also provided up to date news from and about the AC sector. Relevant lists included the EuroActiv Newsletter (with regular policy news from the EU), the UK Food Group mail list (a network of over 50 NGOs and university working on food and farming issues) and Via Campesina (the global organisation that represents peasant farmers and campaigns for food sovereignty).

11. Frequent visits to the media and communication pages on the websites of the Campaign for Real Farming, *Soberania Alimentaria* magazine and The Land Workers' Alliance were instrumental in keeping up with the alternative cooperative initiatives emerging in agriculture in Spain and UK.
12. Further references were followed up throughout the process of this research, including suggestions received during conference presentations and feedback from peer reviews. A very relevant source of data that became available approximately a year after the beginning of this research was a survey on ACs and POs commissioned by DEFRA in summer 2013. According to the NFU, the purpose of this survey was to understand barriers to using AC model and collaboration to raise the competitiveness of UK horticulture. This survey is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Following the review of the above grey and academic literature, it became obvious that a wide range of disciplines are interested in studying cooperation. Furthermore, the multiplicity of terms used to refer to 'agricultural cooperatives' also became apparent. These terms included:

- In the UK: Agricultural Co-operative, Agricultural cooperative (search results are different depending on the use or omission of the hyphen), Farmer-Owned Business, Farmer-Controlled Business, Producer-Owned Organisations.
- In Spain: *Co-operativa Agrícola* (Agricultural Co-operative), *Cooperativa Agrícola* (Agricultural cooperative), *Asociación de campesinos* (peasants' association) and *Sindicatos Agrarios* (agrarian syndicates).

The above terms are frequently used interchangeably, although they reflect the food policy paradigm behind each of the different conceptions of cooperatives. For example, some terms refer to unincorporated cooperatives of peasants (*Asociación de campesinos*), with all the connotations that the word peasant entails (van der Ploeg, 2013). Many NGOs and academics are repopularising the use of the term peasant, trying to reclaim it and contest its negative connotations. Other terms, such as 'farmer-owned business', are common in texts emphasising the financial benefits of a type of associationism that still protects farmers' independence but it is embedded in a productionist paradigm. This is common in the UK where there seems to be a refusal of the actual term 'agricultural cooperative' as it carries negative connotations and farmers' do not want to be linked to previous ACs failures (Wilson and MacLean, 2012). In order to avoid excluding relevant publications using these alternative terms, key words were adjusted to include the above key words when undertaking database searches. This strategy ensured that the results included literature that analyses cooperatives from different disciplinary

perspectives (e.g. a more historical or economic perspective) that otherwise could have been overviewed if only using a single key word (e.g. 'cooperative').

3.2 Literature on agricultural cooperatives by discipline and theme

Following the presentation of the sources and search techniques used to access relevant literature, this section explores the five thematic streams identified according to different disciplines:

1. Cooperatives behaviours in the biosocial sciences, mainly psychobiology and evolutionary psychology.
2. Historical stream: history, with a focus on political history of ACs.
3. Development stream: ACs seen from a specific socio-economic perspective mainly from the context of developing countries and emerging economies, but also applied to developed countries. This stream is mainly comprised of grey literature published by NGOs and UN.
4. Economic and organisational performance stream: Two sub-streams were identified here: one of academic literature trying to understand past performance to generate theories that can predict and control future AC performance; the second one, grey literature funded by industry or government departments focusing on reporting performance and providing very practical recommendations to improve it.
5. Cooperatives as part of promoting alternative food networks and shorter supply chains: food policy and rural sociology literature.

3.2.1 Biosocial Sciences literature

Even though this stream of literature does not relate directly to agricultural cooperation, it is worth briefly considering some key texts written from an evolutionary psychology perspective in order to frame the topic of this research into wider debates about the evolutionary and genetic basis for human cooperation. These debates can often be identified as underlying issues permeating all the other disciplines and embedded in the worldview of many academics writing about ACs.

Texts from this stream mainly focus on cooperation understood as a construct that refers to a set of behaviours evolved and reinforced by natural selection; the main argument in this literature is that survival in the natural world is not just based on competition, but also on

cooperation amongst individuals, groups and species. When evolutionary thinking permeated other disciplines such as economics and sociology, two contrasting views emerged: on one hand, competition was presented as a natural way of surviving in modern capitalist societies; on the other hand, some authors argued cooperation was the basis of (and for) social order. One of the earliest and more popular advocates of cooperation was Prince Kropotkin. The famous Russian activist, scientist and philosopher presented the case for cooperation in his acclaimed books *Mutual Aid* and *The Conquest of Bread*. Kropotkin backed up his arguments with examples from different species that cooperate in the wild to survive (Kropotkin, 1902 and 1906). Even though both Darwin and Kropotkin agreed cooperation helps higher evolution, Kropotkin regretted how Darwin had emphasised the competition element rather than the cooperation that occur in the natural world – both are laws of nature. Kropotkin also analysed the social and political implications of his argument; with regards to rural communities, he wrote:

The current theory as regards the village community is, that in Western Europe it has died out by a natural death, because the communal possession of the soil was found inconsistent with the modern requirements of agriculture. [...] Everywhere, on the contrary, it took the ruling classes several centuries of persistent but not always successful efforts to abolish it and to confiscate the communal lands (Kropotkin, 1902:184).

With regards to ACs in particular, Kropotkin thought that they could be both ‘anticapitalist’ and ‘joint-stock individualism’ (Kropotkin, 1902:214). The Prince accepted that both rural and urban societies struggled to introduce and maintain mutual aid institutions (Kropotkin, 1902:223), but claimed that ‘the periods when institutions based on the mutual-aid tendency took their greatest development were also the periods of the greatest progress in arts, industry and science’ (Kropotkin, 1902:232).

Another key text in this stream is the *Evolution of Cooperation*, a 1981 paper by political scientist Robert Axelrod and evolutionary biologist W. D. Hamilton (Axelrod and Hamilton 1981) that was then expanded on Axelrod’s 1984 paper by the same name. The authors applied game theory to analyse how cooperation can emerge and persist, critically reflecting on the implications for – and being informed by – moral and political philosophy of cooperation and the relationship between individuals and groups.

In 1998, philosopher Elliott Sober and biologist David Sloan Wilson published *Unto Others* (Sober and Wilson, 1998), a book using a multidisciplinary approach to demonstrate the evolutionary advantages of altruistic behaviour and group selection. Following Kropotkin’s example, this book first provides examples of the animal kingdom and then explores

cooperative behaviours in humans. More current literature includes Natalie and Joseph Henrich's book: *Why Humans Cooperate* (2007), an anthropological account of cooperation using ethnographic methodology, and evolutionary biologist Martin Nowak's work: *Supercooperators* (Nowak and Highfield, 2011). The Henrichs proposed five elements that were key to shaping the evolution of cooperation: (kinship (natural selection and cultural learning), reciprocity, reputation, social norms and ethnicity); while Nowak's analysis deeps down into human bodies, putting forward the theory that cancer develops based on a group of cell's failure to cooperate, opting instead to reproduce in a selfish, uncoordinated manner (Nowak and Highfield, 2011), which has huge implications for treatments.

In summary, this body of literature takes on the mission to uncover the least well known aspects of Darwin's theory of evolution that consider cooperative behaviours core to natural selection processes, a topic he expanded on in *The Descent of Man* (Darwin, 1971). This stream argues that the survival value of cooperative behaviours are in line with those of competition, calling for a rethink of socio-economic orders, foreign policies, market strategies and even cancer treatments as in the case of Nowak's work. This literature challenges mainstream top-down approaches to governance and it is critical of designing public policies and economic systems based on competition and the pursuit of individual interest.

3.2.2 Historical literature

This stream includes literature by authors who have written about the historical development of cooperatives in agriculture. In the UK, the historical study of the cooperative movement focused more in industrial (Webb and Webb, 1897; Coates and Benn, 1976) and retail (Brazda and Schediwy, 1989; Birchall, 1994) cooperatives as those were the sectors (especially consumer cooperation) in which UK cooperativism became more successful. This was a reflection of the needs of the working population at that time. Urban industrial workers no longer had the resources to grow their own food, so cooperation made sense at the retail level to allow them to access food of better quality at cheaper prices.

The most comprehensive historical account of UK agricultural cooperativism found was Joseph G. Knapp's book *An Analysis of Agricultural Co-operation in England* (Knapp, 1965). Knapp was the first administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farmer Cooperative Service. The English Agricultural and Central Cooperative Association commissioned Knapp to write this book-format report due to his extensive experience on cooperative studies. Knapp was asked to undertake this enquiry of the AC sector because farmers were concerned with the fast

degree of vertical integration of food production and the exponential growth of industrial farming (Knapp, 1965). Knapp's work was extensively referenced in Chapter 2 when discussing the development of ACs in the UK. Twenty years after Knapp's report was commissioned, Rayner and Ennew published a historical review of agricultural cooperation in the UK. The authors' account is similar to Knapp's analysis of how the unfavourable policy context of the 1920s and 1930s hindered the development of ACs in the UK; they also highlighted how the incorporation of Britain in the EU was the cause of a shift in policy and a new emphasis on promoting agricultural cooperation, resulting in its substantial expansion aided by UK and European funding (Rayner and Ennew, 1985).

The dozens of Agricultural Year Books part of the astounding collection of the Plunkett Foundation's library are a fascinating record of the history and development of global agricultural cooperation. These yearly books included statistics on the number, sector and trade of ACs as well as any other information regarding legislative and political changes that affected the structure of the sector in different countries across the world. When reading specific country chapters from different years, an excellent account of the gradual industrialisation of agriculture and its socio-economic and political context and impacts emerge (a good example of this rich description can be found in the Agricultural Year Book, 1966).

Numerous historical-politic and political-historical accounts of Spanish agricultural cooperativism were found in these Year Books. Historical politics, referring to the instrumental uses of history, is a concept used to reflect how historical narratives can be intentionally reconstructed and disseminated not only within a country, but also across national boundaries, frequently with a political motive (Miller and Lipman, 2012). The historical connotations attached to cooperatives shaped not only how the origins and development of the movement were and are perceived by the general public, but also affected policy approaches to ACs and the dynamics of collective memory. Examples of this use of history records were found while reviewing the Plunkett's Agricultural Year Books that included a chapter on Spain (1938, 1954, 1955, 1961, 1966, 1967, 1973, 1985 and 1988). The chapters were written by different authors every year, sometimes by Spanish authors (e.g. Agricultural Year Books, 1961, 1967) sometimes English (Agricultural Year Book, 1985), with mainly single contributions in each given year. The structure of the texts varied from year to year; some chapters provided statistics while others analysed case studies of specific regions. It was interesting to notice how the ideologies of the authors were quite palpable in the texts, and how the accounts of agricultural cooperativism would vary accordingly. The chapter on Spain included in Year Book for 1967 written by Jose Luis del Arco Alvarez will be used as an example to illustrate this point. According to Del Arco, the development of cooperation was almost carried out exclusively by

Catholic Social Action groups many years before any legislation was introduced; the author also adds that the lobby pressure of these groups resulted in the passing of the Law on Agricultural Syndicates in 1906. This account of history embellishes the role the Church played in promoting conservative ACs that maintained the status quo, a part of Spanish ACs' history that many other authors have highlighted (Simpson, 2003; Garrido Herrero, 2003; Hermi Zaar, 2010; Planas and Valls-Junyent, 2011).

The chapter of Year Book 1954, authored anonymously by 'A Correspondent', had a completely different political tone. This alternative account explains how the National Federation of Consumer Cooperatives and the Cooperative Supply Centre set up before the Civil War were regarded by the end of it as 'red' and communist and thus were not further developed. The author also blames the 'peculiar structure' of cooperatives during Franco's dictatorship – characterised by compulsory vertical integration and the obligatory presence of a representative of the Regime and the church in each board – as the reason for the lack of links with cooperatives in other countries (Agricultural Year Book, 1954). An additional example can be found in the 1953 Book's chapter on Spain that mentions how Franco's Regime's law from 1938 was designed to annul the socialist characteristics of the previous cooperative law approved during the second Republic, and compares the new legislative framework of the regime to that of fascist Italy and Petain's France (Agricultural Year Book, 1953).

With a strong political element, a more recent stream of academic papers developed in Spain after the end of Franco's regime; the return to democracy brought a resurgence of literature trying to study the historical development of agricultural cooperativism, creating a heated debate still alive today on the roles that the Second Republic, Franco's Regime and the church had in it (Bernal et al., 2001). Readers interested in this stream are recommended to read Garrido Herrero's work (Garrido Herrero, 2003). Some of the more recent historical literature links early agricultural cooperatives to notions of social capital, food democracy and peasant rights (Planas and Valls-Junyent, 2011; Tapia, 2012). There is confusion over terms in the literature and many authors use 'cooperativas' and 'asociaciones' interchangeably in the same paper as discussed in the beginning of this Chapter. It has been highlighted that the early history of Spanish cooperativism has not been reported and documented accurately from its real beginnings due to the confusion with these terms (Agricultural Year Book 1967).

Some authors (Planas Maresma, 2008) have analysed farmer cooperatives within the wider frame of agricultural associationism, presenting cooperation as a struggle to maintain different collective identities in Spain's still mainly rural, but already increasingly urbanising society at the beginning of the 20th century. Planas Maresma's political analysis of agrarian

cooperativism uses the lens of collective identity in Catalonia. According to Planas Maresma, the dual character of cooperativism at the time, with co-existing 'rich' and 'poor' cooperatives that served different purposes for different actors, weakened the movement (Planas Maresma, 2008). Other authors have tried to pinpoint reasons for the numerous but short-lived ACs that developed at the beginning of the 20th century in Spain. Many conflictive accounts of the power relations in agrarian cooperation in this troubled period of Spanish history still exist. (Simpson, 2003; Garrido Herrero, 2007; Planas and Valls-Junyent, 2011).

Finally, it is interesting to share here that only one academic paper written in English with a historical EU/International focus on AC history was found. The article, written by Morales Gutierrez and colleagues (2005), offers a comparative review of historical records of agricultural cooperative movements during the 20th century in seven European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom). The authors compared the legal framework, the state support for the promotion and development of cooperatives, the underlying values involved and the different socio-political and economic factors that fostered or curtailed the development of ACs in these countries (Morales Gutierrez and et al., 2005). Based on their findings, the authors identified two opposing development strategies for agricultural cooperation in the selected case studies based on two dimensions: the level of ideological inspiration and the degree of support from the State (Morales Gutierrez et al., 2005). These dimensions are still relevant to ACs today as it will be discussed in Chapters 6, 8 and 9.

3.2.3 Development studies literature

This more recent thematic stream emphasises the wider socio-economic benefits associated with AC enterprises. The texts reviewed under this section are in its majority grey literature coupled with some academic publications; the focus is both on developed and developing countries but from a different approach in each case. When focusing on developed economies, a dual understanding of development was identified:

- Developing rural areas/communities: the most active publisher in this area is the Plunkett Foundation, the aforementioned charity currently working on facilitating community-owned farm projects. Also, in 2013, Co-operatives UK published a paper on *sticky money*, referring to how for every £1 that was spent with and by a cooperative, the local economy received £1.40. The study followed Local Multiplier 3 (LM3) methodology, a long-established way of measuring how money travels in local economies (Sacks, 2013). Additionally, some of the reviewed academic literature

considered cooperatives' potential to develop tourism in rural areas (Barke and Eden, 2001), generate social cohesion (Fairbairn, 2006) and community development (Zeuli and Radel, 2005).

- Developing alternatives to industrial farming and capitalism: including texts from the coordinators of the Campaign for Real Farming (Tudge, 2011) and the New Economics Foundation (NEF, 2011) that indirectly discuss the social and financial potential of the cooperative model.

In low-income countries, many NGOs and UN publications also present ACs as a tool for development, poverty reduction and combating gender inequalities (e.g. Fairtrade Foundation, 2011; FAO, 2012; Oxfam, 2012). Other authors, such as Birchall, have described how ACs have helped small farmers in developing countries reach export markets (Birchall, 2003) whilst Rhodes (2012) has highlighted the paternalistic Euro-centric character of this approach. As this research is focusing on two EU countries with industrialised agricultural sectors, this last development stream was only briefly explored to frame the object of study into a global perspective. However, the data collected by this research highlighted the extent of the impacts European ACs have in developing countries, a topic that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 9. Finally, other global organisations, such as the International Labour Organisation, also regularly commission research and publications on cooperatives, as well as guidelines for cooperative legislation and recommended levels/areas of state intervention in cooperative affairs (Henry, 2012).

3.2.4 Economics literature

The largest body of academic literature in ACs comes from the economics discipline. This section also reviews recent grey literature from industry bodies. The review showed a marked interest on ACs by economists from 1980s. As it will be discussed, this was the decade when ACs undertook a process of transformation to become 'more professional food businesses' (Chaddad, 2009). This transformation was both fostered and documented by the economic discipline. This stream also included abundant industry data providing statistics and forecasts of ACs' performance, such as publications from the European Commission, Co-operatives UK, Copa-Cogeca and Cooperativas AgroAlimentarias that are referenced throughout the thesis.

But before discussing more recent literature, it is interesting to refer back to one of the most famous political economists, Karl Marx. As discussed in Chapter 2, while Marx thought cooperatives were not radical enough, he considered they were a step in the right direction

towards the ‘great workers’ companies’ he envisioned. In 1866, at the Provisional General Council of the International Working Men's Association, Marx encouraged workers to get involved in production cooperation, rather than in consumer cooperatives as production and industry ‘attack the groundwork’ of the capitalist system (Marx, 1866). From these early Marxist and Weberian discussions around whether cooperatives could bring down the capitalist class system or not, the debate in economics gradually moved to the other end of the spectrum: how to make ACs to become as flexible (in terms of capital accumulation and governance structures) as privately-owned firms (POF) in order to compete in an increasingly concentrated market.

In 1947, two US petroleum business associations commissioned a report from Austrian economist von Mises on the role of cooperatives in the petroleum industry, concluding that the organisational model of cooperatives was a failure and only existed due to governments’ support. Despite the shortcomings of this argument that ignores the support and indirect subsidies that many private corporations receive from the state, it is worth including a quote from von Mises regarding his views on agricultural cooperatives:

The farmers are producers. But the farmers' cooperatives do not organise the farmers in their capacity as agricultural producers; they organise the farmers only as buyers of various equipment and articles required for their production and as sellers of the products. The individual farmer remains an independent entrepreneur and is, as far as his production activities are concerned, not integrated into a cooperative production outfit (von Mises, 1990:239)

The above quote reflects the apparently contradictory identities that farmer members of ACs often struggle with: growers, buyers of inputs, consumers of food, etc. This multiplicity of identities and ACs’ failure to organise farmers as workers will be discussed in Chapters 8 and 9.

Historically, in a theoretical effort to fit ACs within one of the generic forms of economic organisation, many authors applied economic theories to the study of cooperatives. In 1962, Helmberger and Hoos published the first mathematical model of an AC based on the neoclassical economic paradigm. Soon a debate started in the economics community around how to define cooperatives from a New Institutional Economics (NIE) perspective that could take into account the social costs of doing business, conceptualised in an analysis of transaction costs and property rights (Karantininis and Nilsson, 2007). Much has been written about the high transaction costs of cooperative governance, mainly from this NIE perspective (Karantininis and Nilsson, 2007). It is often claimed in the literature that such complex

governance structure is bound to make the organisation fail or convert to a private company (Lindsay and Hems, 2004; Münkner, 2004), an organisational theory labelled the “degeneration thesis” (Somerville, 2007).

The bulk of these papers have a common denominator: cooperatives are perceived as an inefficient organisational model not fit to survive in a competitive market due to its costly democratic decision-making process, risk-averse nature and long-term investment preferences. The main objective of these papers can be summarised as: a) identification of the model’s weaknesses and b) to recommend strategies to overcome these weaknesses (Murray, 1983; Oustapassidis, 1988; Ortmann and King, 2007). Some authors have championed an opposite way of thinking that tries to prove and provide evidence on the resilience of the cooperative model (Ostrom, 1990; Sanchez and Roelants, 2011). For a detailed account of advances on economics cooperative theory since the 1990s, the work of Cook and colleagues is recommended (Cook et al., 2004).

How to define the economic organisational form of ACs has been the topic of lively debate in this literature. The extract below from Chaddad’s paper paints a clear picture of the evolution of the perceived organisational identity of cooperatives:

Until the early 1960s much of the theoretical debate focused on whether cooperatives represented a form of vertical integration by farmers, that is, an extension of the member firms [...] or whether cooperatives could legitimately be analysed as organisations having scope for decision making independent of their member firms [...]. Subsequent theoretical work has modelled cooperatives based on coalition, [...] nexus of contracts [...] and property rights perspectives [...]. There is, however, no consensus yet as to how to define a cooperative in the continuum of generic forms of economic organisation. [...] I show that cooperatives blend market-like attributes with hierarchy-like mechanisms and thus should be viewed as a true hybrid rather than as an intermediate form. (Chaddad, 2009:1)

Four thematic and chronological streams were identified during the review. The first stream emerged in the late 1990s and reflected a shift in the way ACs were studied and portrayed in the literature. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, a large body of work on ACs focusing on analysing the ‘New Generation Cooperatives’ (NGCs) was published. NGCs started to emerge in the US during the late 1980s as a survival strategy to overcome the aforementioned crisis they were encountering by adopting more liberalised models of governance and investment. Table 3.1 compares the main differences between traditional and NGCs (based on Merret and Walzer, 2001 and Cook and Plunkett, 2006). Whilst traditional cooperatives focused on production and countervailing market power, NGCs emerged as a more entrepreneurial model, more market-oriented and with a focus on value-added, normally taking the cooperative

activities downstream within the food chain (Merret and Walzer, 2001). Stofferahn has written about how the conversion of ACs to NGCs snowballed and it was presented as the only sensible option for farmers, dissipating any resistance from cooperative members against the privatisation of their cooperatives (Stofferahn, 2010). Other authors questioned whether NGCs represented a new type of cooperative or the beginning of the end of the cooperative structure itself (Ménard and Klein, 2004).

Table 3.1 Comparing the main differences between traditional and New Generation Cooperatives

	Traditional	Entrepreneur (NGCs?)
Main objective	Achieve economies of scale	Horizontal Competition with other producer companies / Vertical Competition with retailers
Strategy	Operational	Strategic
Focus of value added level	Production / bargaining / low processing	Processing of high yields / Marketing / branding
Portfolio	Single commodity	More varied to become/remain preferred supplier
Membership	More homogeneous	More heterogeneous (but still reliant on members' commitment)
Financial structure	Members' capital	Differential levels of openness to external shareholders
Character	More local	Differential levels of internationalisation
Relationship focus	Transactional relation	Capital relation
Shareholders	Members only (farmers)	Members and non-member investors with differential degrees of decision making
Preferred growth method	Organic growth (increased production and members) Horizontal mergers	Vertical integration Internationalisation
Intangible value added	Social and potentially environmental by localisation and farming method	Branding Potentially environmental by larger equity to fund technology for precision farming
Focus of collective action	Defensive = protect position in failing market	Offensive
Products traded	Undifferentiated commodities	Branded products
Level of capital accumulation	Defensive = member level	Offensive = coop level
Capital intensity	Less capital intensive	More capital intensive

Source: The author adapted from Merret and Walzer (2001) and Cook and Plunkett (2006)

At the turn of the 20th century, several authors proposed the US NGC model as the way forward for European ACs. Gradually, reflecting the increasing complexity of AC models in terms of ownership, economists' efforts focused on developing typologies of ACs based on property rights and governance structures (see Harris et al., 1996; van Bekkum and van Dijk, 1997; Nilsson, 1999; Cook and Iliopoulos, 1999; Fulton, 2001; van Bekkum, 2001; Goldsmith and Kane, 2002; Iliopoulos, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 1, many typologies emerged trying to categorise ACs based on the source of their investments (from private investors or farmers' members). Other authors theorised the existence of organisational life cycles, suggesting that as ACs grow and mature, the managers' aspirations take over members' ones, gradually

transforming the organisational and financial structures and trading practices and making them more akin to investor oriented firms than traditional cooperatives (Hind, 1999).

As part of this interest in cooperative identity, several authors explored extensively (from an economic perspective) the effects a flexible cooperative identity has on cooperative principles and cooperative structure when competing in a liberal market context. Szabó has talked about changing the “cooperative identity” to generate a self-defense mechanism against corporations by becoming more like them (Szabó 2006); others have emphasised ACs’ role in the social economy, helping the rural economy to adapt to the European policy context (Juliá Igual and Marí Vidal, 2002). Kalmi has tried to explain the disappearance of the cooperative model from economic textbooks by putting forward the argument of paradigm shift from institutional to neoclassical analysis (Kalmi, 2007). While other authors have focused on trying to prove the theoretical benefits of defining ACs as “hybrids” (Szabó, 2006; Ortmann and King, 2007; Chaddad, 2009), including recognising their multiple objectives beyond profit-making for members.

Since 2007 to present, perhaps caused by the effects of the financial crisis, the literature reflects a concern with the increasing de-socialisation of ACs (suggesting many are becoming more capital-centred rather than people-centred) while emphasising and reminding readers of the importance of social capital (Somerville, 2007; Gomez Lopez, 2009; Bijman et al., 2010; Feng et al., 2011; Mulqueen, 2011; Whymann, 2012; Nilsson et al., 2012; Jones and Kalmi, 2012). Interestingly, this is in contrast with the growing popularity of buying groups and other types of informal consumer cooperatives as well as new attempts to resist the monopoly of supermarkets and link up consumers with small farmers (Kneafsey et al., 2008; Böhm et al., 2014). A more critical perspective on ACs comes from Jacques Berthelot, a French agrieconomist working for the NGO Solidarité, who in 2012 published a daring piece titled *‘The European agricultural cooperatives, promoters of the unequal globalisation’*. In this article, Berthelot uncovers bad practices of some large European ACs, including the uncooperative conditions French sugar beet AC Tereos imposes on their subsidiaries in Brazil and Mozambique. Other cases relate to land grabbing and outsourcing of operations to developing countries, where some ACs exploit workers who contribute to the commercial activity of the AC but who are not given the option to join as members (Berthelot, 2012). Berthelot’s work is referenced again in Chapter 9 when considering the global impacts ACs have beyond their national boundaries and how their practices often clash with cooperative principles.

Most of the academic literature from the economics discipline is mainly concerned with an organisational level of analysis. This narrow focus was considered a limited analytical lens for this research, as the present study was informed by and applied a food policy perspective that aimed to look at ACs as part of the food system, including how they are helping or hindering food sustainability and how they fit within the wider cooperative movement and other social movements.

3.2.5 Food policy literature

Finally, after discussing some of the main disciplines that have considered cooperatives worth of study, this section offers a review of the body of literature specifically focused on food policy. Before continuing, it is worth pausing to explicitly specify the definition of food policy that was used as the backbone of this research:

The decision-making that shapes the way the world of food operates and is controlled.
(Lang and Heasman, 2004:2).

For the purpose of this study, food policy was understood as a comprehensive concept that refers not only to the way the different levels of the food system are organised and governed, but also to the policy-making process itself, and how it is shaped and influenced by a variety of actors with conflicting interests and expectations (Lang et al., 2009). Food policy has a multidisciplinary approach that tries to unravel the dynamics of the increasingly globalised and industrialised food system. It is essential to highlight the interdisciplinary and contested character of food policy and to point out that lack of policies in some unregulated areas also affects what people eat, either by deliberate or unintended causes and effects; thus, unregulated areas of the food system are also part of the remit of study of food policy in general, and this thesis in particular. This definition informed the selection of academic literature reviewed under this stream.

The search criteria excluded studies on developing countries as this research focuses in two EU countries, although as mentioned in the previous section, Chapter 9 considers the global impacts European ACs have abroad. The majority of literature on cooperatives identified focused on consumer cooperatives rather than on ACs. This finding could be explained by the current emphasis on consumer behaviour and individualistic rather than systemic approaches as the entry point to change harmful dietary trends (Lang and Heasman, 2004). Clashing interests that hinder policy integration dominate the contested food policy terrain. In this context, placing the

responsibility in the consumer rather than in the whole food system, is an ineffective but easy approach that powerful actors benefit from (Lang et al., 2009). It also reflects how an ever-decreasing farming population becomes relegated by the study of an ever-increasing urban consumer population. When ACs do appear in the literature, they do so as part of shorter food chains and alternative food network (AFN) discourses (Ronco, 1974; Allen, 2004; Lamine, 2005; Guzmán and Mielgo, 2005; Hingley et al, 2011). The most common themes identified included: arguments to present the cooperative model as a tool to create new alternative ways of buying or producing food (Guzmán and Alonso 2007; Little et al., 2010; Calle and Gallar, 2010; Calle et al., 2012); and ACs as a tool to foster rural development with a clear interest in analysing case studies of small (both in terms of trade and size) ACs that are usually part of niche markets (Seyfang, 2006; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2012).

Overall, the literature on ACs is mainly reductionist, as it tends to be strictly either economic or sociological (the latter in very few cases), ignoring the ongoing tensions, dilemmas and contradictions in the movement (Gray, 2014a). Very few authors have written about ACs in relation to the neoliberal and political context they exist in. The main work in this area that this thesis draws on it is that of rural sociologists Patrick Mooney and Thomas Gray. Mooney and colleagues' thought-provoking papers from 1995, 1996 and 2004 discussed the increasing depoliticisation of ACs taking place through the reprivatisation discourse of neoclassical economics, pushing ACs to achieve a higher degree of financial competitiveness by becoming more capital-centred rather than people-centred (Mooney and Majka, 1995; Mooney et al., 1996; Mooney, 2004). Gray et al. (2001) discussed how very few ACs were suited to compete with agri-food giants. Those cooperatives that were able to enter into competition with multinationals, did so at the cost of shifting toward positions that were '*characteristically less cooperative, and more bureaucratic, and more top down, though likely more efficient, and with greater market penetration*' (Gray et al., 2001:167).

Mooney proposed to reclaim ACs as organisations that have the potential to legitimise and sustain class struggles, tackle power imbalances and improve workers' conditions (Mooney, 2004). In agriculture, cooperatives can help farmers regain power from supermarkets by strengthening their negotiating position (Mooney, 2004). In his view, cooperatives can help farmers regain power in the food system while (and because of) raising contradictions at different levels: (1) in social relations, between production and consumption; (2) spatial relations, between the local and the global; and (3) collective action, between cooperatives as both traditional as well as new social movements. In this sense, Mooney notices that ACs provide the space for those tensions to emerge, become visible and provide innovative solutions

in contrast to the neoclassical economics model that presents those tensions as barriers to efficient profit-making (Mooney, 2004:81).

Few authors since then have written about the increasing ‘corporatisation’ of agricultural cooperatives. In their study of cooperatives in Scotland, Wilson and MacLean concluded that the cooperative members they interviewed had a ‘collective belief in independence’ rather than any bigger aspirations to transform the market economy status quo and were ‘*motivated primarily by individualism and survival rather than shared or cooperative values*’ (Wilson and MacLean, 2012:535). The authors found that the word ‘cooperative’ is often not used on ACs’ names because ‘*a lot of co-ops have tried not to look like co-ops*’ as the cooperative identity is seen as “old-fashioned” (Wilson and MacLean, 2012). A popular alternative to the word cooperative is ‘farmer-owned business’, a term recurrent on the literature and many ACs’ websites, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

ACs have also been touched upon when discussing contemporary peasant farming (van der Ploeg, 2013). In his book *Peasants and the Art of Farming, a Chayanovian Manifesto*, van der Ploeg refers to the evolution of ACs from Chayanov’s days (beginning of 20th century) when cooperatives were ‘*class based*’ and ‘*still offered the promise of an effective countervailing power*’ to the present: ‘*(t)oday the situation is very different. Former cooperatives have evolved into entities that treat peasants in the same way as food empires*’ (van der Ploeg, 2013:84). The work of van der Ploeg is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 as part of the theoretical framework for this research.

Two recent papers by Emery (2015) and Stock et al. (2014) have identified the relation between neoliberal conceptions of autonomy, independence and their effects on agricultural cooperation. In turn, Gray has discussed how many US ACs are becoming large bureaucratic organisations in their own right, shifting cooperative governance models away from economic democracy and toward IOF models that emphasise the needs of capital over members’ needs (Gray, 2014b). The author has warned how when using a return on investment logic, the traditional local embeddedness of ACs becomes an unnecessary constraint that interferes with mobility of capital. As a result, many ACs have expanded geographically, losing their local identity and uniqueness and adding ‘*another layer of distance — physical distance — between members, member governance, and cooperative decision-making*’ (Gray, 2014b:26). These concerns will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 when discussing trends in the UK and Spanish AC sectors.

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3.3 Review of literature defining sustainable food systems

This section offers a summary of key literature discussing the unsustainability of the current food system in order to argue why it is important to research how ACs are addressing (or not) this complex challenge. A growing amount of evidence of the environmental challenges facing the food system has been piling up for decades (Pimentel et al., 1973; FAO, 1995; McMichael et al., 2007; Garnett et al., 2013; IPCC, 2014). Lang has collated evidence from other authors to neatly summarise these challenges in what he calls the Nine Fundamentals (adapted from Lang, 2010 with additional and more up-to-date statistics added by the author from several sources referenced accordingly):

□ **Climate change:** agriculture is both a perpetrator and a victim of climate change; food production accounts for 20-30% of anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Garnett, 2014) fuelling climate change that in turn is affecting global yields (IPCC, 2014). Of these emissions, animals are responsible for approximately 31% and fertilisers for 38% (Stern, 2006). In Europe, food is consumers’ biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) (Tukker et al., 2006; Tukker et al., 2009). The consultancy firm KPMG found that if the global food production sector had to pay the full costs of its environmental impact in 2010 it would have reported a loss of 224% (KPMG, 2012).

□ **Energy:** especially referring to reliance on non-renewable fossil fuels and increasing demand for production of agrochemical inputs, operating machinery and transport to cover growing distances between farms, retailers and consumers (UNEP, 2009).

□ **Loss of biodiversity and ecosystems support:** During the 20th century, an estimated 75% of the genetic diversity of domestic agricultural crops inherited from the 19th century was lost (FAO, 1995). Nowadays, 60% of the calories and 56% of the protein derived from plants for human consumption come from only three crops: rice, wheat and corn (Thrupp, 2000; Khouri et al., 2014). By the end of the 20th century, 12 plant species accounted for 75% of global food

supply, and only 15 mammal and bird species accounted for 90% of animal agriculture (FAO, 1998; FAO, 2010b; Khoury et al., 2014).

□ **Waste:** A recent report from the House of Lords for the European Union Committee (2014) reported that EU food waste equals 89 million tonnes per year (one third of all produced food), almost as much as the entire net food production of sub-Saharan Africa. In the UK, each wasted tonne has an estimated value of at least £950 (House of Lords, 2014).

□ **Labour:** with predicted severe labour shortages as food-related work is not properly recognised or fairly paid, reflected in unbalanced financial flows; in the UK, farming accounts for only 8% of the total gross value added of the agri-food sector (DEFRA, 2012).

□ **Demographics:** including several factors such as population growth, urbanisation and inequity of consumption rates. In European farms, the trend is clear: one third of farmers are over 65 years old and only seven per cent are under 35 (European Commission, 2013a).

□ **Land:** tensions around land use are becoming more acute, e.g. between food and biofuels production, but also regarding cases of land grabs, which are increasing food security concerns (UNEP, 2009). Additionally, even though urban areas are only 3% of the earth's surface, their impact through trading and consumption is huge, with ecosystem support needs (including waste absorption) of sometimes 500–1000 times larger than their own area (Folke et al., 1997).

□ **Water:** agriculture accounts for 70% of potable water use, livestock being a significant part of it (Clarke and King 2004; WWF, 2013) while at the same time also being a major source of water pollution. Intensive livestock production is thought to be one of the largest sector-specific sources of water pollution (UN, 2011).

□ **Soil:** with increasing erosion and degradation due to intensive farming and livestock production, the loss of soil is an increasing concern (Garnett, 2014). Fertilisers and intensive farming has also dramatically altered nitrogen, phosphorus and carbon cycles (Rockström et al, 2009a; Rockström et al, 2009b; Cordell et al., 2009; Foley et al., 2011).

□ **Health / nutrition transition,** referring to the trend that reflects the dietary change of populations in emerging economies with an increase in high protein intake (especially of animal origin) and sugary foods (Popkin, 2003). By 2008, more than 1.4 billion adults, 20 years old and above, were overweight (WHO, 2013). Health problems from over-, under- and mal-consumption and non-communicable diseases now co-exist in most countries across the world (WHO, 2011).

Additionally, there has been growing concerns over the environmental impact of meat production, an issue that cuts across all the above fundamentals. The FAO took a major role in raising awareness about this problem with its 2006 Livestock's Long Shadow report (Steinfeld et al., 2006). Approximately half of all cereals grown globally are fed to animals destined for

human consumption and they account for a tremendous amount of embedded water (Steinfeld et al., 2006; Gerber et al., 2013; Lymbery and Oakeshott, 2014). For example, it takes 2,400 litres of water to produce a 150-gram hamburger (Chapagain and Hoekstra, 2006). Therefore, increasing calls for a reduction of meat consumption is taking place, not only due to its environmental impact but also for animal welfare and public health reasons (Lymbery and Oakeshott, 2014).

These externalised costs are a huge burden on society and ecosystems (Lang et al., 2009). Many academics and civil society organisations have been calling for policy change and system transformation for years, highlighting some planetary boundaries have already been exceeded and others are approaching hazardous limits (Rockström et al., 2009a; Rockström et al., 2009b).

For all the above reasons, environmental sustainability is one of the most important aspects of the crisis facing the current food system and also an essential feature of an integrated approach to food policy (Lang et al., 2009). Attempts to define sustainability started back in the late 1980s with the popular definition of sustainable development (SD) offered by the Brundtland report, in which SD is defined as the *'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'* (WCED, 1987:8). However, this definition was framed into a conception of sustainability still based on constant economic growth. This conception of SD fosters a continuation of incongruous policies to secure growth that damage the environment and thus compromises the actual type of development is calling for (Frazier, 1997). For this reason, when using the term sustainability, it is more adequate to refer to the UNDP's more comprehensive conceptualisation of environmental sustainability and human development that goes beyond *'beyond income and growth to cover the full flourishing of all human capabilities'* (UNDP, 1996:49). However, these early definitions of sustainability still do not cover the complexity that food represents. Food links farming methods with nutritional needs, while interwoven in deeply embedded cultural traditions and new fashions that transcend any attempts to reduce sustainability to GHG emissions or food miles.

Early movements for sustainable food systems and sustainable farming were concerned with the environment but also with social justice (Allen, 2004). However, in affluent countries this link was diluted over time as the constant availability of cheap food meant that the social justice element became less relevant, and lobbying efforts went down the environmental route (Allen, 2004). The debate became centred on farmers (level of actor), agriculture (level of food system) and the environment (impacted area). Soon again in the 1990s, the concept was criticised for ignoring issues of social justice and critics called for a wider conception of sustainability,

stretching the sustainable agenda outside the farm gate and bringing consumers into the debate (Kloppenburger et al., 2000). However, this new breath of aspirations generated a multiplicity of definitions; still today, a commonly accepted definition of what a fair and sustainable food system (SFS) should look like is missing. As an example, in a study analysing the evolution of definitions of alternative food systems, Allen found that different NGOs and alternative agrifood institutions defined social justice – a key ingredient of a SFS – in quite different ways (Allen, 2004).

Some of the earliest attempts to map the attributes of a SFS started in the late 1990s following the publication of the Brundtland report. In 1997, Clancy and Lockeretz (1987) called for a food system that included a more agriculturally literate society, local food security, and supportive institutions and policies. In 2000, Kloppenburger and colleagues asked 125 people from the alternative food scene (working in farming and food projects) to list the attributes they thought a SFS should have. The group came up with a long list of attributes. In the paper, the authors highlight how the disputed nature of the concept of sustainability has facilitated opportunistic agri-industry attempts to appropriate the term for their own purposes. As the authors suggest, the lack of clarity has diluted the meaning and power of this concept (Kloppenburger et al., 2000) and it has allowed *'the conventional Green Revolution experts to sell their old wine in the new bottle of "sustainable agriculture"'* (Lélé, 1991:617). The concept of *'sustainable intensification'*, discussed below, is an example of this co-optation.

Kloppenburger and colleagues offered another example to prove this point: in 1991, DuPont Corporation defined a SFS as *'ecologically sound, economically viable, socially acceptable'* (Kloppenburger et al., 2000:179); but as the authors highlight, *'what is socially acceptable is not necessarily just'* (Kloppenburger et al., 2000:179). This example emphasises the importance of using food democracy as a key guiding principle of SFSs. Apart from mapping the complexity of conceptualising a SFS, one of the key contributions of Kloppenburger's paper is the emphasis on the importance of integrating producers and other actors into the definition process, as they are the key agents of change:

Conceptual framings of alternative food systems have been based largely on the reflection of academics and policy specialists. While such formulations are surely valuable, they may not reflect the full range of understandings characteristic of the producers and eaters (Kloppenburger et al., 2000:178)

This democratic aspect of the defining process will permeate through the present study as it aims to collate ACs and ACs' members' conceptions of SFSs.

Allen has reported how nowadays most attempts to define SFSs use permutations of the three “Es” model: E for environment, economics and equity (Allen, 2004:82). However, Allen has warned about the common underlying limitation of these models and definitions of sustainability and thus of SFSs: the ambition to maintain the system for current generations with the unequal distribution of both food and environmental problems that we have today instead of aspiring to construct a better system now (Allen, 2004). Allen argues that this focus in future generations ignores the unmet needs of people living in the present. This warning links with the need for the paradigm shift discussed earlier.

Although disconnected in the early alternative food movements, the link between environmental and social justice has become sadly obvious and difficult to ignore again even in developed economies (Lang et al., 2009). There is an increased awareness of how inequalities, climate change and lack of food affect the health of people in low incomes across the world, both in developing countries but also in affluent societies. The increase of food banks and food poverty in rich countries is also putting the social justice debate back on the policy agenda (Caraher and Dowler, 2014). The growth of movements such as Via Campesina and its principle of food sovereignty are giving a voice to the social and environmental struggles of traditional and new peasants across the globe (Via Campesina, 2011).

One of the most recent and comprehensive attempts to outline the attributes of a SFS was the multiple values model produced by the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) in 2011. The now dissolved SDC, whose role was to advise government with regards to sustainable development, put forward a list of multiple values as part of their work in food systems. The list of values is shown in Table 3.2 was developed based on Lang’s omnistandards (Lang, 2010) and includes six different headings (quality, social values, environment, health, economy and governance) with several subheadings that act as a checklist for assessing the all-inclusive sustainability of food.

With regards to the link between sustainability and cooperatives, only one academic paper was found presenting evidence on how cooperatives are more sustainable than IOFs (Baranchenko and Oglethorpe, 2012). Other non-peer references reviewed included reports from the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society and Co-operatives UK highlighting how cooperatives save resources by sharing equipment and how members are less likely to waste resources, as they are member-owners and waste has a direct impact on their finances (Co-operatives UK, 2012 and SAOS, 2012).

Despite the variety of models, lists and attributes found in the literature, there is a strong trend to integrate both the environmental and the food democracy agendas. Even though the concept of food democracy does not guarantee food sustainability, it can offer a guiding light to navigate through an arduous food paradigm transition.

A second finding was a gap in the literature with regards to the relationship between cooperatives (especially ACs) and sustainability. As this gap was identified in the food policy literature, this research set out to contribute to the debate by discussing the diversity of approaches to environmental sustainability and food democracy existing in the farming cooperative sector (with a focus on Spain and UK).

Table 3.2. Multiple values for a sustainable food system

Quality	Social Values
Taste	Pleasure
Seasonality	Identity
Cosmetic	Animal welfare
Fresh (where appropriate)	Equality and justice
Authenticity/provenance	Trust
	Choice
	Skills (for food citizenship)
Environment	Health
Climate change	Safety
Water	Nutrition
Land use	Equal access
Soil	Availability
Biodiversity	Social status/affordability
Waste reduction	Information and education
Economy	Governance
Food security and resilience	Science & tech evidence base
Affordability (price)	Transparency
Efficiency	Democratic accountability
True competition & fair returns	Ethical values
Jobs, skills & conditions	International aid & development
Fully internalised costs	

Source: Sustainable Development Commission (2011)

3.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of a multidisciplinary literature review on ACs. Searches revealed two disciplines dominate the academic study on ACs: history and economics. Economists' mainly study ACs as an organisational model that *still needs to be improved*, and is expected to evolve to become a hybrid between cooperatives and privately owned firms. With regards to historical perspectives, the body of literature analysing the history of ACs in Spain (both written in Spanish and English) is noticeably larger than accounts of UK agricultural cooperativism. This is explained because English historical literature on cooperatives mainly focuses on the more popular British consumer cooperatives. It was also noticed that there are quite a few recent papers analysing the early beginnings of ACs in Spain in peer reviewed journals, a finding that seems to point out that this topic is still quite debated by the academic community in Spain. The work of two key rural sociologists, Thomas Gray and Patrick Mooney, was identified as particularly relevant to this research as it provides a less reductionist and more nuanced approach to the study of ACs that moves beyond a black and white portrait of these organisations and aims to unpack the tensions and contradictions they encounter. This initial finding highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach and a critical food systems lens to the study of ACs in order to build up integration of the knowledge we have of them and of policies designed to regulate them.

Several gaps were identified in the food policy literature with regards to the study of the different types of ACs, the increasing corporatisation of the sector and the lack of research linking sustainability and ACs. These gaps informed the research questions and the research objectives. The literature on defining sustainable food systems revealed this is a contested area of work still ongoing. This thesis provides a contribution to this debate by offering an insight into the perspective of ACs on this topic, which is of vital importance given the fact ACs are powerful actors in European farming policy and key shapers of rural realities. How are ACs in Spain and UK addressing – or not – unsustainable practices in their sector? ACs rely on farmers and these in turn rely on natural resources; thus one could predict a strong self-interest in addressing sustainability challenges. After having introduced ACs and reviewed the history and academic literature that has studied these organisations, the next chapter presents the methodological approach taken by this research.

4. Methodology and theoretical framework

This chapter starts by examining the relevance of the research problem and documenting the evolution of the research questions. Then, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks are presented; building on those frameworks, the methodology and methods, including the underlying epistemological and ontological approaches of this thesis, are discussed. A particular focus is placed on the comparative dimension of this research and the strategy adopted to select the case studies, which was informed by the findings from the literature review and the research questions, following an iterative process. The chapter then presents the types of the data collected, explaining how each type was analysed. A final section offers reflections on the methodological approach and the potential limitations and challenges that were considered and accounted for before the data collection stage began.

4.1 Research objectives and evolution of the research questions

As discussed in the first three chapters, ACs are key players in European food production, handling, processing and marketing. In the context of industrial food systems, ACs are very influential players. They are gatekeepers to millions of farmer members. They account for approximately half of the market share for agricultural trade and are powerful players in facilitating international trade at large scale (Bijman et al., 2012). In alternative food systems discourses, ACs are mainly presented as democratic organisations with the potential of improving and changing farmers' livelihoods. There is also an assumption or expectation that ACs follow cooperative principles and share the mission of the wider cooperative movement, such as concern for communities and the environment and educate the public about the benefits of cooperation (ICA, 2011). Thus, ACs' relevance and potential to contribute to the development of more sustainable food systems are unmistakable, which draws attention to the surprising lack of literature exploring the links between both the cooperative movement, specifically farmers' cooperatives, and food sustainability. This gap was identified when carrying out the multi-disciplinary literature review and distilled into the research questions. The original research questions that this project set out to answer evolved as immersion in the field got deeper and the range of publications reviewed got wider. Showing the evolution of the questions reveals the thread of thinking and evidence that led this research to its final attempt to draw a picture of the AC sector in Spain and UK and how it relates to food systems sustainability, the wider cooperative movement and as it emerged from the data, to other social movements too. The following list includes the research questions that were included in the original PhD proposal before they were refined after the in-depth literature review:

1. What are the barriers and enablers to ACs achieving a stronger presence in UK agriculture? [This early question referred to analysing factors that could contribute to an increase in the numbers of ACs in the UK. The assumptions implicit in this question are discussed later in this section].
2. What are the main policy, structural and operational differences between Spanish and English ACs? (i.e. tax breaks or internationalisation). Can the UK economy apply the Spanish cooperative model?
3. How could ACs benefit from the new revival of interest in food in the UK and take advantage of the policy context to grow, become stronger and get a bigger market share? Or will this just act as a hindering passing fashion?
4. What is UK farmers' attitude to ACs? How does it compare to Spanish farmers' attitude? What is the perceived role of cooperatives by Spanish/UK farmers? Does it include a social and environmental remit as well as financial profitability?

As it is obvious from the above questions, the research was initially approached with a naïve view of cooperatives that assumed they were “doing the right thing” by default. This attitude was informed by an outline literature review that, when reflecting about it a posteriori, reflects the scarcity of critical literature on cooperatives. It took time, several conversations with experts and an in-depth review to uncover a small pocket of literature that dealt with tensions in ACs using an analytical lens beyond reductionist economic approaches.

Additionally, this naïve view was also the result of a halo effect developed during my former MSc research that explored informal consumer cooperatives' potential to reduce power imbalances in the food system and ease the dearth endured by people living in “food deserts”. After a deeper review of the literature and some informal scoping meetings and engagement with key actors in the sector, there was a realisation that the original research questions had to be re-examined and refined. Soon, it was clear that the complexity of the agricultural sector was intimately interwoven with the evolution of the AC sector: from its past history, in which the industrial revolution transformed farming from a way of living into an additional “sector of the economy”, to its present, framed by CAP subsidies and contested sustainability discourses that are shaping and shaped by ACs' practices.

Furthermore, when mapping the AC terrain in both countries, it emerged that a wide range of realities in food and farming labelled as cooperatives exists: from producers working together in more informal and not legally incorporated associations (Vara Sanchez, 2008), to emerging

agricultural workers' cooperatives, multi-stakeholder models in which consumers also become members (Gray, 2014b) and Community Supported Agriculture schemes. Other models include large enterprises with international subsidiaries, small village cooperatives that refuse to merge and even the recent Producer Organisation model discussed in Chapters 2 and 6 (Bijman et al., 2012). It is important to clarify that this research only considers legally incorporated cooperatives, as opposed to other informal arrangements often also referred to as cooperatives but not formally registered as such (Vara Sanchez, 2008).

As a result of these new insights, a revised set of questions that better reflected the complexities of the topic of study was formulated. Informed by the themes emerging from the multidisciplinary literature review and some informal interviews with actors in the cooperative sector, the research questions were refined as follows:

RQ.1 What does the comparison between the UK and Spanish ACs sectors reveal about those countries' and EU's farming and AC policies?

RQ2. To what extent are ACs part of a social movement adopting cooperative principles or a mere section of the agricultural economic sector? And to what extent can they be both at the same time? [While this question has been discussed in the literature in similar terms before, this research aims to explore ACs both in the context of the wider cooperative movement but also of other social movements grounded on sustainability and social justice principles, such as organic, fair trade, relocalisation and food democracy].

RQ3. How is the dominant AC sector in Spain and UK – in the context of European farming policy – contributing to multidimensional food system sustainability?

RQ4. How do the findings contribute to the theorisation of agricultural cooperatives and alternative and sustainable food systems?

The above research questions were framed within an ecological public health framework (Rayner and Lang, 2012) to acknowledge the complex socio-economic and environmental dimensions of food policy and public health. In this context, this research analysed the theoretical and empirical basis of ACs. ACs were used as the entry point to explore the interrelationships between government, the agricultural sector and civil society and how these actors impact the creation and development of cooperatives by shaping the policy context they exist in, their practices, production methods and membership demographics.

Theoretical and empirical data were collated and synthesised using a range of methods in order to inform and develop a comprehensive and detailed study of different models of ACs and the

associated type of sustainability they promote (or not). To this end, the research objectives designed as steps to be able to answer the RQs included:

- I. Undertaking a multidisciplinary review of the literature on: (i) agricultural cooperatives within the wider context of farming in its national, EU and global context; (ii) defining sustainable food systems; and (iii) exploring any connections in the literature bringing the analysis of (i) and (ii) together [Chapters 1, 2 and 3].
- II. Identifying a series of case studies in each country to examine in detail different types of ACs and analyse their respective hierarchies, networks and governance processes [Chapters 4, 5, 7 and 8].
- III. Following the findings from the above point, to examine trends in the AC sector with regards to degree of embeddedness in industrial food systems and its implications for food system sustainability [Chapters 5, 6, 8 and 9].
- IV. Analysing cooperative members' views on agricultural practices and their effect on the environment and health (on both food producers and consumers) [Chapters 5, 7 and 8].
- V. Analysing the understanding of and attitude to food sustainability discourses that members from the ACs selected as case studies have [Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9].
- VI. Carrying out different levels of comparison: geographical (UK/Spain/EU) and sectorial (different types of cooperatives), reflecting on how the past has shaped the current AC sector [Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 9].
- VII. Interpreting what the above findings mean in the context of national/regional (EU) and global food systems, discussing the interconnections and impact that multi-level governance food policy has had on ACs [Chapters 6, 9 and 10].
- VIII. Developing a theoretical framework with sufficient explanatory potential to accommodate the interaction between food system sustainability and the wide range of food production realities labelled as cooperatives to cover the theoretical gap identified by the literature review [Chapters 9 and 10].

4.2 Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

This research started from an inductive position, seeking to build up an understanding of ACs from an alternative lens to the neo-liberal economic approaches that, as discussed in Chapter 3, dominate the existing literature. Because of the limitations of existing theories of ACs to provide a framework for an integrated food policy analysis, the final theoretical framework was not fixed a priori but gradually emerged from the data. Nevertheless, following Miles and

Huberman (1994), it was noted that a tentative rudimentary framework was a good starting point to approach the field and to structure the rationale for the selection of case studies. A theoretical framework helps connect the researcher to existing knowledge and vice versa. The review of relevant theory also offers a basis for a potential hypothesis and choice of research methods. A conceptual framework was also developed and is discussed later on in this chapter. This research made use of a conceptual framework for the three purposes put forward by Miles and Huberman: (a) identifying who will and will not be included in the study; (b) describing what relationships may be present based on logic, theory and/or experience; and (c) providing the researcher with the opportunity to gather general constructs into intellectual ‘bins’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994:18). This section describes the theories that informed the initial rudimentary theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Since the final theoretical framework did not take shape until the data analysis stage, it is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9 since it emerged as an outcome of this research.

4.2.1 Critical approach to epistemology

An interpretivist and constructivist lens

Following both Stake (1995) and Yin (2014), this research approached case study methodology from a constructivist perspective. Interpretivism and constructivism are related approaches that developed as a critique to the entrance of positivism in social sciences (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Both interpretative and constructive approaches discard the existence of a ‘true’ and mind-independent reality, assuming instead ‘*multiple, apprehendable and equally valid realities*’ (Ponterotto, 2005:129). In this sense, this research conceives individuals as active participants that interpret (and re-interpret) as well as construct (and reconstruct) meaning and reality. This approach acknowledges the role individual values and experiences play in the construction of knowledge, and in the particular case of this research, the construction of definitions and imaginaries about what cooperatives and sustainable food systems look like, whether they are defined in financial terms or also – or instead - with environmental and social dimensions. Following White, this research notes that ‘*as individuals try to understand and interpret their situations, they construct meanings or decide what events mean, and then respond to these social constructions rather than to the world itself*’ (White, 1999:512). In this sense, by framing their actions (including choices) and perceptions of reality within their own individual values and experiences, food actors (farmers in this case), are not only imagining but also creating and recreating ideas and embodiments of food sustainability. They do this through both their individual choices (e.g. farming techniques) and collectively, through their

cooperatives' practices, adapting and shaping their reality to fit their own constructs that are in turn shaped and influenced by the financial and social constraints and context they exist in.

Additionally, this approach is particularly relevant for the study of the dual character of ACs: the organisational level (the cooperative) and the sublevel of individual members (the farmers). How are imaginaries about sustainability and cooperative principles constructed at each level? Do the imaginaries from each level overlap or clash? This constructivist approach has methodological implications, and methods were selected to ensure that participants were able to describe their views of reality by sharing their own opinions and their own understanding of sustainability in their own words rather than imposing existing categories or descriptions (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

The underpinning theoretical assumption made when applying an interpretative and constructivist approach to the study of food policy is that all individuals – and ACs as representatives of individual farmers – are assumed to be active participants. Actors are perceived as having the potential to shape their systems of production and provision as well as of influencing other actors, while also often facing barriers and factors that shape how they behave. In the context of this research, actors in the food-policy space include: farmers, cooperative members, processors, retailers, policy makers, consumers, scientists and civil society groups. The topic of study involves policy but also strong human and power relations and dynamics and the knowledge and experiences of all participants, regardless of their affiliations or positions in organisational hierarchies. Rather than in individualistic isolation, participants – and their ACs in the case of farmers – were thought as agents that interact in and understand the food system by constant transaction with their environments, creating theoretical spaces to consider how different actors construct their own meaning of cooperation and sustainability and their own version of what a successful AC and a sustainable food system should look like.

This research thus acknowledges that actors are not independent but embedded in interwoven environmental, production, processing, distribution, consumption and policy systems. Two concepts are key to those interactions: food democracy and policy integration. The first one is the concept of food democracy, re-popularised by Lang in the mid-1990s to refer to '*the long process of striving for improvements in food for all not the few*' (Lang, 2007:12; Lang et al., 2009; Lang and Heasman, 2004). Alongside food democracy, calls for policy integration have also been increasing, emphasising the need for food policies that take into account all stages of the food system, from production to consumption from an ecological public health approach

that links health and environmental concerns (Rayner, and Lang, 2012). From the combination of the need for policy integration from an ecological public health perspective underpinned by the notion of food democracy, a new theoretical assumption emerges: any proposed ‘solutions’ that help create a sustainable food system that is able to provide healthy foods without damaging the environment must permeate all sectors and all actors for it to work; a prerequisite for this is that *all* actors must be able to access those *solutions* regardless of their income or position/role in the food system including consumers in low incomes and farm workers (Hinrichs, 2000; Caraher and Dowler, 2007; Holt-Giménez and Burkett 2011).

The history of public health and marketing has demonstrated that having knowledge of what the “right” food options are, is not necessarily followed by changes in life and consumption patterns since social determinants of health have a key impact on the number and type of healthy lifestyle choices available to people (Milio, 1976). These social determinants have deep implications for this research, especially when analysing alternative ACs promoting healthy and sustainable models, as it will be discussed later. The case study methodology selected offered the potential to unpick how those determinants are affecting and shaping ACs, asking who is benefiting from AC policies and who is being left behind.

In terms of the analysis of policies relating to farming and specifically to agricultural cooperatives, this research follows Kuhnian thinking (1962) by assuming that policy analysis methods are never able to provide a totally neutral and objective understanding of issues, as they are limited by the theories and methods used to study them. Theoretical positions are cultural and historical and determined by the geo-political context, as Chapters 2 and 3 discussed and data from the case studies will show.

The philosophical underpinning of the policy analysis approach in this research is also linked to the overall constructivist theorising that runs through the whole thesis, but while attempting to avoid endless relativism (White, 1994). So ontologically speaking, this research is located in the constructivist assumption that there are infinite realities out there, depending on who is looking and where from; but these realities overlap and by collating data from diverse sources and informants, we can attempt to draw a silhouette of the overlapping areas and the marginal edges that are not shared. It is in these edges where change and innovation emerge, both in policy and practice as is the case of new governance models in multi-stakeholder cooperatives that will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. The triangulation of data and informants is discussed later in this current chapter in section 4.6.1.

Steps' Pathway influence

The methodological approach of this research was inspired and informed by STEPS' pathway multi-methods approach used to considering questions of sustainability, politics and development. STEPS is the Centre for Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability based at the University of Sussex in the UK. Following the same interpretivist/constructivist line discussed above, the STEPS' pathway approach recognises that 'who you are shapes how you "frame" – or understand – a system' (STEPS, 2015). The following quote from STEPS describes the need to open up theoretical spaces to acknowledge and document those voices and initiatives that could be key to achieving more sustainable food systems but for several reasons are ignored:

Too often the narratives of powerful actors and institutions become the motorways channelling policy, governance and interventions, overrunning the valuable pathways responding to poorer people's own goals, knowledge and values. Our pathways approach pays attention to multiple pathways and, backed by a variety of practical methods, helps open up space for more plural and dynamic sustainabilities. It also aims to open up the political process of building pathways, which are currently hidden, obscured or oppressed. (STEPS, 2015)

The following characteristics are central to the STEPS Pathways approach (STEPS, 2011):

- A systemic approach to issues, moving away from a reductionist focus that ignores wider inter-relations and feedback loops amongst actors, practices and institutions.
- The recognition that there are many ways of 'framing' – understanding and representing – a system, whether by international or national policy actors and networks, different advocacy and civil society groups, different researchers or local people. The Pathways approach values all framings and strives to open up those that are hidden, obscured or suppressed.
- Highlighting pathways to sustainability alternative to the dominant narratives that perpetuate social inequalities and environmental degradation.

This critical approach informed the whole methodological approach of this thesis, based on the fact this research aimed to analyse current thinking and tensions in ACs. This involves opening up theoretical and empirical spaces for those food producers who are trying different versions of cooperation and whose voices are often not heard as they do not fit in current discourses of consolidation and competitiveness taking place in the AC sector. The selection of cases was done accordingly, in order to compare ACs in different points of this continuum between ACs highly embedded in the industrialised food system at one end and those trying to disembed themselves from these relations by recreating new networks and ways to embody and reproduce their understanding of agricultural cooperativism. The STEPS approach was also applied in the way

interviewees were asked to define sustainability in their own terms, without pre-empting them with ready-made definitions. This allowed participants to articulate their own views, concerns and hopes for sustainability in their own words.

4.2.2 Initial theoretical framework

Theoretical influences integrated in a complementary framework of analysis: Paradigms, New Peasantries and Open Coops

Based on the findings from the literature review on food sustainability discussed in Chapter 3, the main theoretical assumption underlying this doctoral research is that the global food system is in crisis and requires an urgent paradigm shift (Lang and Heasman, 2004; Lang et al, 2009). Due to the breath of challenges facing the food system, an integrated policy approach is necessary to overcome the New Fundamentals discussed earlier (Lang et al., 2009). Patricia Allen has also called for a ‘unified vision’ and a ‘whole system approach’ to achieve an alternative and sustainable food system (Allen, 2004). For Allen, the key aspect is to reflect on ‘*who and what are to be sustained and secured*’ (Allen, 2004:210). This sober reflection poses many questions: is it the poor who need to be sustained? Is it small farmers? Growth? Specific methods of farming? These questions informed the choice of the theories that were used to inform the research process. These theories were selected because they reflect the political, social and multi-level governance dimensions of food policy in a complementary manner. This section provides further details on this complementarity.

Following the findings from the literature review, ACs can be mapped in a continuum that starts with small, niche models and ends with corporate-like ones (e.g. NGCs). Based on this diversity, two initial complementary theoretical approaches were identified as suitable for framing this complex reality: Food policy paradigms (Lang and Heasman, 2004) and New Peasantries (van der Ploeg, 2008). Both theories include elements of ecological public health (EPH) thinking as discussed below. EPH conceptualises food in four dimensions of existence: the material (inputs, resources), the bio-physiological (biological process from plants to human bodies), the cognitive (cultural messages and meanings) and the social (human interactions). These dimensions need to be balanced to achieve public health that is both beneficial for humans and the environment they are part of and depend on (Rayner, and Lang, 2012).

Lang et al, in the context of addressing ecological health and the need for a more integrated food policy, refer to the fact that ‘*consumers eat food as social, health and environmental acts*

simultaneously, whether consciously or not' (Lang et al, 2009, p. 298). Applying this thinking to agriculture, it could be said that farmers also grow food as social, health and environmental acts simultaneously, whether consciously or not. Next, these two theories are presented, followed by an introduction to the Open Cooperative framework that was used to analyse the specific case of multi-stakeholder cooperatives.

Clashing paradigms

In *Food Wars, The Global Battle for Mouths, Minds and Markets*, Lang and Heasman depict the current food system as a battle field where the dominant '*productionist paradigm*' (PP) (defined by an industrial model unable to meet current environmental, health and social needs) is being slowly transformed by two alternative paradigms: the '*life-sciences paradigm*' (LSP) in battle with the '*ecologically integrated paradigm*' (EIP). Lang and Heasman defined the construct of food paradigm as a '*set of shared understandings, common rules and ways of conceiving problems and solutions about food*' (Lang and Heasman, 2004:17). This interpretivist definition is based on words such as '*understandings*' and '*conceiving*' merged with a constructivist approach (as discussed in the previous section) that emphasises the active role of actors interacting and sharing common rules and ways of thinking.

The authors use these opposing paradigms to describe two conflicting new conceptions of the food system and call for an urgent introduction of integrated policy (Lang and Heasman, 2004). On the one hand, the PP is still shaped by its historical roots from the industrial revolution and its main focus is in quantity of production through the use of technology and intensive agricultural methods. At retail level, a key feature of this paradigm is market concentration at agribusiness, processing and retailing level. Health is considered consumers' responsibility rather than being embedded in the food system.

Like the PP, the LSP builds on the commercial control of markets, commodities and also of knowledge through intellectual property agreements. It is a clear continuation of the PP's liberal market approach and dependability of external inputs, just using different methods (*'same wine in a new bottle'*) without solving any of the inequities of the current system. Scientific knowledge and a profit-making logic play a key role in the LSP, pursuing the commercialisation of science at all levels of the food system: e.g., introduction of GM at production level and nutrigenomics as part of the latest developments in retailing and nutritional advice.

In contrast, the EIP is still defined as a niche paradigm with less lobby power than the LSP. Criticised by the LSP adherents for being backward-looking, EIP resists the introduction of

certain biotechnologies such as genetic modification (Lang and Heasman, 2004). This paradigm adheres to more holistic and non-intensive agricultural methods, rejecting monoculture. By promoting multifunctionality, the EIP accepts a wider role in preserving biodiversity of both animals and plant species. In contrast to the PP and LSP, the EIP paradigm conceives health as embedded in the system rather than as a commodity (Lang and Heasman, 2004).

The main concern of the paradigm theory is that the dominant policy paradigm inherited from the post war period in the 1950s retains its productionist character still today and it has become embedded in food policy institutions (Skogstad, 2000). The underlying logic of the productionist paradigm was centred on subsidising scientific and technical research (that has become increasingly biosciences-based) to increase food production, self-life and facilitate logistics and distribution at lower costs in order to increase profit (especially for retailers) but also affordability for consumers.

This productionist paradigm based on agricultural exceptionalism made sense in an era of food scarcity and it was incredibly successful at solving the Malthusian problem of feeding the rapidly increasing post war population (Lang et al., 2009). However, having the single objective of increased production meant that this paradigm overlooked both the nutritional quality of the calories produced and the environmental damage associated with its industrial production methods. The policy emphasis remained within the farm gate, and in the meantime consumers and choice became kings. Unfortunately, the limitations and negative effects of this paradigm are so obvious (see discussion on the New Fundamentals above) that a shift is needed and a new approach based on food democracy and able to secure food sustainability (socially and environmentally) must be adopted. This shift in thinking was incorporated in the methodological approach by working with a multidimensional understanding of sustainability and food systems that go beyond reductionist metrics such as carbon food print or yields. This theory also informed the selection and categorisation of ACs according to each of the food policy paradigms they were more aligned to.

New Peasantries against the Empire

The New Peasantries framework put forward by van der Ploeg offers a distinct and modern conceptualisation of the peasantry. This framework is relevant to the study of emerging agricultural cooperatives in alternative food system networks as their members often self-define as peasants, as data presented in Chapters 7 and 8 suggest. According to van der Ploeg, peasants have been theoretically ignored in favour of what the author labels as the “Empire”. This

construct refers to a ‘*complex, multilayered, expanding and increasingly monopolistic set of connections (i.e. a coercive network) that ties processes, places, people and products together in a specific way*’ (van der Ploeg, 2008:255). The “Empire” is thus used as a metaphor to refer to the power concentration in the global food system, ruthless profit-seeking and an unsustainable practices. Resisting the “Empire” to different degrees is what characterises peasants, who, as van der Ploeg argues, are here to stay despite their neglect by theorists. The author conceptualises the *peasant condition* or *principle* as an approach to farming (*coproduction of food*) based on relations of cooperation and reciprocity, with control over the means of production. This control allows peasants to enjoy a relative degree of autonomy from global market forces (van der Ploeg, 2008).

The author recognises the heterogeneity of the farming sector and recognises ‘*various degrees of peasantness*’ (van der Ploeg, 2008:36). This understanding of the current diversity of food producers and their conflicting interests and approaches provided a suitable structure to categorise the different types of ACs explored in this research.

Van der Ploeg’s proposes three different types of farming: (capitalist, entrepreneurial and peasant farming) depending on the degree of assimilation by the “Empire”. Those producers trying to reduce their reliance on the “Empire” are part of what in food policy literature are commonly known as ‘alternative food networks’ (AFN). AFNs have been defined as ‘*emerging networks of producers, consumers, and other actors that embody alternatives to the more standardised industrial mode of food supply*’ (Renting et al., 2003:394). The constructs of Empire and AFNs are used to present a set of findings from this research in Chapters 7 and 8 when discussing ACs that are operating outside global food supply chains and pursuing alternative indicators of success and performance.

Both the New Peasantries and the Food Paradigms frameworks acknowledge the contested terrain of food policy (including unregulated areas as discussed earlier) and provide a theoretical space to debate the tensions in the AC sector identified during the literature review. By opening this space, the research process allowed a wide range of perspectives from different actors to be taken into account, in line with the active participant approach discussed earlier. Nevertheless, it was noted and acknowledged from the beginning of the research that neither of these two theoretical frameworks actually focus on ACs. This limitation and how this research set out to overcome this theoretical gap is introduced in the next section and in Chapter 9.

Peer to Peer Foundation's Open Cooperative Framework

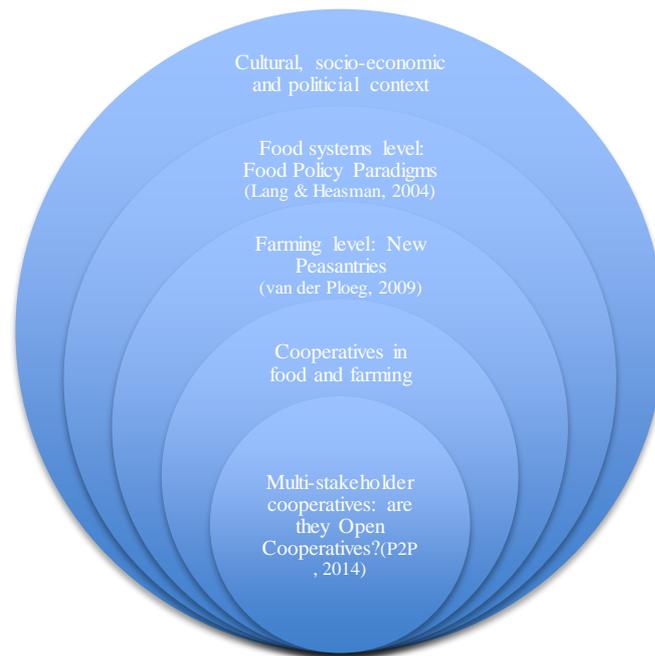
Some of the case studies presented later are legally incorporated cooperatives breaking down the boundaries between growers, buyers and eaters. As opposed to conventional agricultural cooperatives with a single type of members (i.e. farmers), multi-stakeholder cooperatives (MSCs) bring different groups of stakeholders as distinct membership groups under one shared cooperative enterprise to meet their diverse food-related needs. As discussed in the previous section, it was identified that a more cooperative-specific theoretical framework was required to analyse the richness of these innovative governance models as well as to be able to take into account these MSCs' links with other social movements beyond the cooperative movement.

The growing distance between producers and consumers but also between consumers and the places where the food they consume is produced, has been long quoted as a serious concern in modern food systems (Kneafsey et al., 2008). As the literature review has revealed, that distance has also grown between the disciplines that focus on producers and farming and those that deal with consumers' issues. The study of MS food cooperatives presents an opportunity to bridge the common analytical gap that silos food production and consumption activities into two separate categories. With reference to this traditional theoretical gap, Goodman and DuPuis (2002) have called for an integrated analytical framework after reviewing the agrifood and food studies literature and realised the shortcomings of both production-centred perspectives and more "cultural" and consumption-centred theories that try to reclaim the consumer back into rural sociology. For the authors, *'how the consumer goes about "knowing" food is just as important as farmers' knowledge networks in the creation of an alternative food system'* (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002:15).

This research attempts to bridge this gap while also acknowledging the specific case and context of consumer-producer relations in legally incorporated ACs rather than more informal associations (e.g. Food Assemblies⁴). In the modern industrial food system, food initiatives that foster producer-consumer interactions are normally labelled as "alternative" (Holloway et al., 2007). While being a very helpful lens to look at farming and the wider food system, the two theoretical frameworks presented earlier do not offer enough specificity with regards to ACs in particular.

⁴ Food Assemblies allow consumers to place weekly order online directly from local producers on a one-stop website. Food Assemblies are facilitated by the "host" who receives a small % of the sales of the assembly.

Figure 4.1 Multilevel Theoretical Framework



Source: The Author

The academic literature on MSCs is very scarce. This type of cooperatives have hardly been theorised in the context of food and farming (Lund, 2012). Bauwens and Kostakis, from the Peer to Peer Foundation, a forward thinking international organisation focused on ‘*studying, researching, documenting and promoting peer to peer practices in a very broad sense*’ (P2P website, 2016), have put forward a four-fold proposal for Open Coops. This framework is general to cooperatives operating in different sectors of the globalised economy, with an emphasis on the information society (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014). The open economy movement fights the increasing privatisation and commodification of knowledge, especially in the context of the internet age (P2P Value, 2016). Open economy activists are working to develop commons-based models for the governance and reproduction of abundant intellectual and immaterial resources (e.g. software and apps). At the same time, the P2P Foundation is working to link up with cooperatives as the ideal organisational type to develop a reciprocity-based model for the “scarce” material resources we use to reproduce material life (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014). The vision is for the surplus value to be kept inside the commons sphere itself, creating a merger between the open peer production of commons and cooperativeways of producing value: “it is the cooperatives that would, through their cooperative accumulation, fund the production of immaterial Commons, because they would pay and reward the peer producers associated with them” (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014:358). This research applies the Open Coops framework to the food and farming context. The Open Coop model is complementary to the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier (Food Policy Paradigms and

New Peasantries) as it adds a more refined dimension focusing specifically on cooperatives. Open Coops is a unique framework that calls for the evolution of the conventional cooperative model across four simultaneous dimensions:

1. Open Cooperatives should include in their own statutes their objectives and work are aligned towards the common good, integrating externalities into their model.
2. All people affected by the activity should have a say (this is the specific multi-stakeholder nature of Open Cooperatives), practising economic democracy.

As Bauwens has pointed out, these two characteristics already exist in the solidarity cooperatives – which is another name for multi-stakeholder cooperatives (Lund, 2012) – such as the popular social care MSCs in Italy and Canada. The P2P Foundation framework advances two extra practices that MSCs have to incorporate in order to become meaningfully transformational (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014):

3. The cooperative must co-produce commons for the common good, whether immaterial or material.
4. The final requirement is a global approach, to create counter-power for a global ethical economy consisting of cooperative alliances and a disposition to socialise its knowledge.

This framework is used to analyse MSCs in Chapter 7, in relation to case studies from both Spain and the UK. How do MSCs reconcile the different interests of different groups within an organisation? Can the MSCs studied be considered open cooperatives? Are they successful in serving the interests of the two weakest and most disconnected groups of actors in the food chain, i.e. small producers and consumers? To what extent are they socialising their knowledge and joining forces to develop a global ethical economy and realise more-than-economic benefits of cooperation? These are some of the dimensions of MSCs that will be discussed in relation to the research questions. This section has presented the multilevel theoretical framework that informed the research process. The next section presents the rationale for the conceptual framework developed and its alignment with the multilevel theoretical framework.

4.2.3 Conceptual framework

The theoretical benefits of combining the Food Policy Paradigms, van der Ploeg's new peasantries theories and the Open Coops framework is the complementarity they offer with regards to the levels of analysis: van der Ploeg's theory informed the organisational analytical

level (the cooperative) to classify the different types of ACs according to their food production strategy (level of embeddedness in the industrial food system). In conjunction, Lang and Heasman’s food policy paradigms approach elevated the level analysis of ACs to the wider food system, providing a framework to assess their relationships with other actors (e.g. policy makers and consumers) as well as implications for sustainability. Finally, the Open Coops framework offered a specific lens to study the particular case of MSCs and their relationship with other social movements. These different levels of analysis informed the research process, both in the selection of case studies and the data analysis stage. This new approach to the study of ACs offered a powerful explanatory potential to analyse the political, socio-economic and environmental aspects of ACs, a much-needed contribution to the literature on the subject. The findings from the literature review informed the formulation of the conceptual framework. The framework documents the key concepts and dimensions used in this research as well as the relationship between tensions at the meso cooperative level and the macro food policy level discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, summarised in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Tensions at the meso cooperative level and the macro food policy level

Dimensions of agricultural cooperation	Related FP themes
Legal: Informal co-operation ---- Incorporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contested policy context - Governance and MLG - Notions of accountability - Access to subsidies
Food system integration: Primary production ---- Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Danger of extreme localism - Level of integration of actors - National consumption vs. exports - Links with consumers
Conception of food: Quality (“pride”) ----- Commodity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality vs. quantity - Health implications - Re-localism / environment - Niche markets vs. food democracy
Reason for cooperation: Social motives --- Financial motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Degree of food accessibility - Ethics vs. practicalities - Social capital and trust
Levels of Identity/Policy: Local ---- Regional --- Autonomous Communities / UK’s devolved admins.) ---- National (Spain / UK) ---- EU ---- International (WTO)	

Source: The author

4.3 Multi-level cross-country comparative research

Comparative research has a long tradition in cross-cultural studies and it has long been recognised for its value as an analytical strategy to unravel different social realities (Kohn, 1987; Hantrais, 1995). Many definitions of cross-national comparative research in the social sciences exist, and most have in common their aim to observe social phenomena across nations, identify similarities and/or differences to attempt to learn from analysing effects, testing theories or evaluating policies and learning about best practice and social processes more generally (Hantrais, 1999). Growing in popularity after WWII, the comparative approach has been applied for decades to the study of organisations and social policies (Hantrais, 1999) as well as the food system (Ménard and Klein, 2004). Processes of globalisation and Europeanisation have only given impetus to the popularity of comparative research (Baistow, 2000).

The original assumption comparative research was based on related to the belief that constant factors, general laws and universal characteristics not only existed, but could be separated from the wider context for analysis. Comparative research started the quest for ‘landless theories’ (Rose, 1991). When applied to countries, the early conclusion of comparative researchers was that there was a linear evolution of industrial development in societies and that one day, all countries would converge (Hantrais, 1999). While early cross-country studies carried out in the US were assumed to be generalisable to any other country in the planet, soon it was recognised that findings are conditioned by spatial, temporal and socio-economic conditions and that contextualisation is key (Glover, 1996; Hantrais, 1999; Belfiore, 2005). Some authors strongly emphasised the importance of contextualisation, proposing ‘*culture-boundedness or relativism*’ and rejecting the idea of universality of concepts and values.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the famous Chicago School developed *Culturalism*, an approach based on ethnographic observation of cultural diversity, the uniqueness of different contexts and the near total rejection of comparison and even more strictly, of generalisation. Since then, many comparative researchers have attempted to achieve a balance between context-free and context-bound epistemological extremes to develop research approaches that recognise but are not discouraged by the importance of contextualisation (Hantrais, 1999). In the case of this particular study, this research conceives social reality neither to be context free nor completely context bound, but incorporates context as a key aspect to consider. Hantrais’s approach that considers context as “*an important explanatory variable and an enabling tool, rather than constituting a barrier to effective cross-national comparisons*’ was followed (Hantrais,

1999:94). This section discusses the methodological decisions associated with this approach. As the next chapters will discuss, the need for contextualisation became obvious when comparing ACs in Spain and the UK because of the countries' marked historical differences; but by situating and analysing these countries in the context of European food and farming policy, wider trends could be identified and a balance achieved between completely context free or context bound explanations.

Hantrais concluded there is no one best approach for carrying out cross-national comparisons. The author has used a useful culinary metaphor to elucidate the interactive relationship in the cross-national research process between the researcher and the method adopted that deserves to be quoted at length:

The availability and quality of the ingredients (concepts and data) vary from one restaurant (country or society) to another, but so do the preferred recipes (methods) and menus (social constructions) that go to make up the meal (research project). The experience and skills of the cooks (researchers), the restaurant manager (team leader), their tastes (cultural backgrounds and prejudices) will determine whether they opt for a menu aimed at mass consumption, whether they try to satisfy a specialised clientele, or whether they offer a more varied bill of fare designed to address the needs of different users. Whatever the option chosen, the restaurant owners (sponsors) will expect to see a reasonable return on their investment. From the experience of eating in one restaurant, or even twenty restaurants, it would clearly be dangerous to conclude that all restaurants, or a subset of them, are good or bad. If two clients who have eaten the same dish both suffer from food poisoning the next day, it would be tempting to deduce that the dish was the cause of the upset, but if another client did not have the same symptoms, a larger number of factors would have to be investigated. Explaining why a particular restaurant chain can, or cannot, be successfully transported across national borders is not simply an academic question. It requires all the skills of the experienced cross-national comparative researcher to carry out careful scrutiny of a wide range of socio-economic, political, national and local factors and to interpret and evaluate the findings with due regard for the cultural bias of his/her own background. (Hantrais, 1999:105-106).

Chapter 2 has already provided the historical, socio-economic and political context in each of the two countries under study as well as the European region they both are geographically, politically and economically part of. In-depth understanding of these contextual dimensions has been deemed in the literature a precondition for successful cross-country comparative research (Hantrais, 1999). Theoretically, comparative research pushes the researcher to consider and justify if and why the country level is the best contextual frame of reference. The rationale for the selection of the country cases has already been introduced in Chapter 2 (see also Appendix I) and further arguments are presented in the current chapter.

Cultural and socio-economic factors are especially key to this research's areas of study: namely food, farming, cooperation and sustainability (Ménard and Klein, 2004; Bock and van Huik, 2007; Thøgersen, 2010). By adding a cross-national perspective, the multidisciplinary character of the food policy approach used by this research was enhanced, offering a set of data and potential ways of analysis that could provide a deeper understanding of ACs and how they are affected and shaped by socio-cultural settings. Green has stated how in comparative research, '*no comparison is completely neutral*' (Green, 1994:6). As well as external factors, the researcher's own cultural and linguistic background, worldview, disciplinary and institutional affiliations and financial and logistic resources also determine the choice of topic, countries and research approach (Hantrais, 1999). For this reason, it was advisable to reflect upon the background of the researcher herself. This methodological aspect will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapter 10, when considering the challenges that faced this research (Hantrais, 1999). Before discussing other levels of comparison undertaken as part of this study, first the rationale for the macro level is presented by discussing the choice of the two countries selected.

The selection of countries in comparative research can be determined by the specific stage of development or transition in one country or their membership of an international organisation (e.g. EU or WTO); another determinants can simply be a matter of resources available for the study and/or whether the researcher is more interested in finding similarities or differences. In the case of this research, the choice was based on a number of historical and socio-economic differences and present similarities that are discussed below. The idea of country was applied loosely, even where intra-national differences exist (Hantrais, 1999). This point is especially relevant in the case of Spain, where nationalisms and regional identities were very strong in some case studies based in Catalonia and the Basque Country; the UK will be considered a country for the purpose of this research, although formed of several countries itself. It is worth mentioning that internal variations in the UK were found (discussed in Chapter 2), with Scotland having a stronger and more consistent level of government support for ACs than England and Wales (data in Northern Ireland was not included due to time and resource constraints). Appendix I summarises the main differences and similarities that make Spain and UK two interesting case studies to compare. The relevant differences identified between the two countries are listed below (for a detailed description of each factor and references see Chapter 2).

The UK was the first country to:

- Have a formalised cooperative (see more about the Rochdale legacy in Chapters 1 and 2).
- Undergo the Industrial revolution with its associated transformation of society.
- Transform its agriculture into a highly industrialised economic sector.
- Consolidate farming (only second after Denmark; by 1980s UK had the largest farms in Europe).

Additionally, in the UK agricultural cooperation:

- Developed less and slower than consumer and industrial co-operation.
- Became a tool for economic protection and of top-down measures.
- Currently, agriculture accounts for 0.5% GVA/GDP and 1.4% of employment (DEFRA, 2012).
- There are 621 ACs in the country providing approximately 8,000 jobs (Co-operatives UK, 2016).
- Does not receive funding from the UK Government (only partially in Scotland), with vertical cooperation in the supply chain being more prominent.

In contrast, Spain:

- Was one of the last 17 Eurozone members to industrialise agriculture (Simpson, 1995).
- Early agricultural cooperativism became a control tool used by the church and fascist regime to counterbalance communist and anarchist ideologies as discussed in detail in the introduction.
- Currently, Spain has the second strongest cooperative economy in EU, accounting for 2.2% GVA/GDP and 4.3% of employment.
- Has 4,000 ACs providing approximately 100,000 jobs (OSCAE, 2015).

At the same time, these two countries also share some similarities around their approach to AC policies:

- Conservative governments promoting the cooperative economy: At the time this research started, Spain was under the government of the Partido Popular, a Christian democratic and conservative party. In the UK, the Coalition government led by the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats were pushing the concept of the Big Society. Throughout the PhD, many political changes took place in both countries. In Spain,

two new political parties emerged and are now key actors in the political arena. In the UK, the Conservative party won a majority in May 2015 following five years of their coalition with the Liberal Democrats. It is still unclear what the Brexit vote in June 2016 will mean for UK farming and ACs.

- Both countries have undergone recent cooperative legislation changes: Spain introduced a new law to promote mergers and acquisitions in the AC sector in 2013. In 2014, the coalition government in the UK approved the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, bringing cooperatives into the agenda and combining 17 pieces of different legislation that had not been updated for decades.

This research project was meant to focus on the comparison of the two countries. However, despite the value of cross-national research in itself, the need to rethink the character and type of comparison soon became obvious during the first stages of the literature review and preliminary interviews with key stakeholders in the AC sector. Significant intra-country differences emerged, calling for a multi-level analysis that, in order to answer the research questions, could not be ignored (Hantrais, 1999). Early evidence suggested national boundaries were different from cultural and political boundaries (Hantrais and Mangen, 1996), and especially relevant to this research, also different from the degree of adherence to the dominant industrial food system (van der Ploeg, 2008). Four months into the PhD, a new comparative dimension was added to account for the key differences between large and commercially driven agricultural cooperatives in both countries and a new generation of emerging smaller cooperatives involving consumers and buyers as members. In this sense, the comparative exercise stretched and started to cover dimensions beyond the obvious cross-country analysis, including the following:

- Intra-country: Comparison of diverse types of ACs in each country
- Inter-country: Initial cross-country comparison of sectors within the EU/CAP context
- Specific models in both countries as in the case of multi-stakeholder cooperatives
- Interesting linguistic comparisons and comparability of terms food policy vs. food politics (e.g. in Spanish the word “politics” is used to refer to both politics and policies)
- Conceptual comparison and conceptual equivalence (e.g. Are the connotations of the word ‘cooperative’ the same in both countries? Is farming perceived in the same way?)
- Longitudinal accounts of members’ engagement and the evolution of their memberships versus snapshots of current experiences of being a cooperative member

The theoretical framework helped provide a structure for the topics that were emerging from the literature. As discussed previously, the theoretical framework of ecological public health

that aims to integrate health, the environment and society guided this research. Following this thinking, it made sense to identify and utilise the connections between different ‘levels’ of organisation (macro/meso/micro) in the food system in which ACs exist in, to analyse the issues that were emerging from the data. This food systems approach acknowledged top-down and bottom-up forces shaping the AC sector and can be summarised as follows:

1. *Macro: national and European level (Phase 1)*

The top macro-level focused on national and EU policies (also in the context of transnational WTO agreements) relevant to cooperatives and food policy. This level related to the role public policy has in shaping ACs’ practices and their impact on ecological public health and social and environmental justice. It identified and reviewed the policy and contextual factors affecting ACs. Macro data included ACs statistics from government, EU and industry reports as well as academic literature and public policy documents.

2. *Meso: organisational case study (Phase 2)*

The meso-level focused on the cooperative organisation in order to:

- Identify a spectrum of ACs according to size, different levels of integration of non-farmer actors (e.g. consumers and buyers as in the case of emerging multi-stakeholder models) and level of embeddedness in the industrial food system.
- Select case studies according to their location on the above spectrum.
- Reflect the diversity of the sector. For theoretical purposes, diverse examples in the AC spectrum were chosen. The literature reveals a trend towards consolidation and specialisation in an increasingly concentrated cooperative sector. At the other end of the spectrum, a growing number of smaller ACs with a more social and environmental focus started to appear during the 2007/08 financial crisis, fuelled by the desire to make business more ethically and to return to closer to nature ways of living. The case studies represent this variety characteristic of the AC sector: from large ACs with international operations (discussed in Chapter 5 and 6), to those trading locally only but being politically active globally (discussed in Chapters 7 and 8); variety was also reflected in terms of size and governance structures.

3. *Micro: Individual interviews with cooperative members (Phase 3)*

This final level of analysis aimed to:

- Collect and analyse cooperative members' points of view about the role of ACs and their reasons for joining.
- Investigate the subjective views and experiences of members and policy makers regarding differences amongst ACs.
- Explore how members understand food sustainability.

Taking into account the transnational character of this study, the limitations of data comparison were minimised by:

- Interviewing participants in their native language directly (without translators).
- The information sheet and consent form were translated from English to Spanish.
- Quotes and other data collected in Spanish and included in the discussion of the results were translated to English.
- Spanish literature was reviewed to ensure the correct translation of agricultural and food policy concepts under study.
- Field trips were carried out in both countries to get first-hand experience of the context and actors.

4.4 Case study methodology

This section provides details of the rationale for the choice of methodology and selection of the case studies. According to Yin (2014), a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer 'how' and 'why' questions; (b) the behaviour that wants to be observed cannot be manipulated; (c) contextual conditions are believed to be relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear. These are all conditions that applied to this research; the last two points were especially relevant because in farming, the cultural, socio-economic and political context shapes the number and type of cooperatives that emerge (as discussed in Chapter 2); thus, the boundaries were not clear and it was key to take this aspect into account when selecting the methodology.

Following the findings from the literature review that showed how the economic discipline dominates the study of ACs, this study set out to research these organisations using a more sociological lens. Since the objective was to achieve depth, not breadth of analysis, case study methodology was identified as the best way to offer a 'close-in' into the practices of some specific cases. Furthermore, case study methodology allows the researcher to explore both

cooperatives and its individual members, and supports the deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of complex constructs such as the two key ones used in this research: food sustainability and cooperative principles (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

As with all methodologies, the case study approach has its own limitations, which are worth considering here. Flyvbjerg (2004) has provided an in-depth account of the most cited problems of case studies, mainly based on beliefs around the importance given to generalisation, often expressed in relation to the impossibility of generalising from a single case (Flyvbjerg, 2004). The author has identified five misunderstandings or oversimplifications of case study methodology (Flyvbjerg, 2004:421):

1. General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.
2. One cannot generalise on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.
3. The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, that is, in the first stage of a total research process, while other methods are more suitable for hypothesis testing and theory-building.
4. The case study contains a bias towards verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions.
5. It is often difficult to summarise and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.

In his paper, Flyvbjerg presents strong arguments to refute all the above claims. It is not the objective of this PhD to defend the value of case study methodology, so this chapter examines only the claims that are more relevant to this research and interested readers are encouraged to read Flyvbjerg's thought-provoking article for a detailed account of the counter-arguments (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

First, the objective of this research is to explore trends and dynamics in ACs rather than statistical generalisations. This is done in order to acknowledge and respect differences in the AC sector rather than 'pigeon-holing' findings. Furthermore, case study methodology offers the opportunity of rich and contextualised analysis of varied sources of evidence and data (Merriam, 1995; Thomas, 2011), which applies to this research.

Second, Flyvbjerg highlights the fact that humans become experts in certain areas or skills by gradually experiencing learning in consecutive specific cases (Flyvbjerg, 2004). In this context, the author argues that studying cases is an advisable and adequate methodology to develop researchers' learning and skills. Being the main purpose of a PhD to develop the author's research capabilities, this was an additional reason for using case study methodology.

Third, a revelatory example presented by Flyvbjerg is that of Karl Popper's 'falsification' test key to critical reflexivity in social sciences. As Popper pointed out, a statement such as 'all swans are white' would be refuted and considered not valid if just one observation of a single black swan could be carried out. Falsification was important to the project's aims. In the present research, the generally accepted statement that claims all cooperatives are part of a social cooperative movement and are in line with the cooperative principles could be falsified by specific case studies showing evidence of the opposite. In this sense, if one of the case studies revealed practices not in line with the cooperative movement, which it is the case as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, this evidence would contradict the commonly accepted imaginary of a homogenous cooperative movement.

Fourth, a phenomenon, or in this case, a type of cooperative, need only appear once in a sample to be meaningful (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In this research, finding different types of cooperatives with different strategies and missions falsifies the existence of a consistent AC sector, let alone homogeneous cooperative movement. Vice versa, the existence of cooperatives that see social and environmental values central to what it means being a cooperative, falsify some dominant definitions that define ACs in solely economic terms. Flyvbjerg uses the case of Galileo's rejection of Aristotle's law of gravity to evidence how generalisations can be made from a single case. Galileo refuted that it was not just weight – like Aristotle claimed – but a combination of other factors (air resistance and friction) what determined the acceleration of falling bodies. Galileo's view was not accepted and the Aristotelian view was not finally rejected until half a century later, with the invention of the air pump. The air pump made it possible to conduct Galileo's experiment, by proving that a coin or a piece of lead inside a vacuum tube falls with the same speed as a feather. The relevant point for case study methodology is that only one instance with two very different materials (a piece of metal and a feather) were used to prove the theory and make generalisations that applied to other materials (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Following this logic, this research selected contrasting cases of very different ACs to ascertain the level of heterogeneity in the AC sector and whether widespread generalisations can be applied to all ACs. This was achieved by analysing the cases of large

and competitive ACs as well as other cases of small cooperatives with practices alternative to those of the dominant agrifood sector.

In summary, case study was identified as the most suitable methodology to answer the research questions that emerged from gaps in the literature review (please see Chapter 1 for a summary of the research questions and section 4.1 of this present Chapter 4 for a detailed account of their evolution and refinement). This section has elaborated on the epistemological basis for the selection of case study methodology; next, the types of data collected will be discussed.

4.5 Types of data collected and data analysis method

4.5.1 Defining boundaries: from country level to individual cooperative members

One of the common pitfalls associated with case study is that there is a tendency for researchers to attempt to answer a question that is too broad or cover a topic that has too many objectives for one study. In order to avoid this problem, several authors including Yin (2014) and Stake (1995) have suggested that placing boundaries on cases can prevent this explosion of data and lack of focus from occurring. Strategies to delimit a case study include: (a) by time and place (Creswell, 2003); (b) time and activity (Stake, 1995); and (c) by definition and context (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Setting clear boundaries to cases also ensures that the study remains reasonable in scope.

A key strategy used to control unbounded cases in this study was to constantly refer back to the research questions to make sure they were aligned to these. Guiding questions included: Was it relevant to analyse policies just at the country level? Or specific cooperatives? Should the focus perhaps have fallen on organisational processes and environmental policies in cooperatives? Or was it more suitable to analyse the difference between organisations/countries? Taking into account these questions and the qualitative character of this research, it was not appropriate to use probability sampling, as the aim was not to produce a statistically representative sample or draw statistical inference. As discussed above, particular phenomena or practices need only appear once in the cases to be of interest for this research.

An alternative sampling approach for the selection of case studies is ‘purposive sampling’, a non-probabilistic technique often employed in qualitative investigation (Thomas, 2011). There are different approaches to purposive sampling depending on where the focus is placed (e.g. in

some studies cases are chosen because they are considered more deviant from the average). One form of purposive sampling is theoretical sampling, developed from grounded theory approaches (Glasser and Strauss, 1967). The term grounded theory refers to a research process in which the theory is generated from the data rather than being fixed before the data collection stage. It is worth mentioning how the iterative nature of the theoretical sample design has a built-in feedback mechanism; this offers the opportunity to analyse the data as the sampling progresses, shaping in turn future sampling choices and covering gaps that help reinforce robustness of the theories and models generated.

As one of the objectives of this research was to provide an in-depth account of how cooperative principles and sustainability are embodied (or not) in ACs, a random sample was not considered the most adequate strategy; in Flyvbjerg's words: *'the typical or average case is often not the richest in information. Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied'* (Flyvbjerg, 2004:425). Theoretical sampling was thus considered appropriate to address the research questions that this project set out to answer. As a result of the choice of a purposive non-random sample approach, the number of people/cooperatives interviewed became less important than the criteria used to select them. The characteristics of informants and the organisations they belonged to were used as the basis of selection, chosen to reflect the diversity and breadth of the cooperative sector and relevant food policy actors. The number of selection criteria required and the degree to which criteria are nested are important considerations given the comparative character of this research. Other important factors that determined the sample size were the human and financial resources available to conduct fieldwork across two countries (Ritchie et al., 2003).

Having reviewed extensively the literature on sampling for case studies and having found several relevant typologies, it became obvious that having multiple criteria rather than one sampling criterion would strengthen the choice of cases and informants. The following list shows the rationale behind the sampling strategy of this study according to different authors' typologies:

- Information-oriented selection: cases are selected to maximise utility of information from single case studies based on expectations about their information content (Flyvbjerg, 2004). For this purpose, findings from literature and civil society publications provided the evidence to inform the expectations that guided the choices.
- Extreme/deviant cases (Flyvbjerg, 2004): to gain information on unusual multi-

stakeholder cooperatives.

- Maximum variation cases (Flyvbjerg, 2004): to obtain information by contrasting cases that are very different in one dimension, in the present case, size, geographical location, policy context and form of organisation.
- Paradigmatic cases (Flyvbjerg, 2004): this strategy is used to develop a “school” for the domain that the case belongs to. This study includes two paradigmatic cases: large and market-oriented ACs versus small and multi-stakeholder ACs.
- Multiple, comparative case study (or cross-case analysis) (Thomas, 2011).
- In this research, the case studies can also be labelled as instrumental (Stake, 1995) as they will be used to further theoretical efforts towards a higher level of integration in food policy and the analysis of sustainable food systems. At the sectorial level, the selection of several cases from the agricultural cooperatives population also aimed to further the knowledge of the sector. As Stake (1995) has argued, both categories are not exclusive and these labels are more heuristic than functional. As this author points out ‘the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case’ (Stake, 1995:104).
- Multiple nested case studies that served to examine the similarities and differences between the cases. Yin (2014) has described how multiple case studies can be used to either, “(a) predict similar findings (a literal replication) or (b) predict contrasting findings but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication). Chapters 8 and 9 will provide examples of how both purposes were achieved in this research through the use of multiple case studies.

The above list shows an obvious overlapping of terms and purposes of case study classifications from different authors, included here to introduce the process of triangulation that took place when selecting the case studies. Given the broad scope of the AC sector, several parameters were established to manage the data collection stage. The parameters delimited the inclusion of participants from organisations that were:

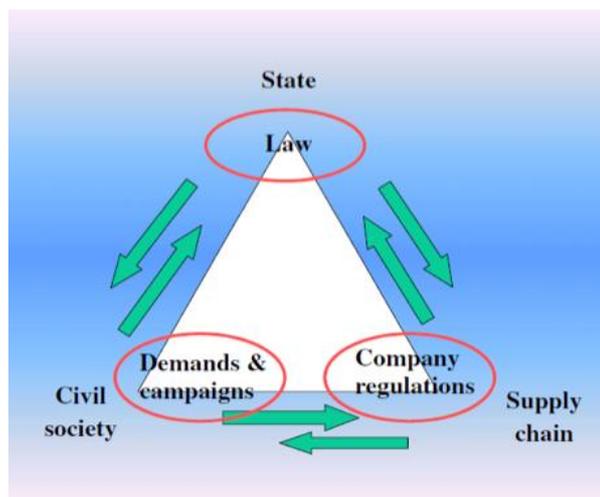
- Either a marketing, distribution, input or worker cooperative operating in agriculture (worker cooperatives are very rare in farming; consumer cooperatives were excluded from the analysis as they were beyond the remit of this research and have been covered extensively in the literature). While a focus was placed on f&v ACs in line with the Ecological Public Health approach discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, two non f&v ACs were included as case studies due to being excellent representative examples sitting at opposite extremes of a continuum of alignment with AFNs at one end and globalised

industrial food systems at the other end. The former is Farmway, a UK cereal AC that was bought by Mole Valley at the beginning of this project. The latter is Esnetik, a dairy multi-stakeholder cooperative in the Basque Country that also encourages members to produce f&v for self-consumption. Both cooperatives are discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 8.

- Indirectly related to the work of ACs, either in terms of monitoring activity and numbers of ACs (e.g. Plunkett Foundation) or reporting news and trends in the AC sector (e.g. Soberania Alimentaria magazine).
- Representative of farmers and ACs (e.g. COGECA at EU level, NFU, SAOS and LWA in the UK and Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias in Spain).
- National/geographical level: organisations geographically based either in the UK or Spain or operating at the EU level (e.g. COGECA).

The sampling approach was informed by the food policy triangle (Lang et al., 2009) that depicts how food policy (including the areas of the food system that are not regulated) is a contested terrain shaped by constant tensions between actors that fall in one of three categories: (1) governance/policy makers, (2), industry (in the case of this research also including cooperative members as ACs are part of industry) and (3) civil society (NGOs, academics) (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.2 Food policy triangle



Source: Lang et al. (2009)

This framework was used as a way to position ACs within the wider food system without replicating previous approaches from the economic literature focusing on interviewing

cooperative members and managers and mainly remaining at that organisational level as discussed in the literature review. The food policy triangle enabled the analysis of ACs in relation to other actors in the food system, helping to identify the informants that could offer perspectives on the topic from different perspectives. Thus, in order to have a comprehensive description of each of the case studies – and ultimately be able to answer the research questions – it was necessary to obtain data on the wider context of the ACs selected, including their embeddedness in their local area, but also in their multilevel context (e.g. international activity/trade/campaigning and dependency on EU subsidies), the character of their representative body/union (if any) and any horizontal and vertical collaborations with other actors in the food system or civil society.

4.5.2 Multilevel data for a multilevel analysis

The aforementioned macro, meso and micro levels of analysis informed the quantity and type of data to be collected in order to provide:

- Breadth: achieved by collating statistics on the AC sector at international, EU and national (UK/Spain) level
- Depth: achieved by data collection based on the policy triangle to take into account different perspectives of the same object of study (Lang et al., 2009):
 - Governance/policy makers
 - Industry (cooperative members)
 - Civil society (NGOs, academics, consumer organisations)

The sources for data were manifold and can be classified as desktop-based research, fieldwork and participant observation. Each category is analysed in detail in the following sections.

Desktop-based research:

A review of multidisciplinary academic and grey⁵ literature was carried out (see Chapter 3 for details); there was a symbiotic relationship between the literature review and the data generated during the fieldwork; academic papers and grey literature were compared and analysed to draw conclusions from the different approaches used to define and study ACs. Documents/content analysis included stand-alone documents (e.g. reports and policies) as well as content from

⁵ Grey literature refers to industry, government and media articles and reports not peer-reviewed but from respected sources.

websites. The desktop-based research undertaken can be categorised as five types of activities:

1. One of the first desktop research activities carried out was a detailed institutional and organisational mapping exercise to identify the relevant players in the AC sector in the UK, Spain and at EU level.
2. Closely linked to the above, two concise but comprehensive timelines (presented in Appendices II and III) were created to chronologically document the main key milestones in the development of ACs in Spain and UK.
3. Analysis of key policy documents such as legislation and official publications from public authorities (from the Spanish Government, to the European Commission and UK government as well as trade organisations such as COGECA at EU level, Cooperatives UK and Cooperativas Agroalimentarias). Table 4.3 includes the list of key documents analysed organised by country, date and content.
4. Analysis of other relevant data from industry and civil society available in the public domain (including DEFRA's survey on ACs, submissions to government consultations, e-newsletters, media articles and ACs' website content).
5. Further desktop-based activities included participation in relevant listservs, subscription to e-newsletters and regular visits to the media and communication pages on the websites of COPA-COGECA, Soberania Alimentaria and Cooperativas Agro-Alimentarias.

Table 4.2 List of policy documents and key reports reviewed

N.	Name of Document	Published by	Geographical remit	Date published	Contents
1.	Draft Bill of Spanish Law to foster integration of ACs [Anteproyecto de Ley de fomento de la integración de cooperativas y de otras entidades asociativas de carácter agroalimentario]	Spanish Ministry for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (MAGRAMA)	Spain	2012	This document included data on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of agrarian cooperativism • Consolidation • Aims and objectives of the law • Policy tools
2.	Spanish Law to foster integration of ACs [Ley 13/2013 de Fomento de la integración de cooperativas y de otras entidades asociativas de carácter agroalimentario]	Spanish Government Official State Report (BOE)	Spain	2 Aug 2013	Official government document publishing the new law to foster associationism of agricultural cooperatives.
3.	Macromagnitudes del Cooperativismo Agroalimentario Español	OSCAE/ Cooperativas Agroalimentarias	Spain	2014 2015	Official yearly publications monitoring the performance, size and types of ACs in Spain (part funded by the Spanish Government).
4.	Estudio diagnóstico sobre la situación del Cooperativismo Agroalimentario en España -Análisis DAFO-	Cooperativas Agroalimentarias funded by MAGRAMA	Spain	Dec 2013	SWOT Analysis of the Farming Cooperative sector in Spain published five months after the introduction of the new cooperative law.
5.	DEFRA Survey on Cooperatives and Producer Organisations	EFFP for DEFRA	UK	Aug 2013	DEFRA carried out this survey to understand barriers to using AC model and collaboration to raise the competitiveness of UK horticulture.
6.	Conditions, attitudes and structures of successful POs and cooperatives - Potential role in supporting a competitive farming sector in England and Wales	English Food and Farming Partnership for DEFRA	UK	Jan 2014	The report presents evidence of characteristics of successful ACs and POs and makes recommendations as to how government could potentially support the introduction and development of ACs and POs in the future.
7.	Homegrown. The UK Co-operative Economy 2013	Co-operatives UK	UK	2013	Report covering the business growth of cooperatives in the UK with detailed statistics.
8.	Agricultural Co-operatives, Policy Position Briefing	Co-operatives UK	UK	March 2014	Co-operatives UK's policy position on ACs with the aim to inform policymakers of the potential benefits of co-operation between farmers.

9	Agricultural Co-operatives, Report on the co-operative farming sector	Co-operatives UK	UK	2016	This report reviews the current state of, and support for, the agricultural cooperative sector, the issues it faces and some of the challenges and opportunities looking forward.
10	Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014	UK Government	UK	2014	This consolidated act brought together 17 different pieces of legislation that had not been updated since 1965.
11	A Cooperative Economy for the Common Good	P. Conaty for the Wales Co-operative Centre	Wales	2015	Economic strategy document for Wales calling for the development of the Collaborative Economy Model – an economic and regeneration strategy developed specifically for Wales.
12	SAOS Annual Review	SAOS	Scotland	2012 2013	Yearly reports on SAOS' activities providing cooperative and collaborative strategies, including development and consultancy services (supported by The Scottish Government).
13	Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in the EU	COPA COGECA	Europe	Feb 2015	The findings of this report highlight the economic significance of EU agri-cooperatives and provide detail statistical information for each EU member state.
14	Fruit and Vegetable Producer Organisations in the EU: Overview and Prospects	COPA COGECA	Europe	2009	Policy briefing presenting Cogeca's policy asks to the EU before the 2013 CAP reform.
15	Support for Farmers' Cooperatives Reports (x3)	EU Commission	Europe + UK and Spain reports	Nov 2012	As part of this project the European Commission published amongst other documents 27 country reports, 8 sector reports, 33 case studies and a final overall report
16	Report on the fruit and vegetables regime	Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council	Europe	4.3.14	Report on the implementation of the provisions concerning producer organisations (POs), operational funds and operational programmes in the fruit and vegetables sector since the 2007 reform.
17	Case studies' websites, constitutions, newsletters, reports and email communications (where available; referenced in the text)	ACs that were chosen as case studies	Spain and UK	Several	These documents were used in combination with the interview data and fieldwork notes from visits and participant observation to create and analyse the case studies.

Source: The author

Fieldwork

Fieldwork activities included both interviews and participant observation:

1. **Interviews:** The cooperative triangle (Lang et al., 2009) discussed in the previous section was used to identify the relevant stakeholder groups to be included in the interviewing process. Table 9 includes a breakdown of the interviews carried out by country and by the type of actor and organisation. In total 41 interviews were conducted. While each was included in the analysis, not all were specifically referenced or quoted in the text. The interviewees fell into one or more of the following categories:

1. Industry
 - 1.1 Large cooperatives
 - 1.2. Multi-stakeholder cooperatives
 - 1.3 industry representative bodies / unions
2. Government
3. Academics
4. Civil society

The total number of participants interviewed was 41. Of those, 18 participants were based in the UK and 22 in Spain. One of the Spanish participants was also a representative of a European organisation. A Cogeca representative is also included in this EU/international category. Every effort was made to achieve a reasonable balance in the number of participants in each category for each country. Finding a representative from the UK government that had ACs as part of their remit was a challenge. One of the findings that emerged is that there is no one within DEFRA with the word agricultural cooperation in their job title. In Spain that was not the case. While Co-operatives UK shared that certain civil servants in DEFRA do liaise with ACs, they do so through supporting specific farming sectors (not directly through cooperation, but collaboration); it became obvious that no one in DEFRA was a clear candidate for this key informant category. Eventually, a senior policy maker from the opposition agreed to take part in the study, which offered a very valuable perspective to the data.

Two sets of research questions were formulated; one set was designed for interviewing cooperative members, who could be either farmers (in conventional ACs) or a combination of

Table 4.3 Summary of interviews by country, type of actor and organisation⁶

Policy Triangle	UK (18)	Spain (21.5)	EU/ Intl. (1.5)
<u>Governance/Policy makers</u>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK Policy maker (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spanish Policy maker (1) 	
<u>Industry</u>			
Representative bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFU (1) • The Land Workers' Alliance (1) • Co-operatives UK (1) • Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS) (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperativas Agroalimentarias (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copa-Cogeca (1)
Agricultural cooperatives:	<p>ACHEIFS⁷:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmway/Mole Valley (1) <p>New ACs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manchester Veg People (2+0.5) • Moss Brook Growers (1) • OrganicLea (1) • Peasant Evolution Producer Cooperative (1) 	<p>ACHEIFS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anecoop (2) <p>Traditional cooperatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valle del Jerte AC (2) • Valle del Tietar AC (3) <p>New ACs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actyva (2) • Catasol (2) • Cooperative Integral Catalana (1) • Esnetik (3) 	
<u>Civil Society/Academia</u>			
Civil Society Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plunkett Foundation (1) • Somerset Cooperative Services (0.5) • Ecological Land Cooperative (0.5) • Kindling Trust (0.5) • Campaign for Real Farming (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soberanía alimentaria, biodiversidad y culturas magazine (1) • Via Campesina Spanish rep (also member of an AC) (0.5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via Campesina (Spanish rep.) (0.5)
Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK Academic 1 (1) • UK Academic 2 (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spanish Academic (1) • Academic from Finca Experimental University of Almeria-Anecoop (1) 	

⁶ The numbers in brackets indicate the number of participants interviewed in each category. The number 0.5 is used to indicate cases in which the interviewee was representing two organisations.

⁷ ACHEIFS refers to ACs highly embedded in industrial food systems as discussed in section 4.2.2

farmers, workers, restaurateurs and consumers in the case of multi-stakeholder cooperatives. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 illustrate how the interview questions were designed in alignment with the research questions. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the four research questions this research set out to answer were:

RQ.1 What does the comparison between the UK and Spanish ACs sectors reveal about those countries' food policies and current trends in the European AC sector and AC policy?

RQ2. To what extent are ACs part of a social movement adopting cooperative principles or a mere section of the agricultural economic sector? And to what extent can they be both at the same time?

RQ3. How is the dominant AC sector in Spain and UK in the context of European farming policy contributing to multidimensional food system sustainability?

RQ4. How do these findings contribute to the theorisation of agricultural cooperatives and alternative and sustainable food systems?

2. Participant Observation: Participant observation complemented interview data as it was used to document what participants did in 'real life' contexts, rather than just relying on what they say they do (Li, 2008). This included participant observation at events where some of the actors interviewed were taking part: Oxford Real Farming Conference, UK Food Sovereignty Interim Group meeting, UK Food Group meetings and conference. This activity was carried out in the UK only for two reasons: first, due to time and resource constraints that made it difficult to carry out participant observation in Spain; second, mapping the AC actors in Spain was easier because the sector is bigger and more institutionalised. In the UK however, actors in the AC sector were more difficult to identify from online searches and participation in these events made it easier to map the terrain.

3. Field notes: Apart from the interview transcripts, field notes taken during the process of data collection were also kept and analysed. These notes included reflections on the visits to farms and organisations as well as descriptions of places and informal participation in farm activities. Examples of field notes can be found in Appendix VIII.

Table 4.4 Alignment of interview questions with research questions – Participant category: Cooperative members

Related Research Question (RQ)	Interview Questions - Type I Participants: Cooperative members
	Background:
RQ1 RQ2	1. Tell me a bit about yourself and your role/place in your coop [How long have you been a member of this cooperative? Did you live in this town/city before becoming a member of the coop? How did you learn about/were introduced to the cooperative? Why did you join the cooperative?]
RQ1 RQ2	2. In your view, what are the main advantages and disadvantages of being a member of the coop?
	Organisational
RQ2	3. What would you say the main goals of your coop are? What do you think of these priorities? (give examples)
RQ2	4. Do you see yourself more as a client or a member of your cooperative?
RQ3	5. Does your cooperative have an environmental policy? Other policy such as fair trade/salary /training etc. [Do you think it is adequate?]
RQ1 RQ2 RQ3	6. What do you think your coop will look like in 5 years' time? What do you think it will offer to members? Is there a business plan for this period?
	Governance
RQ2	7. Can you tell me a bit more about the governance of your cooperative? [What do you think of the voting principle / admission requirements for new members / exit process for members wanting to leave the cooperative?]
RQ2 RQ3	8. Who owns the land you work? [Would you consider co-buying land with other members?]
RQ1 RQ2	9. Do you think the cooperative model is attractive to young farmers?
	Legislation
RQ1 RQ2	10. Do you know what legal model your cooperative is based on? (PO, SAT, etc.) [If YES: Do you think it is a sustainable model? Why?]
RQ1	11. Are you aware of the current legislation changes in cooperative law? [Explain changes. Do you think legislation changes are going to affect your co-operative? How?]
	Social dimension
RQ2	12. Do you have any contact with fellow coop members outside the cooperative? (Follow up)
RQ2	13. What is the relationship between your coop and farmers' unions?
RQ2 RQ3	14. We have talked before about your environmental policy. Does your coop have any environmental/community initiatives? [If yes, Please can you tell me a bit more about these initiatives? If no, Do you think it matters?]
RQ3 RQ4	15. Do you sell directly to consumers? [Do you think it would be / is beneficial?] [If YES: How would you describe your consumer base?]
RQ3 RQ4	16. Some cooperatives are integrating consumers and restaurateurs in their organisations, involving them in different degrees in the decision making process. Do you think this consumer or restaurateur integration in an AC can be beneficial or problematic? Why?
RQ3 RQ4	17. Have you heard of the concept of Food Sovereignty and of Via Campesina? [If YES: Please tell me a bit more and how/if relates to your coop]
RQ2 RQ4	18. Some people argue cooperatives are more egalitarian organisations than traditional business models, what do you think?
RQ2	19. Does your coop work/trade with other coops? Why?

Source: The Author

Table 4.5 Alignment of interview questions with research questions – Participant category: policy makers, civil society organisation representatives and academic experts

Related Research Question (RQ)	<u>Interview Questions</u>
	Background
RQ.1 RQ.2	1. How does your work relate to agricultural cooperatives?
RQ.1 RQ.2 RQ.4	2. How do you think agricultural cooperatives' role is in UK/Spanish farming?
RQ.1 RQ.4	3. What do you think the main organisational objectives of most ACs are? [Do you think these objectives can secure a sustainable food system?]
	Coops and the CAP
RQ.1	4. How do you think agricultural cooperatives have evolved since the UK/Spain joined the EU?
RQ.1	5. I have read about the EU's push for POs and SATs, which are organisations that encourage more flexible types of cooperation without having to adhere to the cooperative principles. Which model do you think is more appropriate to secure sustainable food production? POs, SAT or cooperative model? Why?
	Long term approach
RQ.1	6. Are you aware of the new legislation changes for cooperatives? Do you think the new legislation changes are going to affect agricultural cooperatives? How?
RQ.1 RQ.3 RQ.4	7. Short-term policies that seek fast financial returns are often blamed for many environmental problems. Do you think cooperatives are more suited than other legal forms to enable a balance between the short and long term impacts of food production or is it maybe just a matter of willingness rather than legal forms?
RQ.2 RQ.3 RQ.4	8. Some cooperatives are integrating consumers and restaurateurs in their organisations, involving them in different degrees in the decision making process. Do you think this consumer or restaurateur integration in an AC can be beneficial or problematic? Why?
	Cooperative principles
RQ.2 RQ.4	9. One of the main distinctions between the different cooperatives I have been studying is their adherence to the food sovereignty principles. Have you heard of the concept of Food Sovereignty? How do you understand it? How do you think it relates to ACs? What do you think of the way FS refers to "peasants" and "farmers"? Are they a homogenous population in your view?]
RQ.2	10. Do you think the size of ACs affects their adherence to the cooperative principles? Why?
RQ.2 RQ.4	11. Do you think the integration of consumers and or restaurateurs can affect the adherence to the cooperative principles? Why?
RQ.2 RQ.3 RQ.4	12. Do you think having a cooperative legal form can encourage organisations to adhere to ethical principles more than other legal forms or do you think the legal form is irrelevant?

Source: The Author

Online survey

At the beginning of the research project, an online survey was considered for use with bigger cooperatives (more than 20 members) as it was anticipated this method could reach more members and would overcome potential problems accessing cooperative members' meetings. Survey Monkey was used to test a pilot. However, the survey was eventually considered to be an inadequate data collection method for several reasons. The main reason related to the fact that the targeted participants were part of a population recently researched by the same survey method. According to the approved Research Ethics procedure for this project, participants had to be protected from over-research, ensuring that the same individuals were not asked to take part in similar research projects within the same year. Just before the data collection stage began, DEFRA carried out a survey on Cooperatives and Producer Organisations in the UK. The survey was posted on the NFU website and thus, targeted NFU members who were also members of a Producer Organisation or AC, inviting them to share their views on how grower and farmer controlled businesses could play a role in raising the competitiveness of UK horticulture. DEFRA commissioned EFFP to undertake this study on ACs and POs. The brief was to provide recommendations to DEFRA regarding the implementation of the CAP reform in the UK (NFU Online, 2013; EFFP, 2013). The survey focused particularly around questions on measuring performance, success factors and the willingness of growers and farmers to join ACs/POs. For this reason, it was considered that this method would only contribute to the existing survey-fatigue of the target population. Alternatively, the data from that survey were collated and analysed as part of the literature review. While the survey was still live by the time this thesis was printed (EFFP, 2013), the results had not been made public, so a Freedom of Information request was made to access the report (the most relevant sections of the results are included in Appendix VI). Despite being commissioned by DEFRA and reaching thousands of NFU members, the survey had a very low response rate (only 38 respondents), which anticipated an even lower response rate if a survey with fewer resources would have been carried out as part of this research.

4.5.3 Six phases of thematic analysis

All the data collated, both written in its primary format (reports, newsletters, etc.) plus the transcriptions of the audio data from the interviews (see details of all the data collected at the beginning of section 4.5) were imported into QSR NVivo for organisation, charting and analysis. Given the large amounts and variety of data collected, NVivo software was used to organise and create coded categories. This way of working allowed consistency and enabled a

comparison of the statements made by all the subjects on particular topics. While NVivo is a powerful piece of software, it lacks the capacity to 'read' texts as human beings do, and to recognise nuances in complex expressions and syntax (Krippendorff, 2013). Thus, NVivo was not regarded as a substitute for rigorous document analysis but as support tool to aid organisation.

In order to take into account both the content and the context of documents, thematic analysis (TA) was selected as the most suitable analytical method. TA was first named in the 1970s as a method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data (Merton, 1975). TA was selected over discourse analysis, which seeks a constructivist interpretation of data by drawing substantive interpretations from the content of a text (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2003). Another method for analysing documents is content analysis (CA). CA is best suited to explore large amounts of textual information to determine trends and patterns of words used, their frequency and the structures embedded in the data (Gbrich, 2007). For this reason, content analysis was also considered as a data analysis method but rejected based on the findings of the literature review that had highlighted the need for a more qualitative and less reductionist approach to study ACs.

An additional reason to select TA was the theoretical flexibility that this method offers, as it allows for the search and examination of patterning in the data that does not require adherence to any particular theory of language or explanatory framework (Clarke and Braun, 2013). This means TA can be applied within a range of theoretical frameworks, a strength that benefits the multi-level theoretical approach of this research. Furthermore, TA is suited to a wide range of research interests and theoretical perspectives, and it is useful as a 'basic' method because: a) it works with a wide range of research questions, from those about people's experiences or understandings to those about the representation and construction of particular phenomena in particular contexts; b) it can be used to analyse different types of data, from secondary sources such as reports to interviews transcripts and field notes; c) it works with large or small data-sets; and d) it can be applied to produce data-driven or theory-driven analyses (Clarke and Braun, 2013).

This research followed Braun and Clarke's six phases of TA (2006) as detailed in Box 1. The authors did not design this list as a linear model where the researcher is unable or not advised to proceed to the next phase without completing the prior phase; rather, analysis is conceived as a recursive process. This research also applied this iterative method, an example of which was the evolution and refinement of the research questions discussed earlier in this chapter.

Box 4.1 Six phases of thematic analysis

Phases of thematic analysis	Related actions taken for this research
1) Familiarisation with the data: the researchers must immerse themselves in, and become intimately familiar with, their data; reading and re-reading the data (and listening to audio-recorded data at least once, if relevant) and noting any initial analytic observations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Author carrying out the interviews, transcriptions as well as translation of quotes from Spanish to English - Taking notes from initial readings and observations
2) Coding: this involves generating pithy labels for important features of the data of relevance to the (broad) research question guiding the analysis. Coding is not simply a method of data reduction, it is also an analytic process; codes capture both a semantic and conceptual reading of the data. The researcher codes every data item and ends this phase by collating all their codes and relevant data extracts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Several iterations of coding were carried out in NVivo - Coding was done using both semantic and conceptual clues - All the documents and transcripts were coded
3) Searching for themes: A theme is a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data relevant to the research question. Searching for themes is a bit like coding your codes to identify similarity in the data. This ‘searching’ is an active process; themes are not hidden in the data waiting to be discovered by the intrepid researcher, rather the researcher constructs themes. The researcher ends this phase by collating all the coded data relevant to each theme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Themes were constructed by identifying similarities in the codes using NVivo - The themes were constructed following an iterative process
4) Reviewing the themes: Involves checking that the themes ‘work’ in relation to both the coded extracts and the full data set. The researcher should reflect on whether the themes tell a convincing and compelling story about the data, and begin to define the nature of each individual theme, and the relationship between the themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The review of the themes was done using NVivo - Some themes were merged into one and others were split into two or more themes - No themes were discarded
5) Defining and naming themes: Requires the researcher to conduct and write a detailed analysis of each theme (the researcher should ask ‘what story does this theme tell?’ and ‘how does this theme fit into the overall story about the data?’), identifying the ‘essence’ of each theme and constructing a concise, punchy and informative name for each theme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first stage of defining and naming themes was done using NVivo. - A second stage involved the re-naming of themes and was done during the writing up (see below).
6) Writing up: Writing is an integral element of the analytic process in TA (and most qualitative research). Writing-up involves weaving together the analytic narrative and (vivid) data extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data, and contextualising it in relation to existing literature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing up was done in two stages. The 1st stage of the process involved a transfer document submitted at the end of the first year of the PhD, including the introductory chapters, literature review and proposed methodology. - The 2nd stage of writing was completed after the data collection and analysis stages. During this stage some of the themes were renamed as the narrative of the findings became clearer.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006)

4.6 Qualitative quality

High-quality qualitative research is characterised by a rich complexity of abundance, in contrast to quantitative research that is more likely appreciated for its precision and for offering generalisations (Winter, 2000 in Tracy, 2010). This research followed Sarah Tracy's Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research (Tracy, 2010). Tracy's approach differentiates between qualitative research's *means* (methods and practices) and its *ends*. This section explores how the research meets Tracy's eight criteria that were selected as a benchmark of quality in qualitative research: (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. This benchmark was selected because it delineates eight *universal* hallmarks for high quality qualitative methods across paradigms and it leaves enough room for tailoring to the specific topic of this project, the specific researcher, context and theoretical framework (Tracy, 2010). Table 10 lists in detail the components of the Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research (adapted from Tracy, 2010), how they were used in this research and what specific chapters of the thesis relate to each particular criterion.

As a strategy to achieve validity and replicability, the responsibility was taken to ensure that: (a) the research questions were clear and substantiated; (b) the case study design was appropriate for the research questions; (c) the sampling strategies were appropriate (d) data were collected and managed systematically; and (e) data were analysed correctly (Baxter and Jack, 2008). These points were taken into account throughout the whole research process following the steps detailed in this chapter.

With regards to reliability, it is worth mentioning here that this concept fundamentally developed in the context of psychometric research (Thomas, 2011) and refers to the importance of having tests and tools that provide consistent results from one testing occasion to another, e.g. different researchers or time of the year (Thomas, 2011). In social sciences, the concepts of dependability or consistency have been proposed in favour of reliability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Three main strategies to achieve consistency (both for reliability or internal validity) were followed (Merriam, 1995):

Table 4.6 Eight “Big-Tent” Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research

Criteria for quality (end goal)	Various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve	Criteria discussed in Chapter/section
Worthy topic	The topic of the research is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant • Timely • Significant • Interesting 	Chapter 1 Chapter 4
Rich rigor	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate and complex: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes 	Throughout thesis, especially in: Chapter 4 Chapter 9
Sincerity	The study is characterised by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) • Transparency about the methods and challenges 	Chapter 4 Chapter 10
Credibility	The research is marked by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (“nontextual”) knowledge, and showing rather than telling • Triangulation or crystallisation • Multivocality • Member reflections 	Throughout thesis, especially in: Chapters 4-10
Resonance	The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalisations • Transferable findings 	Throughout thesis, especially in: Chapter 2 Chapters 5-9
Significant contribution	The research provides a significant contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptually/theoretically • Practically • Morally • Methodologically • Heuristically 	Chapter 1 Chapter 4 Chapter 9 Chapter 10
Ethical	The research considers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research) 	Throughout thesis and in more detail in Chapter 4
Meaningful coherence	The study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves what it purports to be about • Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals • Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each 	Throughout thesis, especially in: Chapter 2 Chapter 4 Chapter 10

Source: The author, adapted from Tracy (2010)

1. Triangulation – the next section offers details of how data, theory and method triangulation was undertaken as part of this research.
2. Peer examination – peer feedback was sought from supervisors, fellow PhD students, colleagues in conferences and reading group sessions as well as from anonymous reviewers through journal submissions.
3. Audit trail – including field notes and reflections on the data collection process.

In qualitative research, internal validity is affected by the qualitative research design, while external validity is related to the extension of qualitative findings. The next section now turns to discuss internal validity, and how it was sought in this research through data, theory, interdisciplinarity and cross-country triangulation.

4.6.1 Triangulation and crystallisation

Unique in comparison to other approaches, the advantage of employing case study methodology is that researchers can collect and integrate data from multiple sources that are then converged in the analysis process rather than handled individually. Hantrais has suggested that although methodological pluralism is not a panacea, this approach can provide a fruitful approach to unravel the complexity of the objects under study in international comparative research (Hantrais, 2014). In this sense, each data source can be considered one piece of the “puzzle”, with each piece contributing to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon (Baxter and Jack, 2008). This convergence adds strength to the findings as the various strands of data are braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case.

Although the opportunity to gather data from various sources is extremely attractive because of the rigor that can be associated with this approach, there are dangers. One of them is the collection of overwhelming amounts of data that require management and analysis as a side effect of the ‘freedom to roam’ that case study methodology offers (Thomas, 2011). Often, researchers find themselves “lost” in data. This research used two main control mechanisms to avoid being inundated by data; first, most of the cooperatives used as case studies were founded quite recently, so data from these organisations were only available for the last five years approximately, which controlled the number of documents to be analysed. The second mechanism was to use two different interview scripts (included in Appendix VII) for each category of participant: 1) farmer/cooperative member and 2) civil society/policy maker/academic participant. The interview scripts included questions that were open ended,

non-leading, with warm-up questions leading to more controversial or complex topics. Limiting ‘why’ questions to avoid giving the impression that there is a right answer (Bernard, 1995) and using probing techniques. The scripts offered a guide to avoid collecting what could be interesting but irrelevant data. Nevertheless, the scripts were followed with flexibility, carrying out semi-structured interviews with built-in flexibility to use participants’ own language to phrase new questions, an approach that is considered to be good practice as it enhances participants’ understanding and engagement (Bernard, 1995).

When two or more sources of data, theoretical frameworks and types of data collected, or researchers, converge and reach the same conclusion, that conclusion becomes more credible (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The concept of triangulation refers to researchers’ attempts to use different avenues to explore if all sources of data and informants take them to the same final conclusions. This research project sought different levels of triangulation, including of:

- Data: different data sources, informants and collection methods were used as described so far in this chapter.
- Theories: Open Coops to study MSCs; New Peasantries to frame the farming level of analysis and Food Paradigms as a wider food policy framework.
- Disciplinary approaches: the literature review analysed papers from food policy, economics, anthropology, sociology and biopsychology as well as industry reports.
- Cross-country: by exploring the same research problem and questions in two very different countries, an extra layer of data triangulation was added by the cross-cultural dimension of this study, which also contributes to the quality, depth and richness of the findings.

Triangulation of data sources, data types and informants is a primary strategy that can be used to support the case study research principle that calls for phenomena to be viewed and explored from multiple perspectives. The inclusion of multiple and varied voices in qualitative research has been termed by Tracy as ‘multivocality’ (2010). This study has strived to follow a multivocal approach for several reasons: it is in line with the inclusive and critical STEPS Pathways methodology discussed at the beginning of this chapter; it provides space for a variety of opinions and opens up space for viewpoints that diverge with those of the dominant majority or with the author’s. Multivocality also suggests that authors are aware of cultural differences between themselves and participants, including differences in cultural background, nationalities, class, gender and age, very relevant variables in farming, so credibility is enhanced when the research pays attention to these possibilities (Tracy, 2010).

Additionally, this research was informed by Cook's lists of techniques on critical methodological '*multiplism*' for capturing multiple views and sources of data, also in line with Tracy's multivocality principle: (1) embracing competing definitions of concepts; (2) using multiple research methods; (3) carrying out several studies of a single subject; (4) completing informal synthesis of loosely related studies; (5) using models with multiple causes; (6) testing of rival hypotheses; (7) involving a variety of stakeholders in the analysis; (8) adopting multiple theories or value frameworks; (9) promoting advocacy by multiple analysts; (10) undertaking research with multiple targets (Cook,1985:21-22).

The concept of triangulation assumes a single reality to be known and considers using a variety of data and methods as a way to uncover that reality. Several authors have highlighted the dangers of naïvely assuming that "there can be a single definitive account of the social world" and "*that sets of data deriving from different research methods can be unambiguously compared and regarded as equivalent in terms of their capacity to address a research question*" (Bryman, 2003:1142). However, triangulation was still considered a useful approach as the advantages were expected to outnumber its disadvantages, and could enhance the credibility and validity of the research narrative and conclusions.

Like notions of reliability and validity, triangulation does not lay neatly over research from interpretive, critical, or post-modern paradigms that view reality as multiple, fractured, contested, or socially constructed. A more suitable term for research that uses multiple data sources, researchers and lenses based on post-structuralist assumptions is *crystallisation* (Ellingson, 2009). Richardson (2000) describes the crystal as a central imaginary that transcends the traditional notion of the rigid, fixed, two-dimensional triangle (Richardson, 2000). Crystallisation opens the door to a better understanding of a research problem from different perspectives, in line with the food systems thinking embedded in this study. In Tracy's words:

Crystallisation encourages researchers to gather multiple types of data and employ various methods, multiple researchers, and numerous theoretical frameworks. However, it assumes that the goal of doing so is not to provide researchers with a more valid singular truth, but to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue (Tracy, 2010:844).

The aforementioned concept of multivocality is closely aligned with the notion of crystallisation, being an expression of it by including multiple and varied voices in the qualitative report and analysis. The multivocality principle informed the decisions about the

selection of informants and how much data had to be collected, which in turn intersected with the level of analysis. The most important issue was to consider whether the data would provide for and substantiate meaningful and significant claims and perspectives. Multivocality emerged as an effort to analyse social reality, in this case, agricultural cooperatives' practices, from the participants' point of view (Tracy, 2010).

4.6.2 Transcription process and the use of quotes

As part of the range of strategies used to achieve consistency, it is worth briefly describing the transcribing process here. The researcher transcribed all the recordings and made notes herself, both to protect confidentiality and so as to be as familiar as possible with the data. It has been acknowledged that audio recordings do not constitute verbatim records of a research interview because they do not capture many elements of interpersonal interaction, nonverbal communication and interview context that are essential for the interpretation of what was said (Poland, 1995; Knapp and Hall, 2010). In order to overcome those limitations, Poland's strategies for maximising transcription quality were followed (2008), including: ensuring the highest possible audio quality; being consistent when dealing with pauses, laughter, interruptions, intonation, etc.; prompting clarification of ambiguous material during the interview; using field notes written as soon after the interview as possible (example of field notes can be accessed in Appendix VIII) and using observational data to complement the material from the interview and the context in which it took place. All of these mechanisms also provide insights into the process by which the raw data were transformed and organised, acknowledging that the transcriber, in this case, the author, is not a machine but an interpreter of the content and the context of the interview (Bucholtz, 2000). This interpretative dimension of the interview data and the way to document it in writing, link back to the constructivist approach of this study discussed throughout this chapter as well as to the need for transparent and consistent methodology.

With regards to the cross-country and language dimensions, the literature on comparative research suggests having an intimate knowledge of the society under study, its language and culture is almost a prerequisite for embarking on scientifically grounded cross-national research projects adopting a societal approach (Hantrais, 1999). Having lived in both the UK and Spain for years, the researcher enjoys this intimate knowledge of both countries, which greatly assisted the research process. For example, all the interviews were carried out in the native language of the interviewees (Spanish or English), except for two exceptions in which the

researcher could not speak the participants' native language but the participants were fluent in English, so the interviews were carried out in this language. The interviews were transcribed and coded in the language they were carried out in (e.g. data in Spanish were coded in Spanish). Quotes from interviews and extracts from written documents selected for inclusion in the thesis were translated to English. Appendix IX offers a sample of original and translated quotes from Spanish participants. In a few instances, in order to add fluidity to the text, some of the quotes are presented as short extracts of interviews. In these cases, the researcher is referred to by an 'R' and the participant is referred to by an 'I' (interviewee). The reader might notice that a few quotes do not follow the standard word order expected in written sentences. This was done intentionally to respect and reflect the diversity and richness of interviewees' expressions and the individual nuances of their verbal communication. One interviewee was not a native speaker but the interview was carried out in English, as that was the only language shared by the researcher and the participant. Some of the quotes from this interview are not in perfect English but the meaning was considered to be clear enough so the transcription was done as a literal reflection of the audio recording to respect the interviewee's way of communicating their ideas in line with the STEPS Pathways methodology discussed earlier. Finally, square brackets in quotes ([...]) were used to provide additional clarifications to ensure the meaning of the quote was not lost or diluted in the translation and transcription processes.

4.7 Ethical considerations and confidentiality

Full ethical approval for this research was sought from and granted by the School of Arts and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at City, University of London. The participants' consent form and information sheet can be found in Appendices X and XI, including the English and Spanish versions for both forms. This process also required checking and complying with ethical regulations in Spain. All interviewees but one signed the consent form required by the University Regulations as a way to inform and protect participants. Reactions towards the compulsory information sheet and consent form varied widely, especially in Spain. Most people did not share their thoughts on the matter. A few participants pointed out the value of both forms and stated that kind of process would not happen in their country (Spain). Others joked about the solemnity of the formality. By far, the most interesting reaction was that of the participant who refused to sign the consent form as an act of non-compliance with the system and status quo their cooperative is trying to avoid and transform, but confirmed their consent to take part in the study and for the interview data to be used.

With regards to ethical considerations in the way interview data and quotes were used, this research followed Poland's recommendation to remove not only names (replaced by pseudonyms) but also other potential identifying information from the data (Poland, 2008). Poland has also pointed out the need for researchers to be aware of how participants are presented in their quotes (Poland, 2008). This can be in relation to the simple fact that most interviewees are likely to come across as more articulate if asked to write about the subject instead. From a methodological point of view, it is important to note contextual features emerged in some interviews more than others depending on how talkative and descriptive the informants were. For example, some participants gave more background about the meaning their ACs had for them and spoke about being unemployed before joining their ACs or about gender, political inclination and national identity, issues that other participants did not mention at all. That was balanced by the choice of quotes and the structure of the discussion chapters. Finally, Poland recommends the contextualisation of certain concepts or labels, as failure to do so can reinforce negative stigmatising stereotypes (Poland, 2008). For example, some of the interviewees defined themselves as 'peasants', a word with strong connotations that requires an additional explanation to provide the reader with the political context and the fact that certain social movements are putting a lot of effort into reclaiming the positive meaning and connotations of this word.

This chapter has provided a detailed overview of the original theoretical and conceptual frameworks that informed the research process as well as all the methodological aspects of the study. The next four chapters introduce the case studies selected and discuss the data collected.

5. “Leading the way”: market-oriented agricultural cooperatives in Spain and UK

5.1 Introduction

What ensues in this chapter, and the following three chapters, reports on what was uncovered using the methods set out in Chapter 4. This chapter starts with the presentation of two ACs selected as case studies, one from the UK, Farmway, and one from Spain, Anecoop. These farmer-owned companies are an example of the type of ACs ranked in the top six in these countries in terms of turnover and size (see Chapter 2 for statistics) and as such, representatives of the successful criteria of agricultural cooperation valued by the AC sector national governments and at EU level. The chapter starts by discussing the UK case and then the Spanish case, presenting data from desktop based research and fieldwork as discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

5.2 UK: Farmway as an illustration of consolidation of the AC sector

5.2.1 From Farmway to Mole Valley Farm

Farmway was an agricultural merchant formed in 1964 from the amalgamation of three ACs namely, Teesside Farmers, Northern Farmers and East Yorkshire Farmers. When it started, Farmway had approximately 2,000 members and the initial investment required to join the AC was £25. It was the North's leading agricultural and rural retail business, specialising in animal feeds, the processing and dressing of cereal seeds, fertilisers, and also the drying, storage and marketing of grain.

In 2013, while this research was taking place, Farmway was bought by Mole Valley Farmers (MVF). When a long-standing member of Farmway who had sat on the board of the AC for many years was interviewed as part of this study, the AC he had been a member of for decades only existed in a residual form, as it was in the process of being incorporated into MVF. The acquisition of Farmway meant MVF expanded their geographical presence and the AC now operates from Cornwall to the Scottish Borders.

Mole Valley Farmers was founded in 1960 by a small group of farmers around South Molton who, according to the AC's website, were concerned by the discriminatory practices and the

large margins being taken by many of their input suppliers. Today, MVF is the fourth largest farmer controlled business in the UK by turnover and the top supply cooperative (Oxford Farming Conference, 2014) owned by over 8,000 farmer shareholders (Co-operatives UK, 2006).

In contrast to Farmway, MVF decided to bring in a new customer base by going into retail and selling a wider offer of products to reach a wider audience beyond farmers, including horse-riding gear, clothes, dog, pet food, shooting equipment and garden and homeware to non-members.

The company has more Suitably Qualified Persons⁸ than any other agricultural company in the UK, around 350 in total. MVF has ten Mole Valley Farmers branches and three Bridgman's stores across the South West, 38 Mole Country Stores, two Cox & Robinson farm direct outlets in the South and East of England, 11 manufacturing sites across England and Scotland (Mole Valley Farmers, 2016). MVF has a focus on precision technology and on continuing to grow and develop (Mole Valley Farmers, 2016). MVF's family of enterprises also includes: Molecare Veterinary Services, Renewables, Farm Buildings and Mole Valley Forage Service (the last one is a joint venture with Roullier Group, a large international fertiliser manufacturing and distribution business).

In MVF's report from 2015 analysing the AC's performance in 2014, Mole Country Stores, of which the principal constituent parts are the former CWG Country Stores Limited (a chain of stores of agricultural merchants involved in the sale of agricultural raw materials, live animals, textile raw materials and semi-finished goods) and Farmway reported a positive contribution to MVF's financial results that year. However, the report highlights, the underlying results fell short of their expectation of managing the transition of these investments into profitable growth orientated contributors (Mole Valley Farmers, 2014). This last point exemplifies a common trend in the wider AC sector: the increasing preference for growth through mergers and acquisitions even if expected results are not always achieved, an issue discussed in Chapter 2.

5.2.2 The members' perspective

This section presents the main themes emerging from the data from the interview with a long-standing member of Farmway who was also part of the management group of this AC. The interview took place soon after it was announced MVF was buying Farmway and the

⁸ SQP is an animal medicines advisor, a legal category of professionally qualified persons who are entitled to prescribe and/or supply certain veterinary medicines under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations

acquisition process was taking place. The main topics covered in this section are: the degeneration of the cooperative spirit, the contradiction of cooperatives' competitiveness, disembeddedness from local areas and the constraints posed by the policy context.

- Degeneration of the cooperative spirit:

The interviewee spoke with disappointment about how out of approximately 2,000 members, only 30 or 40 would attend the annual general meetings (AGM). He shared an anecdote about a driver from Farmway who was delivering a product in his farm when he was a director of the AC but did not recognise him and said to him: "the boss of this farm owns Farmway"; this episode was for the participant the best example that showed how the concept of Farmway being a cooperative was not strong amongst the membership, nor the fact that members, not an individual, owned the cooperative. When asked what he thought Farmway's members were likely to think about the buyout by Mole Valley, he very confidently expressed his disenchantment with the cooperative form as the following quotes reflect:

I think that the general answer to that question is between they don't care as long as they get their money back and it's a good thing because there's product in the shops, essentially.
(Farmway member)

I: The farmers are saying no, we've had enough of all this, we're going to go down the route of diversifying and selling our own meat, dairy product or whatever. But I think we'd now say that the cooperative thing is dead. I think the cooperative structure within the farming industry has probably disappeared. The company structure, the farmer-owned company structure is now much more suitable in this country.

R: For supply, or marketing?

I: for everything. It works better. (Farmway member)

The cooperative structure works extremely well for so long and then it becomes necessary to [pause] once you start getting the squeeze, because you're really beginning to start affecting the market, then I think the cooperative structure is a weak structure. It's a very defensive structure but it's not a very aggressive structure. (Farmway member)

I: I think the engagement of farmers with cooperatives stopped a lot of years ago, as cooperatives.

R: Can you tell me when and why you think it stopped?

I: Because they weren't delivering a benefit, a perceived benefit...

R: Do you think it matters? Do you think they just did their job at the time?

I: I'm disappointed because I think that they'd still be valuable, but at the moment I must admit that I'd say that I don't really think it matters. And I think, I mean, you know, industries have history of shooting themselves in the foot (Farmway member)

Even then, the fact that it was a cooperative was weakening in the minds of its members. The fact that it was a good agricultural merchant was the driver really, rather than it was a

cooperative. I have a rule that is the father, son and grandson rule. The father sets up the cooperative; the son keeps with it because he thinks he better keeps father's thing up, and the son marries in it but he starts to wonder off a little bit, he doesn't buy everything and his son basically packs everything up [...] The grandson, yes, the grandson... The real thing is the grandfather is the only one that experienced the problems that were there when there wasn't a cooperative and therefore set the cooperative up and of course, the son might have done something to, you know, he might have listened to his father talking about and so on, but then the grandson, you know, things have moved on since then and go in a different way (Farmway member)

This final quote highlights how the lack of involvement in the original struggle that generates the motivation and level of organisation from farmers to set out any given ACs means new members often are unaware of those origins. By not being part in the struggle and the negotiation of the rules and the culture of the ACs, members feel more like customers than owners if no education programme to keep that knowledge alive is introduced. This point is further discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

- From being insignificant competitors to being unable to compete:

At the time when Farmway was growing, many supply cooperatives remained trading despite being not very competitive, or as the interviewee put it: "*they were allowed to exist*" by a handful of large competitors:

I think the thing is for a lot of years in the UK the coops were allowed to exist, they weren't strong enough because they didn't have this federated thing and because they were relatively small, they didn't federate; Farmway is an amalgamation of three cooperative societies. They didn't work in a federal way; they didn't work together, at least not until much later on. [...] In the country there were a very small number of very major suppliers and some of them... there was a firm particularly called Kenneth Wilson that is part of an international grain trading company. There was a time when Kenneth Wilson didn't worry about whether they make any money in the UK or not and the big companies like the BNSN and everybody else, they didn't have a specific need to make money in the NE of England... (Farmway member)

In that sense, many ACs were not strong enough to be considered serious competitors, however, their added value was based in the close relationship with their members:

The principal value was actually the problem of dealing with, for a big company dealing with a very large customer base, while the coops knew who was going to pay the bills and who wasn't with a fair degree of accuracy and they had the staff in the ground to go and talk to Fred and decide whether he was going to buy this or the other and go to his kitchen and talk to his wife or whether not to do that and [...]. So the principal thing that the coop had was a direct connection to the customer. (Farmway member)

Over time, as average farm size got bigger, the situation changed and ACs lost power to larger farmers:

It was easier for the big companies to deal with the coops. But when farmers started to get bigger, and lorries got bigger and everything else got bigger, then it became easier for these people to deal with the farmer, without going through the cooperative and the cooperative share or what the profit was, they could just rule them out (Farmway member)

At the same time as farms got bigger, margins in agriculture shrank, so the ability of a supply cooperative to give a bonus on purchases disappeared and with it, the financial benefit for members decreased. Cash-strapped members did not see the logic in paying a bit extra today to get it back in dividends the following year:

And that, that loss effectively really, is what stopped people thinking about it as a cooperative. (Farmway member)

As a result Farmway decided not to offer bonuses on some products, the first one to be added to this list was pesticides. This caused strong disagreement amongst members at the AGM that year:

Before my time there was a row that involved a chap that then became minister of agriculture sometime later because the board decided that they weren't going to give bonuses on certain products anymore [...] people claimed, although they were told, people claimed that they were expecting a bonus when they bought fertiliser and I always remember a dirty big grey stamp on the invoices in the green sheet of paper and it used to be done mainly by hand and the stamp was not bonus, so... (Farmway member)

In the 70s, mergers, instead of federation started to happen more quickly:

Yep, they were just merging, they weren't federating, they just merged together and largely that was because of the financial pressure on the small ones, you know, I know Farmway was formed because basically the three it was made up of couldn't, just basically couldn't survive, the financial pressure (Farmway member)

- Policy barriers:

This financial pressure not only came from shrinking margins, but also from lack fiscal support from the state:

There was a fiscal benefit at one time to running a cooperative and that was taken away and I remember getting really shirty when they started doing what is now called ISAs but they called it something else before that when you get a tax free... but they wouldn't allow us to, they wouldn't allow cooperative shares and cooperative interest if you like in that group of tax free

arrangements and the cooperative itself had years ago a beneficial tax system, but that's gone, that went a long time ago (Farmway member)

- Disembeddedness from local area and loss of local knowledge:

The Farmway long-standing member claimed buying groups such as Anglia Farmers are growing as they can demonstrate significant savings if farmers place purchases via them. Anglia Farmers for example accounts for one tenth of all UK's farm inputs (Anglia Farmers, 2016). Logistics, according to the interviewee, are another key aspect that is making traditional marketing ACs redundant. Similarly to "just in time" approaches in food retail, the infrastructure to deliver agricultural goods means suppliers do not need to go through the ACs warehouse as it used to happen, so this whole process of delivery has shrunk. These changes have altered the way the industry works. An additional factor that hinders ACs' ability to borrow funds was an increasing removal of local knowledge, as local banks grew apart from ACs and gradually lost their knowledge of how ACs in the region were working as this quote reflects:

Yes, the trouble is that the parameters they use now to decide whether they are going to lend you any money is not based on the ability of the company to repay but on the security of the company that exists based on some computer programme that tells them and the computers don't know how to deal with cooperatives basically, that is a simplification of the situation [...] there is so few of them essentially, so it's not worth the banks going out of their way to educate a number of people to deal with it and so they just don't and so West Cumberland converted themselves into a company and Farmway as well because that did the governance much easier and when Farmway came to be taken over by Mole Valley, they sold the company to Mole Valley (Farmway member)

All these factors suggest that cooperatives are increasingly losing their financial and social embeddedness in local areas following strategies to adapt to lower margins and savings and to new supply chains. This growing disconnection from local areas seems to be impacting on the knowledge not just members but other external actors such as banks, have of ACs that were previously closely linked to a geographical area.

- Policy context constraints:

The reductionist way of measuring ACs' performance mentioned in the previous point will be discussed in detail in Chapter 9. An interwoven theme that emerged in interviews was the application of market parameters to ACs by the Competition Commission. The Commission treats cooperatives as companies rather than as individual farmers coming together to form a group. However, even though this might sound unfair to individual members, there is also a

danger in ACs getting too big. For example, Arla Food's own members demonstrated outside the cooperative factory during the milk price crisis in 2012 to complain about the low payments they were receiving (Birchall, 2012). Some farmers argue that Arla's and other large cooperatives' behaviour does not differ from private dairies and that they are detached from their farmer-owners' control (Hanisch and Rommel, 2012).

5.2.3 The experts' perspective

This section presents the themes that emerged from the interviews with non-farmer experts, including two representatives from civil society organisations, one academic, one policy maker and one participant from each of the bodies that represent cooperatives in the UK: Co-operatives UK and SAOS (in Scotland).

- New integrated Cooperative Act

Several participants spoke about the new integrated Cooperative Act approved in 2014 that was discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. For the Co-operatives UK representative for example, the Act was a positive move as it renamed the original Industrial and Providence Society legal form that *'did not even have the word cooperative in it'*. The participant also noted the Act was expected to bring further benefits in the future; for example, if/when the movement next campaigns for further legislation changes, there is only one act to focus on, rather than having to think what piece of legislation is better to amend as it was the case before the integrated Act was introduced: *'it's like the kind of the start rather than the end of the process'*. Other interviewees also had positive views on the new Act:

[...] on consolidating the legislation on the new act, I think that's very important because previous to this the legislation was traceable to several different acts, so it was actually very difficult for people to follow the law and to keep up to date. It's not just for the farmers coops themselves, it's for the professional services, the solicitors, for instance, the lawyers who advise them, very often, they would rather simply persuade them to change to a company's act model because it's so much easier and familiar to them than the coop law which required quite a lot of specialist knowledge to be able to trade the coop law, so having a consolidated act will be very helpful. I think it will lead to fewer coops converting to the company format (SAOS rep.)

Just before the new Consolidated Cooperative Act was approved in August 2014, the withdrawable share capital limit was raised from £20k to £100k in January 2014:

The main thing is the withdrawable share capital limit being raised from £20k to £100k and it doesn't get reviewed very often, the last time I think it was 16 years ago. ACs in the UK

generally are under-capitalised compared to European counterparts and so this would improve this situation (Plunkett Foundation Rep.)

However, because cooperatives are not able to buy non-withdrawable shares, it is very unlikely that the members would invest more than £20k. What was the point in raising the investment limit then? For some interviewees, it was about making the most of this policy window in which cooperatives made it to the policy agenda:

Well, the £100k is more of a long...it was moved much higher because it only gets reviewed...it might not get reviewed for 20 years, that's the reality of coop legislation...even if you've got support of government, it is never at the top of anyone's list, so the opportunity was taken to go high. There were ACs calling for the £100k limit so I presume there is the basis in that there's the reality that some of their members could invest at a higher level, not necessarily £100k but more than £20k... (Plunkett Foundation Rep.)

They were one of the main sectors which was really supportive of going for such a high threshold, one of the main benefits is providing access to technologies and new production techniques and that kind of thing...to remain competitive in agriculture farmers need access to more and more expensive and more complex technology. I think there was an idea that in order to get that large scale investment into the agricultural cooperative, there needed to be a bit of a steep change in terms of the amount of money members could actually put in in order to make that happen, and not members. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

While this sounds like a positive development for cooperatives, the above quotes suggest that large and highly mechanised farmer members of ACs were actually lobbying for the increase to be able to fund further investments. It could be argued that this high limit could foster further consolidation in the sector by damaging those smaller cooperatives with fewer members and less financial capital. Glenn Bowen, the enterprise programme director at Wales Co-operative Centre has warned about the negative side of the limit: *'we do have reservations about the size of the new limit [...] there is a risk members who are able to invest more may have an undue influence on the democratic structure of the business'* (Glenn Bowen's quote on Co-operatives UK's website, 2014). However, one of the interviewees suggested that the amount of minimum trade rather than investment is in fact the more common excluding factor for ACs' members:

I think it is encouraging for more people to hold more capital in cooperatives. So it won't necessarily increase the scale of cooperatives but... and bearing in mind this is not an upper limit so people do not have to invest massive amounts of money to become a coop, as long as there is not a lower limit that excludes smaller members, then that should not be an issue. What it is often an issue of ACs is that there is a minimum of trade you need to do with a cooperative in order to be a member and that it is often the excluding factor rather than shared capital requirements (Plunkett Foundation Rep.)

- UK Government's influence in the sector

While in theory governments are supposed to have a minimum involvement with cooperatives in order for the latter to protect their autonomy (Henry, 2012), the case of ACs has been very different throughout history. For over a century, the UK government has shaped, fostered and hindered the development of ACs in farming depending on the political and socio-economic context at the time. The quotes below reflect these changes in government support for ACs; interviewees were asked about their views on whether the current number of ACs had gone down or up and why and these were their responses:

We do not have the data unfortunately, but the level, the total level of cooperatives has been fairly static since the 1930s, there has been mergers and things that take into account some, but there isn't this new growth, so I think, from the perspective of the farmer, you do not have that many options. You might be able to join an established cooperative that you might or might not feel inclined to join or you go alone. There are some that have happened in terms of quite informal cooperation but we haven't seen significant growth (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

Another landmark was the Curry review⁹ ten years ago now. It really emphasised the importance of cooperation and cooperatives in sustaining farm business, emphasising support is needed etc. When that was set up, funding did not come to us, the organisation that had been doing it for decades, it went to the English Food and Farming Partnerships. (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

Historically, if you look at Scotland, we had many, many more cooperatives 80 or 90 years ago than we do now. Maybe three times as many. But of course there have been vast changes over the years, both in the market place and in transport, and politically. So for instance, for 50 years, from the 1930s to the 1980s, in the UK there were many statutory marketing boards that have the powers to sell or to buy all farm produce. So we had the milk marketing board (...) and this purchased all the milk from farmers, so we did not need to have cooperatives to sell the milk at that time (SAOS rep.)

Before the marketing boards were created, Scotland had approximately three times more ACs; the introduction of the marketing boards reduced the need to cooperate and thus, the number of cooperatives, but then, when the UK joined the EU, the development went full cycle:

And then when marketing boards were made illegal, when we joined the common market, when those monopolies were no longer allowed, in the last 20 or 25 years we've seen more marketing cooperatives develop and we've been involved in developing many of them (SAOS rep.)

While Scotland still has SAOS representing the interest of ACs in the country and receiving financial support from the Scottish government, there has been a gap in England and Wales that Co-operatives UK is currently attempting to cover:

⁹ The Curry Report was commissioned by the UK Government to analyse the factors that contributed to the Foot and Mouth crises and the lessons learnt and recommendations. This report is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

I think there is a vacuum in England that there isn't in Scotland, there is no organisation that is pulling together the agricultural coop movement in England and Wales, so there is a space to kind of grow a little bit there. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

This representative vacuum has also been noted in the European sphere:

I: There is no equivalent of SAOS for England. Since 2010 has been no representation for agricultural cooperatives at European level, which is bad, there's been no real voice for agricultural cooperatives in English and Welsh policy making.

R: And before 2010?

I: What used to happen is that EFFP used to fill that role when DEFRA funded and then I think they stopped in 2010.

R: Are there any clear plans to reintroduce that role?

I: I don't think so at the moment. We are trying to do some tentative steps. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

Co-operatives UK has recently started to focus on ACs, offering a new membership package to attract new members from this key sector. Currently, Co-operatives UK states that there are 6,000 organisations in the country that they consider to be a cooperative (across different economic sectors, not just farming). Their representative explained how the vast majority of those 6,000 cooperatives are Working Men's Clubs. Consumer cooperatives are the most common type of enterprise cooperatives, both in terms of number and in terms of turnover. Also traditional retail cooperatives such as travel, funeral and retail societies that are independent from the Coop group but operate in a similar way are very common. Why then is Co-operatives UK showing this new interest in ACs now?

I guess a good number of the largest coops in this country are agricultural coops, so if we're there to campaign on behalf of coops it would be strange to at least not acknowledge the fact that some of the largest ones are agricultural cooperatives (Co-operatives UK rep.)

When asked if Co-operatives UK would still be adding to their books ACs that might not necessarily comply with the ICA principles, the interviewee offered the following response:

[...] if some of the largest, more high profile coops are not behaving very cooperatively, then that represents a risk to the idea of public understanding of cooperatives in general, so we'd want to try and encourage them to be more cooperative and we can only do that if we have a relationship with them (Co-operatives UK rep.)

- Lack of funding to support or monitoring the sector:

The Plunkett Foundation had been collecting statistics on the AC sector nationally and internationally for nearly a century, when in 2001, funding for this activity came to an end.

The participant was asked whether the Curry review from 2002 had been related to this change:

Not necessarily. I think the NFU had a large... the NFU wanted a new independent body set up rather than an organisation that, you know, we had some baggage, we had been going on for 75 years, so... (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

This reference to the historical conflicts between the NFU and the AC movement in the UK is in line with the findings from the literature review (Knapp, 1965). When asked why the NFU might have wanted an independent body, the participant answered:

We don't know [in louder voice]. There'd been certain disagreements with the NFU over the years about cooperatives, so, but when there was the ambition to set up the Agricultural Organisation Society, it was not something that the NFU supported because they thought it would be a secondary voice for farmers and it would dilute the voice of farmers and they wanted one united voice. Really I think it comes back to that really. We were seeing as an organisation that promoted cooperatives, we had a certain view of the world, a certain view of why cooperatives are needed, and why they are important and not everyone agrees with it, so the EFFP and the emphasis on collaboration it meant that they had broader scope to do things slightly different. Lots of the focus under EFFP was supply chain collaboration. People have called it horizontal cooperation, this is a term that seemed to crop up in the last couple of years, which is not really cooperation at all (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

The participant was asked to confirm whether they were referring to horizontal or vertical cooperation. This clarification was required as vertical integration refers to supermarkets collaborating with certain suppliers and integrating them into their supply chains through strict contracts. On the other hand, horizontal collaboration refers to a different approach where similar players in a particular level of the food system cooperate. The interviewee confirmed he was referring to the former:

Sorry, vertical cooperation. Cooperation throughout the supply chain. For example, potatoes farmers working with McCain to supply potatoes for their chips and things like that (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

Since the privatisation of EFFP at the beginning of the Conservative and Liberal Democrats Coalition in the second half of 2010, there has been a vacuum in the monitoring of ACs. The interviewee was asked if this had to do with this focus on vertical cooperation:

It is, it is partially related; [...] we had a bit of a crisis at the end of the 1990s, when our work was dominated by ACs but also international work, a lot of international cooperative development work and both sources of finance seemed to dry up very quickly in quick succession, so some pretty difficult decisions had to be made and that was one of them. So it is a thing we had collected for years as part of our work and stopped then. In fact nobody is collecting it now, Co-operatives UK publish statistics on the data that they are aware of but nobody is doing a comprehensive review of coops. Did you see the EU publish a report? Did you see how poor the data was? It was a bit embarrassing really [...] we are not sure of the progress of the last ten years, we are not clear. (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

The participant was referring to the European Commission country report quoted in this thesis as "Spear et al., 2012". The lack of funding was also quoted by Co-operatives UK as the reason why when the large cooperative Dairy Farmers' of Britain collapsed in June 2009, DEFRA was

asked to provide more policy direction on the governance of ACs, but the new Coalition government moved funding away from this work and also privatised EFFP as discussed in Chapter 2. Co-operatives UK is trying to cover this gap:

When Dairy Farmers of Britain failed, there was an inquiry by the Environment and Rural Affairs government committee and one of the conclusions was that DEFRA should push for more governance in the agricultural cooperative sector. They didn't really do that themselves, but we've been able to do it¹⁰, so we went back to them and said you were tasked to do this, we've done it, so the least you can do is endorse it. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

Changes in government support were also happening while this thesis was being written:

If you look at the abolition of some countryside and rural bodies, whether it is the Commission of Rural Communities and currently this discussion going on as we speak now about ACRE, the Association of Community Rural Enterprises, they have a similar role in monitoring what is going on in rural areas... Why hasn't it...part might have to do with monitoring, but there is a minister in the government who covers, I think his title is food, farming and the marine environment, into which farming in all its guises is included, including the cooperative elements of it would fall too, but it is only one small part of it (UK Policy maker).

There has to be a focus from any government on formal cooperative structures within farming, not forcing them on farmers, but finding a way in which government can support the establishment of cooperatives in farming (UK Policy maker).

A policy maker from the Labour party (the opposition party at the time when the interview took place) blamed funding cuts in DEFRA as the cause for having a slow and reactive department that has no capacity to foster the development of ACs in food and farming:

DEFRA and ministers within DEFRA, is such a strange department, because the budget of DEFRA is actually, yet the areas that are covered are massive, the levers that ministers have are very small, and often, it is the department that if you wanted to rename it, it would not be the department of environment, food and rural affairs, it would be the Department of Crises, when a flood comes along, or a cattle diseases comes a long, or a plant disease, or a forest disease, and if you combine that with, regardless with the pros and cons, deep cuts into that organisation as well, then there is a limit to the things that ministers can look at frankly, and in that scenario when you are fighting the horsemeat scandal, then ash dieback, then flood in the Somerset levels, at what point does a minister with a thoroughly constraint department, then say right, now we are going to have a cooperative as a significant... (UK Policy maker).

It is interesting to mention at this point that the UK has a political Co-operative Party that has been a sister party of the Labour Party since 1927. Today, there are 32 Labour and Cooperative MPs (Co-operative Party, 2014). I asked Co-operatives UK how their relationship with the Co-operative Party was like:

¹⁰ The interview is referring to a new Co-operatives UK (2014) publication on governance for ACs.

We have a very good relationship with them, essentially because they have a group of MPs that they can essentially put into action. The quickest route to do something through parliament, is always through the coop party (...) but obviously they can only do things with Labour (...) the good thing of having a relationship with us is that we can also reach out to Liberal Dems and Conservatives in a way that they can't do themselves, so we can create a more rounded joined-up approach; yes, it's historically, especially that we have a Co-op party that it is tied to another political party. (Co-operatives, UK rep.)

It seems a paradox that it was when Labour was in power that there was a keen promotion of vertical cooperation in the supply chain rather than horizontal cooperation in farming. When asking Co-operatives UK about trade amongst cooperatives, these were their views:

From our point of view, cooperation amongst cooperatives is not necessarily trade [...] A Cooperative Development Fund, like in Italy or Spain, has been put forward in Wales [...] In this country there has been more work on coordinating at the political level, with the Co-op Party, the Co-op group financially supporting the Labour party, or the formation of Co-ops UK... It's also due to the economic culture of the UK, always trying to maintain a liberal economy with less restrictive economic models. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

Cooperatives, it seems, while having a clear political past and still strong political present, are being integrated into neo-liberal economies:

[...] they are not vehicles for furthering social and environmental change. They are very much vehicles for ensuring those independent farmers remain economically competitive and viable. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

I: (...) I get the impression that farmers especially in this country, especially in England, are from a kind of social and political demographic if you like which isn't going to see cooperation as necessarily a plus, but as something of the left, and they're not interested, it's not for them, so if these businesses or cooperatives want to attract membership, then calling themselves, coming and saying: "come and join our farmers' cooperative comrade", is not going to win them their vote, or win them their memberships, they know their target audience.

R: Do you think the coop legal form is still politically charged in that way?

I: We try to depoliticise to an extent as much as possible, but it is. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

- Mergers and acquisitions trend and POs:

Several participants spoke of the pressure on ACs to get bigger in order to benefit from economies of scale and protect themselves from EU competition. The quote below summarises most of the comments made in relation to this theme:

Well, both really. The trend on coops has been mergers, acquisitions, consolidations, so you have seen coops merge and get larger, and larger. And we have seen some failures, like Dairy Farms of Britain, that was quite a spectacular failure; they were a very significant farmer coop in this country. Another important influence has been POs, the status of POs, because really, this is quite a basic view of it, but, really what they are saying for a PO, they want you to be of a certain

scale, they don't want you to be really small, they want you to be of a particular scale but they don't want you to be too large, they don't want you to have a too high share of the market, which is difficult for cooperatives. It is natural for some cooperatives to merge because they are doing a similar things but then it is difficult for new cooperatives to form because there is that massive incentive for POs of a certain scale than for a smaller organisation that is below that lower limit, trying to emerge and trying to be useful but they are at massive competitive disadvantage, so what we have seen is very few new cooperatives formed over that period (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

(...) if you look at examples where POs in the past have maybe fallen down or not kind of adhere to the PO scheme rules, it is quite often when the organisation has been, hijacked might be the wrong word, but almost become a vehicle that has benefitted some members more than others (Co-operatives UK rep.)

This first section of the chapter has discussed the case of Farmway from the perspective of a long-standing member and from there, related trends in the UK AC sector from other experts from civil society organisations. The key themes that have emerged are the degeneration of the cooperative spirit, the trend and impact of growth for ACs and the loss of farmer members' power associated with the latter. Other issues discussed were the increasing disembeddedness from local areas and loss of local knowledge of the activities of cooperatives. Interviewees also brought up points about the new integrated Cooperative Act and the effect of other government policies that have hindered or promoted ACs over the years. An interesting issue raised by participants that highlights the lack of attention paid to ACs by different UK government administrations, is how funding to monitor ACs' activity was discontinued in 2001, making it very difficult to accurately assess current statistics and growth trends in the sector.

5.3 Anecoop, or Spain as the garden of Europe

In Spain, reinforced by European policies, agriculture is seen as key mechanism for rural development and regional economies (Bijman et al., 2012). There is a long cooperative tradition in the Mediterranean country, having the 2nd largest cooperative economy in Europe after Italy (Bijman et al., 2012). As detailed in Chapter 2, Spain counts with approximately 4,000 ACs. As it will be discussed next, for many informants and policy makers, this figure is a burden and a cause of embarrassment rather than pride as the turnover of most ACs is very low and thus, most of them are not considered competitive enough. Additionally, a high number of small ACs are deemed to be an inefficient expenditure for the public purse when administering subsidies.

For other participants, efforts and policies aiming to reduce this number are threatening diversity in the AC sector, but more importantly, diversity in farming and the rural world.

This section starts with the presentation of a case study: Anecoop, a leading fruit and vegetable AC with operations and members all over Spain. A discussion is then offered introducing the views from other expert informants on Anecoop and on the new Spanish law for the integration of ACs published in 2013.

5.3.1 Case study: Anecoop

Anecoop is the largest AC export of citrus fruits in the world and 2nd largest wholesaler, exporting around 80%-90% of its production, mainly to the EU. Anecoop is a 2nd degree¹¹ AC that has 71 associated cooperatives across the whole of the country. Their website is translated into English, French and Danish. When asked how many different crops the ACs commercialises, one of the representatives said laughing: *'I don't know, I can't remember, everything that grows on soil'*, which is pretty much correct by judging the catalogue on their website: all sorts of fruits, vegetables and wine.

The cooperative celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2015. Anecoop was founded in 1975 by a group of 31 citric cooperatives from Valencia to gain negotiating power to deal with large retailers and to be able to deliver big contracts from other countries that no individual cooperative could access due to geographical and size limitations (Planells Orti and Mir Piqueras, 2004). The cooperative exports its produce to 69 countries and was an early adopter of internationalisation strategies; their first subsidiary company to carry out marketing operations abroad was set up in 1978/79 in Perpignan, France. More subsidiary companies followed gradually: IFS in France, Fruchtpartner and Mercato e Ifta in Germany, 4 Fruit Company in Holland, Fesa UK in England, Anecoop Praha in Check Republic and Anecoop Polska in Poland. More recent ones were established in Ireland, Russia, Belgium, Denmark and China (Planells Orti and Mir Piqueras, 2004).

In 2002, a small group of cooperative members pushed for the formation of the Anecoop Corporate Group, which became formalised in 2003, when the Group started to investigate how to merge all Anecoop's AC members into one large AC. Many did not agree with the idea and given the complexity involved in mergers, an alternative option was explored; this alternative

¹¹ A 2nd degree AC is a federated cooperative made up of 1st degree producer cooperatives.

consisted in an structured attempt to homogenise the management of the member cooperatives while maintaining their independence but *'trying to change a hard reality that takes us nowhere'* (Director and Deputy director of Anecoop in an article written by them: Planells Orti and Mir Piqueras, 2004:402).

The 31 original cooperatives became 109 in 2004. In 2015, Anecoop had 71 cooperatives. Some of them merged into larger cooperatives, some of them were allowed to go out of business (Planells Orti and Mir Piqueras, 2004). Despite reducing its number of cooperative members, their volume and trade have continued to grow. That same year, 70,193 people formed Anecoop's team, of whom 28,206 were farmer members, 22,300 were members in other type of services and 19,687 are workers.

Members are required to trade a minimum of 40% of their produce with Anecoop although many trade more than that figure. The destination of the remaining percentage is negotiated with the cooperative to avoid sending it to the same market or buyer. Anecoop defines its strategy as based on permanent adaptation and innovation, quality, efficiency and growth (Anecoop, 2016).

The data presented in this thesis focus on Anecoop in Almeria. This branch of Anecoop was chosen for its geographical location in one of the regions of Spain, Almeria, where farming is highly embedded in the industrial paradigm and global international markets. Almeria is an Andalusian province known for its miles and miles of plastic greenhouses along the coast. Almeria had a golden age in the late 19th century part thanks to exporting the Ohanes grape, a traditional variety cultivated in the North of the province (McNeill, 2003); the Ohanes grape has now been replaced by pipless, fatter and thus more marketable varieties, although many think the shape might have been improved, but the taste has been lost. The explosion of greenhouses began in the 1960s. Before then, the coastal area in the Southern part of Almeria did not have a significant pre-existing cooperative culture or significant commercial agricultural activity (Giagnocavo, 2012). During the 1960s and early 1970s, underground water found under some 30,000 hectares gave the area the status of a designated zone of national interest; soon, Franco's regime introduced wells and basic pumps in an attempt to increase agricultural production (Giagnocavo, 2012).

The first greenhouse was built in 1961 and soon the development of experimental greenhouses at the beginning of that decade started a gradual exodus of farmers descending from the Alpujarras region in the North of Almeria (Sánchez Escolano, 2013). Giagnocavo has described the newly settled farmers' strategies to confront the dry and unfertile soil, saline water and

strong winds. These farmers introduced a ‘technological innovation’, which consisted of ‘putting down a layer of fertiliser, then covering this with by a layer of sand, in order to keep the roots moist and filter the salt’ (Giagnocavo, 2012:3). Later on, plastic and wooden posts from a decaying table grape industry were used to build the first rudimentary greenhouses that radically transformed the region (Sánchez Escolano, 2013). By 1976, 3,081 hectares were covered in plastic; this area grew to 9,657 hectares by 1984 and doubled to 18,694 in 1999 (Sánchez Escolano, 2013). The latest figures from 2015 revealed an ongoing expansion, with the area dedicated to intensive greenhouse cultivation reaching 29,596 hectares (Europa Press, 2015). The area is commonly known as the ‘sea of plastic’ and it is one of the few human constructions visible from space (Europa Press, 2015). The two images in the next page show the extent of the transformation of this part of the Almerian region. One of the participants explained how the new methods created some generational conflict when talking about the visual and economic transformation and the growth of greenhouse agriculture in the Almerian coast:

In the year 1960 it was zero, zero hectares and zero farmers. Well, there were the traditional ones from Berja, Dalias, Valle de Andarax, who were grape farmers; an interesting situation emerged, Serafín Mateo wrote about it very nicely, the fight between the traditional grape growers parents and grandparents and the children who were innovative... (Anecoop rep. 1)

The interviewee remembered how many young farmers came down from inland towns and villages to meet friends and started working with them as labourers in the greenhouses but then borrowed money from the bank to set up their own greenhouses. This was followed by a growing demand for agronomists to improve issues of waste and ran-offs, fertiliser quality, etc.

The second reason for the choice of the case study that is closely related to the first one, is that Anecoop shares an experimental farm with University of Almeria (UoA) where new trials are tested for the market. This collaboration is examined in this chapter. The experimental farm is called Fundacion Finca Experimental Universidad de Almeria Anecoop (University of Almeria-Anecoop Experimental Farm Foundation) that will be referred to in the text as “the experimental farm” or FFE. While there are a few other experimental farms, this one is by far the largest in Spain.

Image 5.1. Satellite view of the ‘Sea of plastic’ in Almeria, Spain.



Source: NASA (Image labelled for reuse).

Image 5.2. Aerial view of surface dedicated to greenhouses in Almeria, Spain.



Source: ANE (Image labelled for reuse).

5.3.2 The members’ perspective

This section presents the themes that emerged from the interviews with member workers of Anecoop. One of the key themes was around how to keep such a large number of members involved and informed of the latest policies and developments. When asking how/if knowledge transfer happens in the region, one of the Anecoop representatives answered: “Almeria is

restless and very curious”. A reflection of this attitude is that over 80% of the fruit and vegetables produced in the region are consumed in Europe, with Germany and France heading the list of buyers. When asking if this factor was the motivation for speed and innovation in farming in Almeria, one of the participants reflected:

The history of Almeria has been a race... I don't know, maybe... everybody has had to adapt to an intensive production, move the crop from natural conditions to under plastic, and this caused an acceleration of the process and I think all of us involved in this sector we have had to follow that rhythm a bit, that rhythm that creates a dynamic that looks normal but when you speak to an olive grower or a wheat grower (laughs), it breaks all your conceptions, or he is going very slowly or we are going too quickly (Anecoop rep. 1)

This ongoing race to increase the intensity of what already are intensive farming methods is expensive and not all farmers can afford it. Currently approximately 30% of greenhouses have obsolete designs as owners refuse or are unable to invest on their upgrade (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). The race is also having an impact on ACs, as when farmers can afford any investments, these normally go towards paying for farm assets rather than towards equity in their cooperatives (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012).

When asked if they believed the ‘theory of the grandfather, the son and the grandson’ proposed by the English farmer member from Farmway that suggests the grandchildren of original cooperators do not realise the value of their cooperatives and the struggles they emerged from, one of the participants shared his views on the social networks that he believes foster stability in a cooperative:

There is a curious phenomenon, I think what gives a generational stability to cooperatives, is merging different relatives, first, second and third removed and neighbourhood relations. If I can achieve that in a cooperative every one of those groups formed by geographical areas, I mean by neighbourhoods, and by family units and every one of those groups has their representation in the board of directors, then it is a social and economically stable cooperative. Having a trusted person [...] so that the next day of the board making a decision that can affect me, I can have the information directly (me as a producer member), in an informal manner, that's how it works here in Almeria, a phone call, a what's app message...once the cooperative reaches that stability, then it can enter a generational period (Anecoop rep. 1)

This reflection on the social aspect of ACs seems like a contradiction when compared to the ongoing growth of faceless cooperatives. However nice the social aspects sound, ACs' clients seem to be looking for something different:

[...] quality of the produce, service and price are the three pillars considered by clients. [...] If they all give good service, nowadays we all give good service, and if they have quality, nowadays we all work for quality, then price is the decisive element (Anecoop, rep. 2)

Anecoop is a 2nd degree AC, so the new law fostering mergers in the AC sector is not going to affect them directly, but it will affect their member cooperatives. One of the participants I spoke to shared their views on the matter with regards to the concerns some have raised about how the law will concentrate the sector excessively and farmer members will lose control and power:

I think what the cooperative law is fostering is integration to avoid the atomisation that we currently have; the thing is of course, the cooperative law frames it within the concept of integration. Integration is absorption, is to manage a company using the same parameters. In my view, I think there are other things to acquire dimension...in my view an adaptation period is going to be needed and a process to allow that cooperatives actually meet the requirements specified in the integration law...we are working for them...it's not about merging, in our case it would be about integrating, integrating the business management into Anecoop and that's what we are trying to do (Anecoop rep. 2)

A couple of the other participants external to Anecoop had mentioned in their interviews that the AC had been losing members recently. This was an interesting point not mentioned by the interviewees from Anecoop until directly asked about it. This was their answer:

Well, the majority of members we have lost is because they haven't integrated themselves, because there have been cooperatives that have absorbed and integrated each other and there are others, logically due to their dimension, that not having integrated themselves in 1st degree structures have disappeared for lack of viability, but we are continuing to do more volume with fewer members (Anecoop rep. 2)

This is a trend that the participants saw as ongoing, as the next quote suggests. Building on this topic, the participants were asked: Where do you see Anecoop in 5 years' time? The following is an extract of the interview that covers the participant's answer to this question:

I: In 5 years... [thinking] I still won't be retired... [laughs]. Let's see, we have an integration project, that although it does have a certain parallelism with the cooperative law, what tries is, well, to increasingly integrate members in the structure of Anecoop, integrate the business management, so, where do we see it? I think it's a simple survival logical way of looking at it, we have to continue growing, we have to continue growing.

R: in trade or members?

I: in everything. It would not worry us not to grow our members as long as our members' dimension continued to grow. We would not mind in 5 years' time to have instead of 72 cooperatives, have 50 but that those 50 made more volume than the 72.

R: So it's growth in terms of volume?

I: Yes (Anecoop rep. 1)

The above extract reflects how this cooperative's focus is placed on continuing to increase its turnover rather than number of members. In fact, the fewer but larger and more 'competitive' members, the easier to agree on decisions and implement consistent standards. The next section

discusses another strategy Anecoop uses to increase its competitiveness in the area of product development and market research.

University of Almeria-Anecoop Experimental Farm Foundation (FFE)

The University of Almeria bought land in 2002/2003 with the plan to start an experimental farm for crop research. In the year 2003 the building works began and activities started in 2004. The farm has approximately 14-15 hectares of which only 10 are fenced. To put the size of this farm in context, it is interesting to note that the average farm size in the country is 24 hectares, but with great differences amongst regions. Currently, more than half of the agricultural holdings in Spain have less than five hectares of UAA¹² and occupy less than 5% of the total Spanish UAA (Eurostat, 2012). The University of Almeria has a department of Agronomy and students carry out visits and research projects in the farm. As the representative from the FFE mentioned, the University thought it would be “*logical*” to reach an agreement with a “*powerful*” fruit and vegetable business and they realised Anecoop was the biggest exporter in the sector. During the interviews, one of Anecoop’s representatives mentioned that the agreement was in fact reached because one of the directors of the cooperative knew the academic from UoA who was in charge at the time. Apparently Anecoop had already been looking for land to carry out trials:

The collaboration took place because one of the directors of Anecoop knew one of the academics personally. A meeting was organised at which the collaboration was agreed. Anecoop had already been looking for an experimental farm for a while... (Anecoop rep. 1)

Anecoop makes use of a section of the farm for commercial purposes. This experimental farm is in fact the largest experimental farm in the country:

You are not going to find in Spain another system like ours. The only university that has an experimental farm associated with an external company not related to the university... we don’t know of any other. (Academic 2, FFE rep.)

Anecoop has a seed bank with seeds that come either from members or partners. Sometimes the cooperative also receives free seeds from large players and has several crop development and improvement projects taking place in conjunction with Syngenta:

[...] we collaborate. In fact yesterday a colleague from Syngenta came here. Phytosanitary companies, if they commercialise a new product with high efficiency that can bring improvements, we normally test them in collaboration with them. (Anecoop rep. 2)

¹² Utilised Agricultural Area, including arable land, permanent grassland and permanent crops.

When asked if they are sold these new products for trials, this was the answer received:

In principle the relationship is one of “try it and let me know what you think”. They are also interested in having access to see the results with somebody neutral. (Anecoop rep. 2)

As the participant pointed to a specific place when talking about the colleague from Syngenta, a follow-up question enquiring if their visits were very regular was posed:

Yes. You need to take into account the tests we do with seed companies for example, each company knows about theirs but don't know about the others' because there is a high degree of confidentiality, you need to realise they are competitors. (Anecoop rep. 1)

I then asked if they worked with big seed companies, to what one of them proudly answered:

We work with the most important companies in the sector (Anecoop rep. 2)

As well as working with Syngenta, they also have collaborative projects with Monsanto:

With Monsanto we worked last year, and this year, I'm not sure, let me check... (Anecoop rep. 1)

After reviewing the FFE's annual reports, Anecoop's relationship with Monsanto and Syngenta seems to be in fact a regular one, as all the reports checked included trials using varieties and seeds from these companies (Fundacion Finca Experimental, 2013).

Some of the most recent experiments included a trial to grow tomatoes with desalinated water instead of fresh water (Chile Alimentos, 2015); water is a key resource in farming, but especially when growing thirsty crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers, etc. in a region like Almeria, well known for its desert climate. The farm also holds a seed bank of around 2,000 varieties of vegetable seeds native to Almeria. Farmers from across the region were visited by Anecoop's representatives who collected samples of all the varieties they could find. Many varieties were currently cultivated only by farmers over 75 years old (Foco Sur, 2011). Apart from seeds, I wanted to find out more about the free inputs Anecoop's experimental farm gets from these companies:

R: but are you given the phytosanitary products or just the seeds?

I: we have to be open (laughs)

R: to anything, right?

I: my colleague is completing the record, the seed company ones, that's why I don't want to tell you the wrong thing. [...] the idea would be to work with as many seed companies as possible,

it's in our benefit to be considered as collaborators; we've had some new Chinese companies that have come and we have also talked to them. And the same with phytosanitary products. (Anecoop rep. 2)

In the experimental farm, Anecoop does not undertake basic research but experimentation and improvement of new varieties. They check if those seeds have the properties the manufacturer claims, and if they are happy with the results, the seeds are transferred to their cooperative members through demonstrations to see the virtues and problems of the new variety, hybrid or crop. If in the end the new plant is considered suitable, one or two years later, members are officially informed that they can cultivate it and commercialise it through Anecoop. The cooperative regularly invites commercial buyers to the farm to check their experiments and new varieties:

It's simply to tell them: listen, you have to come and see my efforts to develop new alternatives, let me show you the results I'm getting, so you participate with me in those results and I'm very interested to know your opinion, because on the basis of your feedback, I will do a higher or lower level of transfer to my cooperatives. [...] we can set up a meeting to discuss a new future product line, we talk about metres, we talk about prices, we talk about the first step to introduce new things. We have had Carrefour [...] BAMA that is today a heavy weight in Norwegian retailing. Or Edeka, the top German supermarket; Carrefour is coming to see the farm next Friday. So then, to all of those people, it's very easy to communicate what we are doing here, and if a client says: "listen, I liked that tomato, I'm interested", then the following year we do a bigger trial and we give them samples. You need to take into account that at the end of the day, supermarkets are the ones that transform our work into money, so we need to see what it is they need. What it is they ask us for, what it is they demand from us in order to harmonise it with the farmer's need to produce. (Anecoop rep. 2)

5.3.3 The experts' perspective:

This section presents the themes from interview data related to non-farmer experts, including two representatives from civil society organisations, one academic, one policy maker and one person from Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias, the national body that represents ACs in Spain.

Loss of members' control:

When discussing the impact of mergers and internationalisation on farmer members, participants talked about changes that indicated a gradual process of disembeddedness of ACs from members and local areas. After take overs and mergers, while the cooperative might still remain in the local area collecting farmers' produce, members often suffer a loss in their decision-making power:

Ok, Anecoop members are not able to make many decisions, that's true, but their product is being commercialised and doesn't end up sitting there for a year. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

Of course. The member has less decision-making power? Yes, yes. Because obviously he will be given certain requirements and he will be told in order to export to US you have to comply. Or to export to Japan. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

It's true, even people very embedded in classic cooperativism models have the same critical reflection [...] "it's gone out of hand", "we no longer have control over cooperatives". They don't know well why, but they criticise them because they're in the hands of directives, that cooperatives have grown too much, that cooperatives only have their eyes on large exporting targets, that cooperatives have been the entry door for the green revolution, that they have been the entry door for GM. (Soberania Alimentaria rep.)

The above quotes show how farmers who are part of large ACs have to accept rather than make decisions as members. These decisions are related not only to marketing and what customers/countries sell to, but also with regards to their daily growing activities, the methods and varieties they use.

The impact of Producer Organisations¹³

The representative from Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias talked about how many ACs are actually registered as POs, as the volumes required to get funding are much lower. The requirements are approved in Brussels starting with a number for minimum volume of produce that keeps being negotiated down and down until "when you realise, anyone can register as a PO" (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.).

So for example, farmers associated with Anecoop are both members of an AC and a PO at the same time (but it is the same organisation). ACs use the funding they receive from the PO stream to manage the market operations or harvest and logistic costs. They present a business plan and if it approved, they receive subsidies as POs. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.).

When pointing out that there was a contradiction between the Spanish government's efforts to foster ACs' mergers and the ongoing reduction on the minimum volume required for POs to qualify for funding, the policy maker agreed:

You are completely right. I mean, that is a legacy of 10 member estates from Eastern Europe. These POs in the West are quite big, well, not as big as in Holland or Denmark but we don't do too badly. [...] What is a contradiction is that our development programme has funding for both [...] to receive subsidies based on this article you have to be a SME, and for me [the government] on the other hand, if it's a SME, it does not reach the minimum established in the Royal Decree

¹³ POs are rural businesses, owned and controlled by producers, and engaged in collective marketing activities. EU legislation explicitly states that a PO can adopt any legal entity. For a detailed introduction to POs, see section 2.2 in Chapter 2.

that we have specified to be considered macro, to be fat. So we are going to give funding to the small ones and the big ones. (Spanish Policy Maker)

The thing is, POs are not required to be cooperatives, so what happens? We have other lobbies that defend the opposite to us. We are totally against POs being formed by four friends, we never decided that and we never defended it, but, we did not achieve our objective. What we have defended is that POs should be as strong as cooperatives, but what happens? If a union says the opposite and says no, instead of requesting 200,000 kilos with 2,500 is enough and then another union says the same and the exporters say the same, you know, in the end the Ministry decided what it wanted, and obviously they did not go with our view. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

The above comments reveal the complex and contradictory subsidy system in place for ACs and POs in Spain, currently being financially rewarded for being really big or for being really small. This indicates an unfavourable policy context for medium-sized cooperatives. Some ACs receive more funding also by being registered as POs:

Yes, it's EU funding. The CMO for fruit and vegetables accepts the PO form (whether a cooperative or not, they put them in the same bag) and the volumes they require are very small. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

The participant went to explain the case of a PO in Murcia, in South Eastern Spain, where a large exporter had selected seven small farmers from which he regularly buys produce and registered them as a PO to access and keep the funding:

We are against this, because that PO is managed by the exporter and they are the ones who keep the money, it does not benefit the farmers and we have reported it in Brussels. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

Impact of policy transfer:

Several Spanish representatives talked about the Dutch or Danish model as examples of best practice and as an aspiration for the Spanish AC sector:

Here what we try to do is that ACs become stronger because distribution is highly concentrated. [...] the model to follow is the Dutch or the Danish, with strong cooperatives that can negotiate prices with the distribution. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

The good thing that Europe has brought is that it's made us enter the EU market, but we haven't learnt, because if you have read the Law 13 of 2013¹⁴, the preamble of the law says that a single

¹⁴ This is the recent Law approved to encourage consolidation in the Spanish AC sector.

Danish cooperative is bigger than all the Spanish cooperatives together¹⁵. We are doing something wrong. (Spanish Policy Maker)

The Dutch and Danish AC sector is highly concentrated. As discussed in Chapter 2, most statistics at EU level combine both AC and PO data to report on the size of agricultural cooperation in the common market. In the Netherlands, the market share of POs marketing fruit and vegetables is actually higher than that of formal cooperatives (Bijman et al., 2010).

New Cooperative legislation and related policies for ACs in Spain:

This theme had two strong interwoven subthemes that will be considered jointly here: consolidation and internationalisation.

Consolidation

Related to the impact of policy transfer and the widespread perception of Dutch and Danish ACs being the best role models to follow, the Spanish government and the national body representing ACs are directing their policy efforts towards mechanisms that aim to reduce the atomisation of the sector and achieve consolidation. In 2013, the Spanish government published the Law for the Integration of Cooperatives and other Agri-food Associative Entities. Apart from mergers, the new law is expected to create a better alignment with large retailers and reduce the current administrative burden of processing subsidy claims for so many ACs:

To correct the disadvantages produced by the aforementioned atomisation, the Government has set as a priority the development and promotion of cooperative and associated integration, in the belief that it will favour competitiveness, redimensioning, modernisation and the internationalisation of such entities, in the framework of structural measures to improve the economy and the competitiveness of the country. (BOE, 2013)

This way of demonising people like Mercadona¹⁶, it's not on. Mercadona is not Darth Vader. Mercadona does its job and does it really well. And it buys and sells really well. And we, here in the first link of the chain we do it badly. So if these people get stronger through measures such as mergers, perhaps we'll gain negotiating power. (Spanish Policy Maker)

The CAP constitutes approximately 30% of the agrarian income in Spain, but then I need to improve their market that is their 70% of their agrarian income, and this is not doosh, these are structural measures [...] from offering education – Ministry of Education – to improve roads so that the logistic facilities are better – Ministry of Fomento – to improve their ability to be

¹⁵ The interviewee is referring to turnover of Danish cooperatives. This comparison with other countries is made in the preamble of the aforementioned Spanish Law.

¹⁶ Mercadona is the largest retailer in Spain accounting for around 22% of food purchases.

competitive. We have structured it in three pillars: internationalisation, food chain and the improvement of associationism that is the Law 13 from 2013. (Spanish Policy Maker)

What I can't have is 900,000 CAP beneficiaries in Spain, from which actual active farmers are 300,000. It's doesn't work. I mean, it is what it is, I will have to live with it. But it is not really the objective of a competitive agriculture. (Spanish Policy Maker)

Here the interviewee was referring to their dismay of having to deal with nearly 100k subsidy recipients or which two thirds are not full time farmers. The administrative costs are very high and thus, considered a burden and a policy problem that needs to be solved:

The law, if you read it, it doesn't say anything, it hasn't got a budget chapter; it simply establishes some basics to say: guys, let's get moving! We're going to publish a plan, we are going to do what we can from the ministry, to the supra-autonomic ones, those are in our remit, we're going to give them dosh and at least, look, one thing that is incredible is that since we got the law out, there have been at least eight or nine cooperatives that are copying the model of fostering integration, and we haven't done anything! (Spanish Policy Maker)

As the policy maker pointed out, the actual law did not initially established a budget, but it announced the plan to develop it in order to offer financial support to reward the creation of a new cooperative form introduced by the law, the 'priority agri-food associative entity' that is expected to bring about:

[...] in some cases, the disappearance of original entities as they become integrated in a new entity, in other cases, the disappearance by takeover, the accreditation of an existing entity, or the creation of a new entity maintaining the base original entities that constitute a higher level entity that controls, at least the tasks related to the joint commercialisation of the production of all the members from the original entities. (BOE, 2013:56583).

Anecoop seems to be already aligned to this growth strategy promoted by the law, as the aforementioned quote from one of the representatives expressed the cooperative's strategic desire to continue growing in terms of turnover, regardless of the number of farmer members or ACs they have in their books.

On the one hand, government policies are encouraging large cooperatives to grow, while at the other end of the sector, smaller ACs are not supported to grow and not compensated by the loss of subsidies they suffer when reaching a certain size. For example, when cooperatives grow out of the size criteria to be considered SMEs, they lose 50% of EU rural development funds. Competition laws are also contradictory, since at the end of the day, ACs, regardless of their size, are still made up of individual businesses. Some authors argue this might be due to the

lack of understanding of cooperatives' needs, as policy makers do not seem to engage the sector into policy discussions (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012).

Internationalisation and embeddedness in industrial and globalised food systems

With regards to internationalisation, the government's aim is to go beyond just exporting produce and to move instead into a more strategic type of growth abroad:

[...] well, incrementing exports or rather incrementing the positioning of enterprises abroad, which is more than internationalising, more than exporting. The first part for you to be able to access a foreign market is to take the produce out, for Anecoop, to take the fruit out. But maybe, they can sort out instead a cooperative with a strategic member in Belarus, to be able to enter Russia. [...] Or see where it makes sense to export and where not. And see where you are failing and where not. In the oil sector the same thing is happening. In fruit and vegetables, there is a lot going on around internationalisation that is more than exporting. See what administrative and bureaucratic loops you are asked to jump to put a lorry in a specific market, etc. there are more things that can be done, yes, yes. (Spanish Policy Maker)

[...] it is necessary to implement measures that foster the integration and strengthening of commercialising groups of associative and cooperative character that have operations and a remit beyond that of one autonomous community; and able to operate in the whole food chain, both in national and international markets and that contribute to the improvement of rural income and the consolidation of an agrifood industrial fabric in our rural areas. (BOE, 2013)

The export activity of Spanish ACs is growing every year, both in terms of numbers of ACs involved in exporting and in terms of volume exported. In 2013, 31% of ACs were exporters. Turnover from exports grew this same year by 13.8%, accounting for 26.5% of the whole AC sector turnover. (OSCAE, 2014)

When asking the Spanish policy maker what they thought the risks of an increasing high volume of produce leaving Spain to be sold in other countries at higher prices were, they answered: *'that's the rules of the market, what can we do?'*. The same rules of the market also normally favour size and economies of scale as they help ACs to financially survive in the competitive global agri-food sector. The effects these rules and trends are having on ACs and their members are discussed in the next section.

A battle against middle-sized ACs:

While the farmer members who took place in the study were not aware of the new cooperative law from 2013, experts consulted had their own views about it. The volumes promoted by the

new law are quite high, which means it is targeting medium to large ACs, as even if small ACs merged, they would not reach the minimum stated:

I have a very small spectrum, roughly 10 cooperatives: Anecoop, Conen, Guisona, Decoop, Baco, which are going to merge next week...ok, say 20. Then at the other end I have 4,000. This is really, really sad. Here I have 2,000 that are garage cooperatives¹⁷, subsistence ones, of “*the virgin such and such*” [...] and the ones in the *middleeee*, the ones in the *middleeee* [in an annoyed voice] are the ones I want to catch. (Spanish Policy Maker)

The frustration on the interviewee’s voice when referring to middle-sized ACs was clear. The interviewee was drawing circles around the rectangle used to depict middle-sized cooperatives in a diagram they had drawn while speaking, a copy of which is included in Image 5.3. The representative from Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias was also asked to expand on the objectives of the new law:

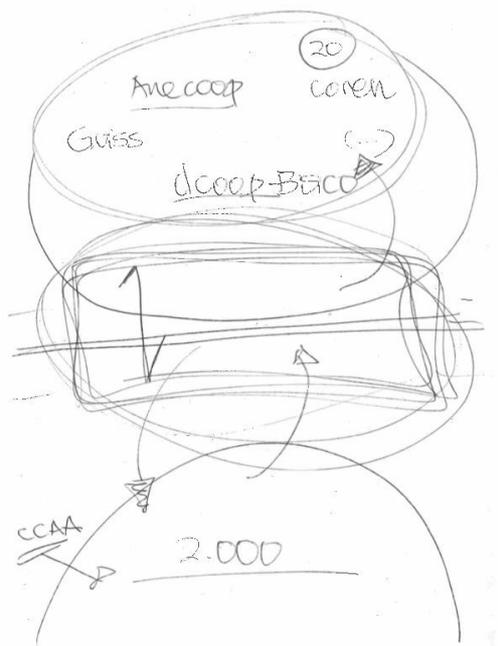
[...] it is made for cooperatives that are already big, to become bigger. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

I’m telling you we don’t want the cooperatives in villages to disappear, they are compatible; what is not viable is that all ACs do the same thing. Smaller cooperatives such as those you are telling me about [referring to MSCs], fantastic, but with that model, 4,000 cannot survive. Those that already have that model, fantastic, we provide them with certain services, this is not an issue that worries us. Those at risk are those that are not big and are not small. Right now they don’t export but they are not able to sell all their production. So they are of a considerable size. And those are at the highest risk. Because the tiny local ones that have an integrated production, do things really well, for example, those who sell raw milk in those little bottles in vending machines, those are small cooperatives that perhaps have 20 members. But those cooperatives that have, say between 400-500 members, those, perhaps are no longer able to do it. So those cooperatives with 20 members, we are here for whatever they need and we don’t try to make them disappear or to change their philosophy, they have found their niche in the market. But we need to look at the 500 members who are not ready to export and don’t know what to do with their product, they are under-selling it. But the other ones, fantastic, we are not aiming to make all of them like Anecoop [...] apart that not all consumers are willing to pay for organic production, and here in Spain even less, so they are compatible. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

We have been trying for a long time that fewer ACs exist. For us it is not an achievement that there are 4,000 ACs...and if there were 5,000 it would be a disaster. What we are trying is to have 3,000, and if it is 2,000 better and 1,000 even better. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

¹⁷ The participant is referring to p/t farmers with very minimal plots or herds, sometimes “keeping one or two cows in home garages”.

Image 5.3. Drawing depicting the atomisation of the Spanish AC sector.



Source: Drawing by Spanish policy maker

The above comments suggest efforts to reduce the number of ACs come from both the government and the industry body that represents cooperatives. The image of modernity for the sector is directing towards a future with fewer but larger ACs that can compete in the European and international markets and have enough power to negotiate conditions with large supermarkets. The following quote however, reflects how embedded the AC culture in the Spanish countryside is and how far from this top-down modern vision the sector actually is:

It is not a problem of the cooperatives, it is a problem of the agrarian structure of Spain, very, very atomised. But it is not a problem of the cooperatives. Who hasn't got a cooperativist granddad? Who hasn't got a granddad that owns half a hectare in a village? What is that good for? NOTHING! And then you have the ANECOOP model that is a monster. So then I have these and these other ones. And then I have these in the middle; my policies go to the ones in the middle. To the guy who's got a cow in the garage, against him, I can't do anything. To the big ones, in reality the policies should not bother them, they are going to serve them as small levers. But to those in the middle, I'm going to try, I shouldn't say it but this is what it is, or get them out of the market so they stop bothering, or get them to integrate in stronger market strategies. (Spanish Policy Maker)

When asked to specify what they meant by the middle ACs "bothering", this was the answer received:

They distort because they don't take meditated business decisions in line with the market. (Spanish Policy Maker)

I'm not worried about Coren, Anecoop doesn't worry me, and if not, Sufrisa will buy it out or, they have directors much cleverer than all of us put together. The problem is the ones in the middle, like the farmers that are in the middle, that are slapped by the small ones because they are very flexible and by the big ones because they have "mucho cash". These small ones of the armchair (because they don't want to leave the armchair) are not going to work regardless of how much...the thing is, what money can I give them? It's very difficult to get to that level of policy, because Spain is stratified politically in three layers: the ministries, the autonomous communities and the municipalities. I get to trick the autonomous communities so that they coordinate their policies and we get 17 uniform policies. I don't reach these ones. People that make less than a million euros a year, they don't interest me, I can't reach them. We are in another game. This is very complicated. From here, we in the Ministry are seen as, well, and the ones in Brussels, we are at another level, they don't liaise with us. To start with, my policies are only for supra-autonomic cooperatives¹⁸, because of the devolved powers. (Spanish Policy Maker)

The one million euros figure is not an official benchmark, but reflects the framing of what the Ministry considers to be their policy problem: medium-sized ACs. This battle to reduce the number of middle-sized cooperatives might however be ignoring the growing evidence that shows the negative effects of consolidation in the AC sector.

As discussed in the literature review, several authors have researched how the focus on getting bigger is affecting their members' social capital (Nilsson et al., 2012), who often perceive themselves more as customers than owners of their cooperative. But the loss might not be only social. Researchers studying the link between size and financial performance of agricultural cooperatives in Spain found no clear relation between these two variables. In fact, smaller farmer cooperatives show a better overall performance measured by several indicators: commercial activity, sales volume and better use of resources, both internal and external to the cooperative such as public funding (Encina Duval et al., 2011). Meliá-Martí and Martínez also found in another study that the strategy of merging agricultural cooperatives produced no statistically significant improvements in the economic-financial indicators studied (Meliá-Martí and Martínez, 2014). These findings seem to be in line with early theories of cooperative degeneration such as Hertzler's 'cooperative dilemma' that suggest that the more successful cooperatives are economically, the more likely they are to fail socially (Hertzler, 1931).

¹⁸ Supra-autonomic cooperatives are those that operate across two or more autonomous communities. There are 17 autonomous communities in Spain, similar to county councils in the UK but with more devolved powers.

Embedded politics in the rural world and ACs

Several participants spoke in different ways of the historical politics still embedded in Spanish ACs:

I can't be like Denmark and Holland. Holland is as big as Extremadura. But man, something in between, get together! What can't happen is what happens in Spain, that in every village there is a cooperative of the virgin and one of the saint, that some are red and the others are *fachas*¹⁹, that they don't get on well at all, probably commercialise the same product, pffff...they're both of first grade, they don't talk to each other but they're members of a 2nd degree one, that the 2nd degree one is good for nothing, the 2nd degree ones are good-for-nothing! (Spanish Policy Maker)

There are two historical moments in the creation of the cooperatives...that is because of Franco, those called after a virgin or a saint or from the first or second republic, called things like Cooperative of the Freedom, or Progress, and the ones in the *middleeee*...! (Spanish Policy Maker)

Yes, short-term policies are made, but this is the price we have to pay for having a democracy. In the North of Europe they have a different way of looking at things. It's the nature of Calvinism and Protestantism. In the South of Europe... everything gets politicised, and in agriculture even more, because agriculture is municipal politics [...]. In a village there are two bad things: the church and the bar. (Spanish Policy Maker)

The allusion to the church and the bar in villages also raised the issue of how politics and farming, and by extension, ACs, are part of the wider public debate beyond agriculture, farmers and policy makers. This topic of how ACs are perceived externally was an interesting subject that emerged from the research and it is briefly discussed in the next section.

Positive perception of cooperatives by the general public:

While it is not the purpose of this thesis to analyse the public perception of ACs, it is interesting to briefly discuss this theme. At the end of 2013, soon after the new Law for the integration of ACs was approved in Spain, Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias published a SWOT analysis of the sector in order to inform the new National Programme for Rural Development agreed at the Conference on Agriculture and Rural Development that took place that same summer of 2013 (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias, 2013). Amongst other objectives, it was agreed this new programme would include measures to foster integration in the AC sector. As part of this study, 2,000 interviews were carried out with consumers, of which, 30.6% said they would be willing

¹⁹ Many ACs in Spain are called after catholic virgins or saints. "*rojos*" is slang for communists and "*fachas*" for fascists, referring to the historical legacy of the Spanish civil war

to travel further to purchase food produced by ACs. 80.5% of respondents also thought that ACs could be a great channel to promote the Mediterranean diet (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias, 2013). These data suggest ACs are seen in a positive light by the average consumer. However, the Spanish policy maker pointed out that what consumers say is often different from what they actually do, either for price reasons or for lack of information:

[...] is a really good study, but we go back to the same thing, it's a study that says what consumers say what they would do, about the perception that the consumer has of cooperatives [...]. They like them. To the average Spanish consumer, cooperatives sound like something good. (Spanish Policy Maker)

Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias tried to get a cooperative brand out a couple of years ago, but it didn't take off [...]. How many people know Anecoop are a cooperative? We assume the consumer has knowledge that they might actually not have. (Spanish Policy Maker)

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on two case studies of large ACs, one from Spain and one from the UK, both highly embedded in industrial food systems. The cases of Anecoop and Farmway have reflected intense processes of consolidation in the AC sector through mergers and acquisitions. The chapter has presented interview and document data categorised under the main themes that emerged from two types of actors: cooperative representatives and external experts (informants from government, industry AC representative bodies and civil society organisations). The next chapter continues this discussion by presenting further data of common themes across the two countries framed by the European policy context.

6. Experts' views on the European perspective: The price of remaining competitive

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented data related to large ACs in UK and Spain ranking in the top 10 lists, highly embedded in industrial farming models and undergoing processes of consolidation. In this chapter, the views of experts outside ACs are presented, focusing on data and themes that relate the two countries to the wider European context.

In 2011 the International Cooperative Alliance's list of the top 300 cooperatives revealed that many of the biggest European cooperatives operate in the agricultural supply or food and drink sectors (ICA, 2011). Many were highly vertically integrated businesses within the food chain. Several characteristics have been identified as signs of the increasing market-oriented character of ACs in Europe, including control transfer from board of directors to management board (as the latter holds more market information), emphasis on marketing knowledge and innovation, review of financing structure to fund innovation and marketing strategies and as a result, efforts to attract new investors with either voting (non/proportional) or non-voting powers (Bijman et al., 2010). This chapter discusses the price ACs are paying to remain competitive and sustain their market-oriented character. The impact, as it will be discussed, affects not only ACs' members but also sustainability in the food system. The sources of data presented in this chapter are:

1. Data from interviews with scientists, policy makers, civil society and informants working in representative AC bodies (e.g. Cogeca).
2. Policy documents such as legislation and official publications from public authorities, and reports from industry bodies and civil society organisations (European Commission, Cogeca, Plunkett Foundation, International Cooperative Alliance and International Cooperative Agricultural Organisation (ICAO), Via Campesina and Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society). See Chapter 2 for a detailed description.
3. Other data from industry and civil society organisations available in the public domain (such as submissions to government consultations, e-newsletters, media articles and relevant organisations' website content).
4. Field notes taken during the process of data collection.

Data are presented in this chapter under the eight overarching themes that emerged from the analysis and in relation to the findings from the literature review. The themes were used as headings to better structure the data: legal dimension, governance, sustainability, cooperative education, the importance of language, path dependency, social movements and future expectations for ACs.

6.2 Legal forms and cooperatives: a dilution of the cooperative spirit?

Before presenting the data related to this theme, it is worth revisiting here the general definition of cooperative (across economic sectors and activities) promoted by the ICA:

An autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. (ICA, 1995)

The key notions in the ICA's definition clash with the capitalist economies cooperatives exist in, as basically, a cooperative is 'people-centred' rather than 'capital-centred', the latter being the main feature of an investor owned firm or private company (Birchall, 2010). In contrast with the ICA definition of a cooperative, ACs are defined by Cooperatives UK - the national trade body that campaigns for cooperation and aims to promote cooperative enterprises in the UK – in the following way:

Enterprise co-operatives formed by individual commercial farmers working together in order to meet shared economic needs and achieve common economic goals. (Cooperatives UK, 2014:2)

To complicate matters further, a relatively new form of farmers' associations that has grown rapidly in the last few years is that of Producer Organisations (POs). As discussed in Chapter 2, POs are economic organisations of agricultural producers (or fishermen) with characteristics similar to those of cooperatives (Bijman et al., 2012). EU legislation explicitly states that a PO can adopt any legal entity; a PO may have the legal form of a cooperative, but in many cases it has not, either because the legal requirements for cooperatives pose many restrictions on the activities and the structure of the PO, or, in the case for countries that have transformed from a socialist state economy, because the term cooperative has a negative connotation (Bijman et al., 2012). The previous chapter presented some participants' claims with regards to cases of abuse of the PO form in Spain. The following quote from a representative from the Plunkett Foundation reflects how the misuse of the PO model as shortcut to access EU funding is in fact quite widespread:

There are examples of people using it really well, but there are examples of people getting significant amounts of funding to be a PO and do what they do already, large businesses, you know, collaborating very informally. (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

In this context, some authors have argued that the initial incorporation of cooperatives into legal frameworks actually reduced their original transformative vision and has diluted the movement (Mulqueen, 2011). It could be argued that POs are both a result and cause of that effect. Guinnane and Martinez have pointed out the underlying legal similarity of corporations and cooperatives and *'will surprise those accustomed to thinking of cooperatives as the very opposite of the corporation, and often formed to combat the power of corporations'* (Guinnane and Martínez-Rodríguez, 2010:2).

The EU is pushing for the PO model over the cooperative model through its Common Organisation of Agricultural Markets' regulations. This preference for POs is not necessarily due to a specific disenchantment with the conventional cooperative model. A top agricultural policy maker from Spain suggested this is the approach taken by the EU because Brussels is not allowed to interfere in member countries' commercial laws. Brussels can and do push for and reward concentration of produce, but it is out of their remit to impose the cooperative form to achieve that result. In short, they are allowed to use measures of support to encourage farmers to work together in order to concentrate supply in the face of increasingly organised demand from large retailers, but they are not allowed to favour a particular legal form, e.g. cooperative or investor-owned firms.

The growing popularity of POs also raises issues for Cogeca. Cogeca is the umbrella group that represents approximately 40 thousand agricultural cooperative organisations in the EU. Cogeca works in partnership with Copa, the network that brings together 60 EU farmers' organisations (Copa, 2016). Copa-Cogeca is known for defending the interests of larger corporate farmers and dominating EU advisory groups including EU DG AGRI (Alter-EU, 2012; Corporate Europe, 2014). Cogeca supports the development of POs in general, however as one of their directives told me, they cannot risk weakening the position of existing powerful cooperatives:

If we set up a competing structure better than [Agricultural Cooperative x] the investment that this cooperative and the farmers have put into [AC x] would be endangered and we cannot accept this because we also represent [AC x]" (Cogeca directive)

Cogeca sees successful ACs as those that offer best economic returns for their members:

Cooperatives [are] becoming stronger in the market place and becoming bigger; it is not necessarily 100% that if you become bigger you are stronger and vice versa, but it seems to be the tendency. (Cogeca directive)

For that reason, the sector and governments favour mergers and acquisitions. However, for campaigners fighting corporate control in the food system, the underlying ideology of the CAP is palpable:

The CAP stands for Common Agricultural Policy. In reality, it is the Capitalist Agricultural Policy, and as such, it pushes what they want to push, they push a model of abandoning small farms in Europe and they open spaces for the agri-industry and to those models of agrarian colonisation, to those large companies, uniform consumption, etc. So those are the objectives of the CAP, and all the tools of the CAP, absolutely all, are addressed in that direction: the subsidy policies, the rural development policies, even the policies to foster new young entries into farming are designed to get young people to practice a capitalist agriculture [...] Agrarian cooperativism would work better without the CAP and without the European Union. Without “this” European Union. (Soberania Alimentaria rep.)

Other civil society representatives went even further, suggesting that the legal form of the cooperative is no longer transformative:

I think the legal model has failed. It does not respond to its original needs. And principally because the cooperative movement has not addressed the transformation of society and have been islands in the framework of the capitalist economy, and in the end, in order to compete they have to enter in the same contradictions typical of private companies [...] and for their own members, the AC does not represent a big difference from the other agro-export companies. (Via Campesina rep.)

This point about how large cooperatives’ behaviour does not differ from private companies and that many farmers feel they are detached from their own ACs and no longer have control over them was also mentioned in the dairy sector report of the European Commission’s Support for Farmer Cooperatives project that has been referenced throughout the text (Hanisch and Rommel, 2012). Furthermore, as the representative from the Plunkett Foundation pointed out, the CAP has fuelled polarisation in farming, rewarding both larger farms and larger ACs with fewer but larger members. Consolidation in this sense can be seen a barrier to the regeneration of the sector:

[...] it is difficult for new cooperatives to form because there is that massive incentive for POs of a certain scale than for a smaller organisation that is below that lower limit, trying to emerge and trying to be useful but they are at massive competitive disadvantage, so what we have seen is very few new cooperatives formed over that period. (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

The pressure to become larger comes not only from competition in the EU market, but also from the concentrated and powerful retail sector. Originally, farmers joined ACs to get more bargaining power when negotiating with buyers. Nowadays, the demand challenge posed by large buyers is not just about amount of supply and low prices, but

also continuation of all-year-round supply as this quote from the SAOS representative illustrates:

We found that the concentration in the food processing sector has increased a great deal in the last few years, and that has meant that many of our coops have merged and consolidated into larger businesses so that they can supply food processors all year round. (SAOS rep.)

The above point reflects how currently ACs fit well the logistics model of large supermarkets. By concentrating production and facilitating deals, it is much quicker and easier for a supermarket buyer to deal with one AC salesperson than with thousands of farmer members individually. ACs are also easy entry points to large groups of farmers. ACs can act as the trusted intermediate link to communicate and encourage hundreds of farmers to adopt specific standards to meet supermarkets' own lines requirements. By inserting themselves in the market of a capitalist economy, cooperatives stop cooperating:

If we take advantage of the legal form, the economic entity that says the cooperative is for profiting, then we enter another type of rationality which is not the cooperativist one, but a corporate rationality focused on economic benefits, mere profiteering, which is exactly what the cooperative model tries to avoid. A cooperative is not made for profiteering. A cooperative reproduces itself socially and economically. Then, when that rationality and therefore the ethics that underlay that rationality break, the essence of the existence of the cooperative breaks with it. (Spanish academic 1)

Data presented suggest ACs are increasingly opting for growth and investment strategies similar to those of private owned companies (Bijman et al., 2012), at the expense of existing members, who lose control and also of new workers who are not always offered the chance to become members of the AC they are contributing to (Berthelot, 2012).

6.3 Governance: the skimming of the cooperative principles

As discussed in Chapter 1, cooperative principles are how cooperatives put their values into practice and what differentiate them from privately owned business. There are two main sets of cooperative principles relating to ACs. On the one hand cooperatives in all sectors are expected to adhere to the seven internationally recognised International Cooperative Alliance principles discussed in Chapter 1 (ICA, 2015).

Chapter 1 has also discussed how during the 1980s and 1990s the globalisation of food trade exploded, fuelled by the inclusion of agriculture in WTO in 1994/95. At that time, arguments for a simplification of the principles were put forward (Birchall, 2005) in order to 'allow' ACs to be more competitive and attract large farmers. In 1987 the United States Department of

Agriculture (USDA, 2002) adopted a simplified version of principles for cooperatives but specially designed for ACs (Ortmann and King, 2007):

1. The User-Owner Principle: Those who own and finance the cooperative are those who use the cooperative.
2. The User-Control Principle: Those who control the cooperative are those who use the cooperative.
3. The User-Benefits Principle: The cooperative's sole purpose is to provide and distribute benefits to its users on the basis of their use.

An aforementioned recent report from the USDA suggested the Department acknowledged how the USDA three principles were a '*reduced form approach*' developed through the '*lens of economics*' and prepared by economists to exclude values from the definition and identification of cooperatives (USDA, 2014:3). The paradox from removing values from the cooperative principles to emphasise its economic edge is that dilutes the ethical and social essence of the cooperative identity. However, the repercussions of the diluted cooperative principles spread beyond the US. As discussed in the introduction, the user principles reached Europe, where they were promoted at the turn of the last century and are still used today (USDA, 2014); the last report commissioned by the EC in 2012 still defines cooperatives by listing the three principles proposed by the USDA in the 80s (Bijman et al., 2012).

Birchall, a long established author in the history of cooperation, has referred to globalisation in the food system as the main reason for the skimming of the cooperative principles in ACs:

There is a view that those co-operatives that are operating in global markets – particularly agricultural marketing and processing co-operatives – cannot afford to internalise the ICA values and principles, but have to work with a slimmer and more self-centred set of principles just to survive; [referring to the USDA principles:] these are the kinds of principles that can be derived from the internal logic of a co-operative, and they have nothing to say about any wider social responsibility, but their market advantages may be clearer and easier to demonstrate. (Birchall, 2005:49)

This partiality for market advantages that are easier to measure and quantify will be discussed in detail in Chapter 9 as one of the biases that determine how the 'success' of ACs is measured and how this is shaping the way the AC sector reproduces itself. While some of the participants – especially from smaller and newer cooperatives – knew about the existence of the ICA principles and values, none of the cooperative members who participated in this research knew all the cooperative principles by heart. The fact is, several participants were not even expecting ACs members to be aware of them:

No, absolutely. And I would be surprised if they did. [...] I would be astonished if most farmers were aware of them individually, or that they would have learnt from them somewhere, or if they were on the wall of First Milk who are currently on the headlines, saying here are the principles; well, it isn't. They see them very much as cooperatives that give them some commercial advantage, some edge, some ability to withstand the shocks long term. (UK policy maker)

The short answer to that is that they are not aware of the principles and particularly, the sort of community and all the other stuff, because it's... what most farmers have now started to do essentially, is to work on the basis of they buy what is easily available and at the best price they can get it. And those two things apply. And I think that's where we are at. (Farmway member)

Wilson and MacLead in their study of cooperatives in Scotland also found that the principles were not being adhered to in any strict sense (Wilson and MacLead, 2012). An ICAO representative explained to me his belief that this departure from the cooperative principles was increasing because *'cooperatives in developed countries are much more focussed on business' and as result, they are losing some interest in governance'* (ICAO rep).

Evidence suggests social capital decreases in large ACs and members lose the sense of being owners of the cooperative, behaving more like customers instead (Nilsson et al., 2012). However, while all the farmers interviewed as part of this research were frustrated with the increasing corporatisation of their ACs, they also highlighted they could not survive without them. A representative from the Soberania Alimentaria magazine in Spain put it in these words:

It is true, even people very embedded in classic cooperativism models have the same critical reflection [...] "it's gone out of hand", "we no longer have control over cooperatives". They don't know well why, but they criticise them because they're in the hands of directives, that cooperatives have grown too much, that cooperatives only have their eyes on large exporting targets, that cooperatives have been the entry door for the green revolution, that have been the entry door for GM. (Soberania Alimentaria rep.)

6.4. Sustainability: "Monsanto will swap you six for half a dozen"

It is worth repeating here the finding from the literature review discussed in Chapter 3 with regards to the lack of peer-reviewed evidence on cooperatives being more environmentally friendly than their private counterparts. Only one academic paper was found in the literature discussing their environmental advantages (Baranchenko and Oglethorpe, 2012). ICA and SAOS also claim cooperatives offer more sustainable business models not only socially, but also environmentally (ICA, 2011 and SAOS, 2012).

Originally, when the European Common Market was formed, the main concern for policy makers revolved around modernising farming systems to increase yields. At the time, ACs took the initiative in technical research, transferring the risk from farmer to cooperative entities, supporting small farmers to meet EU requirements and be able to access new markets (Giagnocavo, 2012). Cooperatives are still key in introducing their numerous small-scale members to technical advances, such as new machinery, greenhouses, etc. (Gómez López, 2004; Giagnocavo, 2012). This can be seen on a positive or negative light as AC act as entry points for different types of technology and inputs, including some controversial innovations such as GM or intensive growing methods. As we have discussed in the last chapter, in Spain, ACs such as Anecoop, the largest AC of citrus in the country that exports around 80% of its production to the EU, shares an experimental farm (the largest in Spain) with University of Almeria where they carry out trials with Syngenta and Monsanto, two corporations globally infamous for their unethical practices and unsustainable products.

In fact, some interviewees argued that farmers in Almeria have lost sense of the land by growing food in greenhouses and on soil replacements. Almeria is a European leader in organic crop control (Giagnocavo, 2012). While this seems like a positive development, an academic familiar with the region pointed out that it was in fact the health issues related to intensive industrial production under plastic what had pushed farmers to adopt organic methods after realising the impact chemical pesticides were having on them and their workers. While for farmers health is one of the triggers and rewards for adopting more environmentally friendly farming methods, for policy makers, sustainability is often translated in money terms:

[...] for us, the basis for calculating sustainability is the agrarian income. And one thing that has not been calculated is the agrarian income cooperativised or not. (Spanish policy maker)

When asking this participant whom they believed to be more sustainable, the small or large ACs they had drawn in a diagram (see Image 5.3), they answered:

These ones [large ACs]. These ones [the small ACs] are not bothered. It is also true that they pollute less because their production is lower. The big ones spend a lot of money on ISO norms²⁰ and that kind of stuff. And the middle ones, what do they do? They either don't comply with the rule or spend money they don't have to try to demonstrate they are sustainable to be able to get closer to the big ones. Complicated. Cooperatives provide a lot of help, because in terms of economies of scale they provide a lot of help, they have a quality department that introduces a couple of sustainability indicators and... (Spanish policy maker)

²⁰ ISO is an independent, non-governmental international organisation with a membership of 161 national standards bodies. ISO sets out the requirements for a food safety management system and can be certified to.

The above quote builds on the ongoing theme of middle-sized ACs, how they just do not fit in a market that either rewards competitive economies of scale or niche producers. Chapters 7 and 9 discuss in detail how emerging small ACs are exploiting those niche markets as well as redefining food sustainability in terms of autonomy of farmers at the vertical level, but better connected at the horizontal level with other actors in the food system (e.g. other growers, consumers and civil society organisations).

The next quote is from a member of a small multi-stakeholder cooperative producing sheep milk products in the Basque Country. The quote refers to the previous ACs the farmer had been a member of and exposes the power ACs have over the growing methods of their members:

[...] supply cooperatives whose businesses are linked to a livestock production model, and at the end of the day, they even promoted industrial farming because that was what they were making a living from, from selling concentrated feed. (Esnetik member 1)

Another participant also raised a similar point:

There are a lot of big coops around the world that you would not hold up as examples of environmental sustainability, there are some that provide multiple offers for their products in order to be able to sell farmers lots of fertilisers and financial products etc. but, I'm absolutely adamant that coops help farmers to change, not all farmers want to change [...] but coops are a legitimate voice for farmers, so they are the voice of Openfield farmers but they are also a way of farmers telling each other what's coming and what's happening, so I think in terms of the environment, coops absolutely have a leadership role to say, ok, this is coming, there's massive instability in financial markets, there's massive instability in terms of weather patterns, in terms of commodity prices, all of this, all of this instability is a massive problem, are there ways of farmers doing things differently in order to help with that? (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

Some ACs are indeed trying to introduce sustainability indicators. Going back to the middle-sized ACs and sustainability theme, the fact that the distance between consumers and producers is bigger than ever and that many ACs are exporting their products, has created the demand for sustainability indicators that can be easily measured and demonstrated:

Environmental sustainability is on the one hand what you are actually doing and on the other what you are able to demonstrate legally. We are getting to this stage. And if you are not economically sustainable, you are not going to be able to demonstrate your environmental sustainability. (Spanish policy maker)

Compulsory government policies to regulate growing methods to be more sustainable would benefit the environment but also large players:

We could introduce a compulsory life cycle analysis, and that will come at some point. What happens in Brussels is that they are very scared, like us. How many companies are able to maintain a sustainability study? Probably Mercadona²¹ has the money to pay for this, and they will introduce measures and stop buying in Tunisia and will buy Italian or Spanish, but my problem is the same, SMES and middle-sized ACs, are they going to have money? (Spanish policy maker)

The lack of integrated policy affects ACs that find themselves on a fine line trying to balance member benefits and surviving in the market. Those two objectives move social and environmental objectives down the agenda as these quotes show:

You know basically we went back to the Co-op and told them that the possibility of a few farms being carbon neutral or negative or whatever, and their opinion was, there's a list of importance and at the moment it is down about 10th place, it is creeping up to about 7th, but can this have a premium, not really (Wales Rural Observatory, 2011:40)

[Cooperatives] are not vehicles for furthering social and environmental change. They are very much vehicles for ensuring those independent farmers remain economically competitive and viable. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

For one of the former directors of Farmway, sustainability was a global, not a local issue:

The first question you've got to ask to sustainability is the sustainability of food production, so we have to know that the amount of food that is being produced and potentially, I mean I know there's huge waste here, and potentially delivered to the consumer, is sufficient. And that means that has to be done in a world basis, it's not UK basis, world basis, because shipping food round the world is an equivalent of shipping water around the world, quite frankly [...] The second criteria to me is water, which is absolutely critical to the whole process, all over the world. And after that we get to what is generally termed environment, which is other species rather than man if you like... [...] and the key question is that all over the world all farmers do exactly the same thing, and that thing is they harvest sunshine, that's what they do, and that sunshine that falls on that tarmac out there is wasted. (Farmway member)

Financial CAP subsidies can also be damaging for the environment, as it is the case of olive production in Spain. This adaptable and not very water demanding crop is perfect for the poor soils of non-irrigated areas in Southern Spain (72% of current production is still grown in these conditions). Unfortunately, EU subsidies have encouraged new irrigated intensive plantings, showing a lack of policy integration as it ignores the environmental impact of irrigation in the increasingly dry Southern regions where most of the production is concentrated (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012).

²¹ Mercadona is the largest food retailer in Spain, recently criticised for sourcing food from the North of Africa instead of supporting Spanish farmers.

Cooperativas Agro-Alimentarias is the industry body that represents a large percentage of the 4,000 ACs operating in Spain. They offer training courses to farmers and the quotes below refer to how sustainability issues are discussed (or not!) with members:

Yes, they do mention that there are more pests because they are becoming resistant. Or if the farm next door has crops from a not trusted nursery, this can introduce pests if one plants things that are not certified. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

When discussing the role of ACs in supporting their members become more sustainable, the participant said:

Well, the cooperative is involved with the members and the members are on the ground. I mean, what is needed is economic sustainability, because otherwise it loses its *raison d'être*, but also...the topic of phytosanitary products or fertilisers, the member is going to be in that farm for 40 or 50 years, so one has to fertilise respecting the environment [...] they look at long term sustainability because the member is going to continue being there. There is a lot of work going on around managing integrated production;²² that work in ACs does happen a lot, it is fostered a lot. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

However, Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias itself has stopped offering sustainability courses to its members:

Do you know what happens? For farmers, you organise a course on how to be more sustainable and people don't sign up, so those topics you pack them in...but in other different courses on offer, mainly around integrated production, but if you call it sustainability such in "sustainable management", they don't come. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

Could this be a rejection or distrust from farmers of the word sustainability?

That is why I'm telling you that this topic of sustainability or sustainable management is not a word that fits with them well [...]. The cooperative has to foster the sustainability of members but without organising courses on sustainability, they have to tell them about it through training, but the course is not called like that, but something along the lines of '*fertiliser of whatever*' and then you tell them. (Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias rep.)

The interviews revealed sustainability is a concept many farmers are suspicious of. Some of the farmers I spoke to, believed the word is used to justify and impose measures to further strengthen the industrialisation of food production and to be sold new projects, or '*Monsanto will swap you six for half a dozen*', as one AC member told me.

²² Integrated production refers to a sustainable farming approach that produces food and other products by maximizing the use of natural resources and regulating mechanisms to replace artificial inputs

On the other hand, interest in sustainability can act as a point of convergence for farmers currently locked in by their own ACs' practices but who share an interest in exploring new forms of production. This research found that organic farming can actually bring farmers from different ideologies together. For example, only 1% of cherry farmers in the Jerte Valley in Spain (where approximately 80% of the national production of cherries is produced) farm organically. Of those, some converted as a way of opposing the general political and economic system. Others, through collaborations with trained agricultural agronomists, came to understand the negative impact their production methods were having in the valley, theirs and consumers' health. A few of those farmers have now formed a small AC to commercialise their organic production.

At the EU level, Copa-Cogeca often discusses sustainability but from a more reductionist perspective. In a presentation covering the challenges stopping ACs from adopting more sustainable practices, Copa-Cogeca highlighted that the market does not remunerate the provision of public goods as the main barrier. The umbrella organisation suggested that financial incentives within and beyond the CAP are needed, as the CAP is neither a research, nor a climate change policy (Copa-Cogeca, 2011). As part of the solution, they called for a focus on sustainable intensification and private-public investments (Copa-Cogeca, 2011).

There are many other examples of Copa-Cogeca's preference for sustainable intensification strategies. In March 2015, Copa-Cogeca along with other 13 trade organisations trading animal feed published a review of the EU's decision-making process to authorise GMOs for food and feed uses. In this position paper, the trade network, claiming to represent '*the whole of EU food and feed chain*', urged the European Commission to accelerate approvals of GMOs for animal feed (COCERAL, 2015a:1). Copa-Cogeca has also pushed the EU to allow GM import authorisations. The EU Food and Feed Chain partners (that includes Copa-Cogeca) rejected an EU Commission's proposal, which attempted to renationalise EU market authorisations of genetically modified crops for feed and food use (COCERAL, 2015b). Copa-Cogeca's view was that it threatened internal market for agri-food products. A month later, Copa-Cogeca's network labelled EU zero-tolerance policy as a "threat to competitiveness".

In 2008, at the EU Joint Research Centre's Workshop on Global Commercial Pipeline of new GM Crops in Seville, Cogeca called for temporary approvals for all GM livestock products risked-assessed by the European Food Safety Authority and for those having being authorised based on Codex guidelines. Failing to do so would have a negative impact in European farmers, as they would lose competitiveness, Cogeca claimed (EU Joint Research Centre, 2008). With regards to the recent Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations,

Copa-Cogeca, while seeming to be very supportive of the TTIP negotiations, were worried about the different levels of standards. In a joint document from Food Drink Europe and Copa-Cogeca, the umbrella organisations raised their concerns about European citizens expecting farmers to implement increasingly expensive and higher production standards while imported products do not have to meet the same requirements. They believed this inconsistency had to be resolved in the TTIP agreement and as their joint position document stated, their ultimate goal was avoiding any new regulatory barriers for EU farmers from being introduced (Food Drink Europe and Copa-Cogeca, 2014).

In summary, this section on sustainability has shown how on the one hand ACs can offer continuity and an ability to help farmers think long-term. Since short-term policies are fuelling environmental degradation, long-term approaches are much needed. However, on the other hand, many ACs seem to have become active agents and victims of short-term pressure and are now pushing their farmers to grow faster and more intensively. This is especially so in the case of supply cooperatives making a living from selling pesticides and fertilisers to members.

A quote from the ILO will be used to close this part of the discussion on sustainability. At the end of 2012, the International Labour Organization (ILO) updated its guidelines for cooperative legislation. The book, in its third edition, was authored by Hagen Henry and is based upon the ILO's Recommendation 193 on the Promotion of Cooperatives. The motto of the book '*Co-operative enterprises build a better world, but co-operatives cannot – and must not - save the world*', emphasises that cooperatives should not be seen simply as a panacea in crisis situations (Henry, 2012). This quote and the data presented in this section raise several questions: How can cooperatives provide a balance between short term and long-term objectives? Are the cooperative legal and governance models able to help or balance the human and policy weakness for short-term rewards? Or are we expecting too much of cooperatives by suggesting they should encourage members to adopt more environmentally friendly and fairer farming? Are cooperatives just suffering from policy stretching, being expected to do too many things, and save the world?

6.5 Cooperative education

During the 20th century, the professionalisation of farming and thus, of ACs, became a global phenomenon (Planells Orti, J. and Mir Piqueras, J., 2004). In Europe, multilevel food policies are rewarding the consolidation of cooperatives (and POs), creating fewer but larger players (Bijman et al., 2012). Smaller producers wanting to practice a more ecological and socially just way of farming are having to reinvent the cooperative model or/and seek help and funding from civil society organisations (see chapter 8 for a detailed analysis of this trend). As an academic expert pointed out during an interview:

It is a shame that professionalisation is confused with capitalisation. [ACs] do not become more professional by becoming larger or by having a more...*hipster* logo. (Academic 1)

Farmers are constantly receiving a contradictory message from industry and multilevel governance policies encouraging them to be both competitive and cooperative at the same time. Being competitive in the food system has become a virtue in the sector but has raised contradictions in ACs:

[...] then there were periods when the marketing boards were thought to be anti-competitive, a really decisive point was when the marketing board was divided into different cooperatives. The emphasis was on the cooperatives should compete with each other, but when you look at the cooperative principles, they state that cooperatives should cooperate with each other. (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

Some participants highlighted how in most ACs there is a disregard for maintaining the cooperative vision alive amongst members, both by making them aware of the origins of their own ACs and the wider vision of the cooperative movement:

The most common issues that seem to come up it is not what they are saying, is that they do not really understand what it means to be a cooperative member [...] our founder always said that there was cooperation and education. Cooperation was the doing and setting stuff up. Education was the ongoing challenge of getting people to understand of what he called the profound implications of cooperation. So it is an ongoing challenge [...] educating [the] membership to understand what it means to be a cooperative [...] to get people to understand what it means to be a member. (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

Education and training for members, not on growing methods or business techniques, but related to the cooperative movement, were considered key by several interviewees:

If cooperativism is a way of struggle, of work, of securing a job, if we don't maintain it and the cooperatives themselves don't invest in training that explains the reasons of cooperativism in an ongoing way, our children are going to lapidate cooperatives because they have not felt the want and they see it as an industry. Training is a basic, and in order to deliver good training,

it needs to be budgeted and that is what is happening to the Mondragon group, the lack of ideology, the why of cooperatives.

R: but they have a university?

I: yes, but they don't cover these topics, it's more the process of production than the ideology. (Cooperative member and Via Campesina rep.)

The problems of short-term cooperative memory worsens with generations. A rural sociologist interviewed as an expert informant put this phenomenon in academic terms:

The issue is that if you do not participate in the origin, the birth of an initiative, and especially when it is born from resistance, and that oppression is experienced and that gives way to the social creativity that allows that initiative to emerge, and in this case of cooperative x, of course, you inherit all that ready-made work. (Academic 1)

The relationship between this reductionist understanding of professionalisation and the lack of cooperative training is well reflected in this quote:

It is very easy for a cooperative, as it becomes more complex in its operations, for the technical and managerial staff to start dominating. And not to invest in reproducing the solidaristic elements from which often coops have emerged. And the question is, how long it takes for that development to happen. I think the reproduction of the spirit of cooperation is the hardest challenge in any of the coops I have ever worked. (Academic 2)

With remaining competitive being the main aim for ACs, cooperation becomes a specific means to an end, seeking continued short-term profitability as opposed to cooperation as part of a social movement with the final ambition of transforming society into a cooperative one (Oakeshott; 1978; Mooney and Majka, 1995). However, imposing a more formalised governance for AC that regulates and monitor their adherence to all the cooperative principles was not deemed as an easy or advisable solution by participants:

I would completely avoid the legal obligation side because cooperatives are their best when people agree voluntarily to do things, people come together voluntarily, work together voluntarily, there is no force, no one is forcing them to do things, because otherwise you end up being like a collective farm, end up being like a Russian collective farm which is not a cooperative at all, so the informal education side is what we focused on rather than the formal '*you must tick this other box*' because most people don't ever read that anyway (Plunkett Foundation rep)

I think ACs are often being outside the movement for that reason really, it's because people have said, well you do not have set social objectives, how do you demonstrate concern for community and all of that and it has meant that the movement, that part of the movement has been isolated (Plunkett Foundation rep)

6.6 The importance of language and terminology

Closely related to the previous theme but distinct enough to deserve a separate heading, is the theme of language. The importance of language in transforming the identity of ACs was also identified as a common and important topic in both countries. In Spain, the 2013 Law, designed to foster mergers and acquisitions in the AC sector, formally introduced a name change to refer to ACs, swapping the previous more sociological term '*agrarian cooperatives*' for the more enterprise-like '*agri-food cooperatives*'. This was the reasoning behind the change:

[To] improve the definition of the types on agrarian cooperatives in their current name to adapt them to their economic and social reality, from now on, they will be referred to as "agrifood" [...]. The new name agrifood cooperative that is given to agrarian cooperatives has been called for by the totality of the sector and it is adequate given its closer approximation to reflect the socio-economic reality. This modification is extended to every instance of the name agrarian cooperative in the Law 27/1999 of 16th July. (BOE, 2013)

Disregard for cooperative principles becomes a normalised trend when the bottom line is presented as the main priority. For certain participants, language was considered to be very important and some thought farmer owned businesses should only be allowed to call themselves cooperatives if they complied with the ICA principles:

If there were truth in the terminology, many cooperatives would be sanctioned for using that name. And it would be right that they were sanctioned or that the use of the word was limited and they had to present themselves as they are. Hojiblanca cannot say is a cooperative and they use the name, they use it because from a commercial or marketing point, is in their benefit. It would be good, without getting obsessed, to clarify the use or delimit the use, to each their own. (Soberania Alimentaria rep)

In the UK, two members of smaller farming cooperatives aligned to ecological farming and food sovereignty principles, agreed that large ACs distant from their members and embedded in industrial and global food conglomerates should not be allowed to call themselves cooperatives. However, they could not suggest if or who and how the use of the word "cooperative" should be policed. Another interviewee offered a potential solution:

[...] at least we can start using it, ourselves, for example, we talk about industrial agriculture, so I can for example try to talk about the 'non-agriculture' or the 'capitalist agriculture', but to be clear that that is not agriculture, that is something else. Then, in the same way that we can incorporate a language with a gender perspective amongst ourselves, let's incorporate statute language as well. Whenever we talk about Hojiblanca, let's talk about the '*non-cooperative Hojiblanca*', or I don't know, at least to be aware, right? [...] It is not urgent, as I said before, let's not get obsessed about this, but every little helps. (Soberania Alimentaria rep)

For other participants involved in policy, the enterprise aspect of cooperatives and their financial sustainability, rather than their names or the language used, are what really matters:

[...] those people, regardless of whether they are treated well or badly, if they cooperative is not financially sustainable, the rest doesn't matter. A cooperative enterprise is a cooperative but it is an enterprise! Especially with what's going on²³. Of course the principles are very nice or very utopic and ideal too, I wish they were complied with, but the thing is, if they don't get moving, at the end of the day it does not matter what name they call their cooperative society, they are going to have to close. (Spanish policy maker)

This topic brought back to the conversation the strong political connotations and legacy that ACs still have in Spain:

This aspect that you are talking about is very nice, it is true that it's cool they call you by your real name. That yoke no longer exists, luckily or unluckily this is a democracy and we no longer have that kind of problem²⁴, we have worse problems, in Spain for example is the politicisation of cooperatives at the municipal level that is Dantesque. Small cooperatives are the bone of contention of the town mayors, and that is shameful [...]. The cooperative leaning to the right supports PP and the lefties support PSOE, that can't be right! Then they give subsidies to the left-leaning one but not to the right-leaning one and the Diputacion does the same thing and the Autonomous Community does the same thing. So we have to open people's minds, that managers comply with the seven principles but that they must comply with the law first. At the end of the day is a matter of financial, environmental and social sustainability. Besides, there is a big problem of politicisation in the boardrooms of cooperatives, and in the small ones, it is worse, even worse. (Spanish policy maker)

This account reflects how historical events create certain paths of development that reveal the legacy of political conflict. This conflict is still very present today in the way ACs operate, at least in Spain, the way they are funded and the way they resist the ongoing top-down push for consolidation as ACs of farmers of opposite political views refuse to merge. This invisible path and how it shapes the development of the AC sector is discussed in more detail in the next section.

²³ The participant was referring to the financial crisis that has depressed the Spanish economy for a decade now since it started in 2007/08.

²⁴ The participant refers here to the repression and dissolution of cooperatives during the Franco dictatorship. Cooperatives were imposed a representative from the regime and one from the church in their board of directors. This topic was discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

6.7 Path dependency and inevitability of the corporatisation of the AC sector

Building on the discussion from the previous sections on sustainability and the impact of history in the development of ACs, this section presents arguments made by interviewees with regards to the inevitability often felt by many participants about the way things currently are for ACs and how radical change is unlikely unless a crisis or breaking point arises. The concept of path dependency is used to discuss interviewees' comments on this theme.

Path dependency is a concept that combines historically informed scholarship and political science approaches (Kay, 2003). Kay has used this concept to analyse the development of the CAP and defines path dependent systems as those in which '*initial moves in one direction elicit further moves in that same direction*' (Kay, 2003:406). In the context of this research, the concept will be used to discuss the themes emerging from the interview data relating to how specific events –such as the incorporation of the UK and Spain in the EU, the incorporation of agriculture in the WTO or the creation of certain cooperative laws – create a narrowing down of policy options in the future.

For example, some participants considered EU policy on POs a key factor affecting the AC sector and discouraging farmers to set up smaller cooperatives. Others however thought the cooperative ideal was just utopian, while a different view was that ACs are not able to meet the AC principles because of the current dominant model of industrial agriculture. Linked to this concept of path dependency were also several comments around the unavoidable corporatisation of the AC sector; this quote from the Spanish policy maker interviewee is an example of the latter:

This is not just happening because of the EU, this is globalisation, modernisation. The utopic ideal of a cooperative is very good, but at the end of the day, they are NIFs²⁵ understood as enterprises, and people come to them to make money [...] At the end of the day the aim is that the product, the goods and the service sold by a cooperative are slightly better in price to those sold by a guy not from a cooperative. And that is my objective. [...] At the end of the day I'm talking about money, how? Economies of scale, which cooperatives are very good at. [...] Moreover, what cooperatives do is to diversify the risk, because it is shared across all the cooperative members, but they have to make money. Cooperatives understood utopically like those invented in England, well, they're very good, but if you don't make cash, they're good for nothing. (Spanish Policy Maker)

Furthermore, in Spain the myth has died, because since Fagor²⁶ collapsed, well, I was very depressed, the example of social economy in all of Spain and Europe, the biggest Spanish cooperative and they go to hell for not doing it properly. (Spanish Policy Maker)

²⁵ NIF is the Spanish tax ID number.

²⁶ Fagor was one of the most famous workers' cooperative part of the group Mondragon that went into bankrupt and was auctioned after Mondragon decided not to rescue it.

When I highlighted that actually around half of Mondragon's enterprises are not employee-owned, the participant pointed out that this is a common practice amongst other large ACs too, such as Decoop and Anecoop, the case study presented in Chapter 5:

That is the same with Decoop; Decoop, how many brands does it have? Anecoop also buys produce from non-cooperative enterprises. (Spanish Policy Maker)

As the policy maker mentioned concentration of agricultural production several times during the interview, they were asked if they thought that was the general objective of the cooperative sector, to what they replied:

No, the objective is to improve the agrarian income. So that this guy is able to have a better life and that he stays in the countryside producing agricultural goods and services, through what? Improving his agricultural income. At the end of the day it is going to be a macroeconomic datum [...]. It is basically a policy of good government towards your constituents but also selfishly because these guys give us the agrarian goods that food is. (Spanish Policy Maker)

Other interviewees discussed the impact that path dependency effects were having in farmers' lives. As discussed in the previous section, one of the interviewees reflected how the adoption of more ecological methods (not always certified) in Almeria was pretty much the only solution to improve working conditions and reduced the serious effects of pesticide exposure under plastic that farmers were suffering from and had power over. However, the organic farming they converted to was not the transformative one envisioned by the early organic movement, but one highly embedded in international supply chains, intensive production with several harvests a year and monocultures (Fromartz, 2007; Goodman et al., 2011). Other more radical changes in their way of farming and selling their produce would be much more complex to implement and thus the current green-houses and cooperatives' contracts keep them locked-in into their current embeddedness in industrial and global food systems:

It is the way chosen to survive, economically embedded in the economic model of exports, that is why they are trapped, there is not an easy political exit against this option, it is not a technical question, it is not a technical question. If you design your farm, your life, your family, your mind for export activities, something has to happen to make you change, something serious, something big that makes you move to get out of there, if not, you don't come out, because you're designed for that, not just your farm. (ISEC academic)

Several interviewees spoke with sadness about the lock-in situation many farmers find themselves in. Some reported feeling trapped and unhappy with the way their ACs were running but acknowledged their farming livelihoods could not survive without them. These feelings of inevitability spread beyond sustainability topics into issues of scale and barriers to creating

alliances between farmers and consumers, as the following quote from a SAOS representative shows; when asked about the potential of MSCs that bring together farmer cooperatives and consumer groups into one organisation, the interviewee replied:

I think part of the reason as well is that many farms in the UK in the last 50 years just got bigger and bigger, larger and larger farms and they have massive volumes of products to sell, so they have to be linked into supply chains that can take all that volume. So very often, they are linked in to supply chains that will be major food manufactures and major supermarkets so that they know they will be able to sell all their produce, so it's scale, there is a mismatch of scale quite often between farmers, coops and local food requirements. The two scales are very, very different. And maybe over time, we will see a trend emerge of I think more local multi-stakeholder cooperatives between farmers and consumers and restaurants, but it will take some time to come. Maybe the closest we've got to that is farmers markets where we have farmers bringing their produce directly to consumers (SAOS rep.)

These issues of scale also inform the type of members that large ACs look for and accept in their books. For example, some ACs specify a minimum amount of trade that members must do with the AC in order to qualify for membership. A small or medium producer with polycultures of different crops or types of produce is unlikely to reach the minimum amount of trade required by large ACs. How does this fit with the ICA open membership cooperative principle?

You are giving me a real work out, aren't you? [laughs] How does that fit with the open membership principle? Ah...it doesn't...ah...often...I mean, the limit around... you must do a certain amount of trade, I think it is an issue, cooperatives do it for logical reasons, they need a certain amount stuff to sell, and they can't get it from too many places, otherwise that can be difficult. So people below that level often have to look at other options, other cooperatives or if there aren't other cooperatives that willing to do that, they have to go Hello?? Which I don't like. I think smaller farmers need to have a place for cooperatives, a place in cooperatives. If that isn't there, then there's a need to be different, different cooperatives that need to be set up. And then we come back to the EU influence...this isn't across all sectors, but particularly in horticulture, there are big disincentives to set up smaller scale stuff because of the PO organisations bias. (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

Here, POs were again mentioned along with large and powerful retailers, as the culprits shaping a policy and trade environment that just pushes ACs to get bigger or get out. The following short extract from the interview with the Spanish policy maker also reflects an element of resignation and inevitability:

R: Via Campesina, do you know them?

I: Yes

R: Do you work with them?

I: No. You need all sorts of people...I go back to the same thing, utopia is necessary, we need to pursue some objective, but [...] I'd like to see them here. Like PODEMOS. They are logical sociological options taken into account what's going on. Cooperativising reality would be wonderful...we are giving a step to cooperativise part of the agrarian expertise (laughs) (Spanish policy maker)

Another participant who had been a member of a workers' cooperative shop before joining a farming cooperative shared their views on why workers' cooperatives are not popular in agriculture:

I don't know. Well, I have thought about it. That's why I started saying I don't think we've been reaping the benefits. I think the way that farming works is quite hard to act as a cooperative because [pause] I don't know, I haven't quite figured it out in my head, I think farming lend itself perhaps a bit more to partnership or sole trade kind of businesses. (Worker cooperative food grower)

When asked if the structure of land ownership was a factor as well as farms being in the family for generations, the participant said:

Yes, there's that. But it's also the nature of the work. It's quite an isolated job [...] I think it's quite easy for most people who work on the land to just want to do things their way and to hire other people to do it. I haven't worked it out. Maybe it's the type of people doing it, rural...? There's a certain stereotype of what it is to be a farmer and to have a farmer mentality, perhaps more closed-minded. (Worker cooperative food grower)

Most of the food growers interviewed that were members of an agricultural workers' cooperative had been previously members of a workers' cooperative in other sectors (mainly retail). This was identified as an interesting finding. It suggests that previous experience in cooperative working, is what other farmers are lacking. By working in a cooperative, on a daily basis alongside other members, individuals embody cooperation and some then take it into farming. However, many farmers and agricultural workers have not experienced such way of cooperating and fail to see the value or the potential of workers' cooperatives in farming to reduce entry costs into this sector. This view is reinforced by the land ownership structure and housing prices in rural areas, which means many farmers live in the land they farm rather than travelling to a farm to work in the same way office workers travel to their offices.

Another interesting point of discussion with participants was around the feasibility of including a representative from consumer organisations in the board of directors of ACs. This strategy could avoid a polarisation of the sector or/and AC's growing focus on getting produce out of the country. However, this addition would be highly complex in legal terms given the fact the Spanish law already determines very specific roles for cooperative boards. While some of the more progressive AC members thought this would be a good idea, the Spanish policy maker highlighted the legal barriers of such an initiative:

[...] it is not feasible. Would it be a good idea? Totally, especially because it is an external opinion [...] but it is not feasible and it is not going to happen, moreover, it is not legal. (Spanish policy maker)

In this context, the legal path of cooperatives is preventing potential innovative solutions that could help ACs consider more sustainable practices. Some participants felt the problem was not actually ACs becoming more corporate or the dominant model of intensive agriculture, but capitalism itself:

They can only explain themselves or can only understand themselves as exporters, because it is the only way of surviving, it is not an answer specific to farmers of the farming sector. It is the general answer of a capital economy and they are in the frame of, we all are in the frame of that capitalist economy, I think this is an important point in order to understand this. It is the same answer that the PP or PSOE or any other political party to getting out of the crisis: produce more, internationalisation, improve competitiveness... Then, with those clues as an umbrella, the farm, whether it is a new farmer or a long-life farmer, if that is the environment, if that is what is being heard, if that is what 99% of the politicians repeat, from the political administrations, from the managers, from business men, everybody only knows how to talk about growth and continue to progress, so if this is the general answer, they replicate the same answers. (ISEC academic)

I think members of each cooperative should reflect on how they have arrived to the situation in which they find themselves now, but I don't think we need to do a blaming-placing analysis of cooperativism in itself; if cooperativism is what it is now, it's because society has taken it down this route, because they teach what they teach in schools and they teach what they teach in universities [...] we have delegated many things and this is what we get now. (Soberania Alimentaria rep.)

Well, that's the problem of living in a market economy. We can't escape it. (SAOS rep.)

It is interesting how interviewees' answers to questions that had a specific focus on ACs ended up referring to wider structural issues, politics, capitalism and the way dominant ways of framing ACs become perpetuated by the education system.

This section has discussed, using the concept of path dependency, how the current agricultural policy and economic context ACs exist in has had a strong influence in shaping farmers' cooperatives. When certain laws, policies and practices are adopted, other alternative are rejected or made more difficult to adopt in the future. The return to those other options is not always easy (e.g. converting from conventional to organic agriculture or from outdoor to greenhouse-farming). The narrowing down of potential options precludes other alternatives from happening, as going down certain policy routes might require undoing many other decisions and policies with wider implications. Changes to the system (policy, social or economic) remain within controlled and specific boundaries, creating lock-in effects (Wilson, 2008) and hindering system transformation, one of the original aspirations of the cooperative movement, a theme discussed in the next section.

6.8 Social movement

This research focuses on Spanish and UK ACs within their European context, but as stated in the introduction, it aims to analyse ACs beyond their organisational limits and in the wider context of global food systems and the wider international cooperative movement. Despite being based in Europe, many European ACs' operations and practices have effects internationally (Bijman et al., 2012). In this sense, some authors have argued that the legal incorporation of cooperatives decreased their political engagement and their identity as a social movement (Mulqueen, 2011), a trend that has been aggravated in ACs by the neoclassical economics discourse (Mooney et al., 1996). The effect has been noted by the wider cooperative movement:

In developed countries, ACs are very focussed on their business. I know they used to be very strong members of the ICA, but the ICA could not provide any profit for their business, so they withdrew all their members, so we don't have many ACs in Europe. The cooperative movement in general is a movement, rather than a business. The ICA is focusing more on business areas but still ACs in Europe are not interested in the ICA, in the cooperative movement. Specially in the EU there is the CAP, so in the European regions, ACs are more concerned about the CAP and they want to be more involved in lobbying and decision making in the EU. (ICAO rep)

A policy maker actually realised during an interview that *'some of the cooperatives out there are in effect a slightly evolved version of a trade association'* (UK policy maker). When asking this policy maker about the social movement dimension of ACs, the following response was offered:

I would be thinking what are they doing in sharing best practice, guidance, education, commercial imperative [...] and maybe that does reflect a different view I have of what a farming cooperative is, compared to what I would normally as a centre-left politician say what a cooperative is. It is curious actually, there is a slight difference. (UK policy maker)

This instrumentalist reading of cooperatives is something that the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS) has also noticed in farmers in Scotland:

The primary purpose if it is a grain coop, is to make the best return to the farmers for his grain. That is the reason why he wants to work together with other farmers because he thinks he can do that better and more effectively in a cooperative than doing it on his own. (SAOS rep.)

Other UK participants also agreed with this view:

I think it is different. I think it is undoubtedly different. Most of the other cooperative forms are done by groups of people coming together on an individual basis and the individual members are not themselves commercial, they are coming together for an economic purpose. Whereas obviously the

individual farmers are already kind of commercial entities before they come together to become members of a cooperative and that is a huge difference I think. So it is business owning a business, owning a business rather than individuals coming together to form a business (...) they have come together for quite specific economic reasons, rather than necessarily for having...there's never been much emphasis, certainly in this country, on the social side of cooperation, they have always been more interested in using cooperation as a vehicle to ensure their economic viability rather than necessarily because they think it is a great thing to do. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

They see them very much as cooperatives that give them some commercial advantage, some edge, some ability to withstand the shocks long term. (UK policy maker)

(...) maybe one of the things I'd say, historically in this country is that farms in this country, and even independent farms have been bigger and wealthier and more commercially viable than they've been in the continent. So when you're talking about agricultural coops in the continent you're probably talking about smaller, poorer farmers whereas especially in some of the sectors in this country, the farmers were quite big anyway, when you're talking about farmers you're not talking about peasants, you're talking about fairly wealthy people in society anyway. (...) most of the cooperatives that grew up in breadth in the 19th century were really there for poor working class people trying to meet very basic needs. Agricultural cooperatives grew for wealthier people to meet rather different economic needs.

R: So both are meeting needs, it's just a very different set of needs?

I: Exactly (Co-operatives UK rep.)

[...] one of the key things that a cooperative does, it is a form of economic democracy...in that sense the social benefit from the cooperative is not necessarily primarily in the work that they do, it is on how the risks and the rewards are shared around. So that the social benefits of cooperation are around economic democracy and participation and more equitable sharing of wealth and distribution of wealth. Whereas the Community Interest Company, the primary social purpose should come from the work it does, whereas for a cooperative is around how the surplus of the work it does is shared around. (Co-operatives UK rep.)

This pursuit of growth regardless of the impacts on members and nature reflects both anthropocentric and Western epistemological biases as noted by one interviewee:

If you want to portrait [the biases] in today's cooperativism, that is, disregarding of other cultures, only wanting to grow and practise agricultures that abuse nature. Then, cooperativism also, it is not a separate entity. What we have is the fruit, the reflection of the model of society, of course. (Soberania Alimentaria magazine rep.)

An ethnocentric bias also emerged from the data. From the 1950s onwards, the ICA became an active promoter of cooperatives as a development tool in low and middle income countries, but critics have pointed out that the imposition of the cooperative model abroad had a paternalistic Euro-centric approach (Rhodes, 2012). Links between colonialism and globalisation are a serious issue when top-down ACs are promoted in less developed countries by both the EU farming industry and governments (Berthelot, 2012). This quote from the ICAO representative reflects just how current the colonialist baggage is:

Actually networking wise, they are focusing on their own business, on the CAP. But individually they are also interested in supporting and providing some benefits to the agricultural cooperative movement in developing countries but their connection is with their past colonised countries. The UK has some programmes with countries in Africa that used to be their colonies. In Norway and other regions they also have connections. (ICAO rep.)

These new ACs are created through top-down approaches, negating the intrinsic democratic and bottom-up spirit of the cooperative movement:

[...] in developing countries is mostly top-down. It is quite normal these days; [...] top-down is more efficient because they get some training [...]. It is very difficult to have more bottom-up processes in developing countries. They do not understand the system of cooperatives, because a cooperative is not just a business, it is a democracy. But in many developing countries, farmers and proprietors don't think they are the owners, they are just users, but in the cooperative they are the owners and users of the business. (ICAO rep.)

This use of cooperatives as an economic and development policy tool imposes Western's models of cooperation into other countries, reducing the space and ability of those being 'developed' and forced to cooperate to define their own understanding of cooperation on their own terms (Böhm et al., 2010; Illich, 1976). This approach is also creating a path dependent development model of ACs and farming methods in those countries as well as reliance on institutions and different levels of inputs from more 'developed' countries (Böhm et al., 2010).

Other authors have provided evidence of this bias in developing countries, where poorer cooperative members and especially women suffer inequalities in ACs dominated by larger landowners and foreign interests (GeoSAS 2012; Griffiths, 2012; Huggins, 2014). Huggins' study of land grabs in Rwanda has also uncovered the top-down government approaches and the unaccountable control that elites wield over many ACs in the country, clearly dominated by larger land-owners and foreign interests (Huggins, 2014) and in which poorer cooperative members are finding it increasingly difficult to gain access to fertile plots. Additionally, in a reflection of the androcentric bias, women were found to be less likely to be able to afford the minimum monetary contribution for cooperative membership, and therefore, unable to join ACs (GeoSAS 2012). Rwanda is not an isolated case, and these issues appear also in fairtrade cooperatives (Griffiths, 2012). Huggins found that farmers no longer had control over the crops cultivated or inputs invested:

The policy of regional crop specialisation, in tandem with a policy of 'encouraging' smallholders to join producer cooperatives that is often implemented coercively, restricts the ability of farmers to make their own decisions regarding crop choice, investment in inputs and marketing (Huggins, 2014:372).

These concerns were shared by farmers interviewed as part of this research; two of them mentioned how their ACs would strongly suggest to members what varieties of cherry they should use, always pushing for varieties that produced a bigger cherry even if the flavour was worse than those of traditional local varieties and even if the new varieties were not adapted to the local climate and pests. Some interviewees also mentioned they found themselves in a lock-in situation with regards to their growing methods. Farmers wanting to become more sustainable mentioned barriers to transform to organic production, as their ACs could not or would not accommodate small volumes of organic produce, as it did not make business sense.

Furthermore, European ACs are increasingly looking for new markets to continue their expansion, as the European food and drink market is perceived as a mature and highly saturated market where significant growth is no longer possible (Bijman, et al., 2012). This focus on globalisation and on using ACs as a way of concentrating production for getting food out of home markets and into export markets severely clashes with the efforts from the food relocalisation movement.

This section has provided findings that challenge the widespread assumption that ACs are part of a global movement aiming to transform society into a more cooperative one. The movement is not homogenous, at least not as concerns ACs. It has also revealed the ethnocentric bias of the more corporate practices of ACs in Europe that are exporting a neoliberal version of the cooperative model to developing countries.

In summary, ACs are increasingly instructing members what crops to grow, what varieties and what growing methods they should use in the framework of the dominant productionist paradigm (Lang and Heasman, 2004). Civil society groups have warned of the level of power concentration and the intensive monoculture approaches that ACs are instructing their members to adopt in order to standardise and increase production, moving away from the original cooperative objective of transforming the world, to merely adapting to and reproducing the system they operate in (Soberania Alimentaria, 2013).

6.9 The future is polarised

As part of all interviews, participants were asked about their views for the future of ACs and how they believed ACs' relationship with the wider food system will develop. Most participants warned of a growing polarisation in the sector: at the one end, some large powerful ACs will continue to get bigger and follow internationalisation strategies. At the other end, some small ACs will find niches in which to thrive. The fate of those in the middle, according to the participants, is uncertain, but options seem few: they will have to merge, grow or get out. When discussing the dangers of pushing for the creation of really large players, the Spanish policy maker recognised the following:

It is true that to form, well, they can't be called cartels, but form people that powerful at all levels, we need to be very careful about this, of course. Luckily, that is not the task of this ministry; it's the task of the General Secretariat for Commerce, to ensure this is uniform. (Spanish Policy Maker)

This quote shows the extent of lack of policy integration in cooperative policy. Additionally, this scenario of polarisation seemed inevitable to many participants:

Most probably there will be two trends. There will be first, further consolidation, and I sincerely hope, that for instance in Spain, in the case of olive oil for instance, we see some consolidation, because we see some major opportunities for the olive oil producers and their cooperatives in this respect [...] So I have a reason to believe that in the South we will see bigger cooperatives especially in certain sectors where they would have a stronger position in the market place, would influence their economic returns, have better access to export markets or EU markets, put money in research and development and so forth. We already have this for instance in fruit and veg, we have some major cooperatives in there, we have some major cooperatives in wine, we must probably also see some further consolidation. That is one trend (...) but in the North, we might probably see also the trend, and we already see this, the trend of setting up new cooperatives that bring in this locality to a certain extent. (Cogeca rep.)

At this point, the interviewee started to explain the case of rural water cooperatives in Finland bringing together farmers with other rural actors:

Water cooperatives which is a new form of cooperative sector (...) meaning that individuals, not necessarily farmers, farmers only, but including farmers, they join forces with the local community and set up a cooperative where they organise their water supply for instance, or drainage, or sewage, or whatever, so that we see (...) these new forms or new cooperatives also coming to Northern member estates or all member estates in fact, where the cooperative form of enterprise could give some assistance to certain developing sectors in better servicing, especially in rural areas. (Cogeca rep.)

The Spanish policy maker also agreed the future of the AC sector has a high probability of becoming very polarised:

Extremes are going to fall off the CAP and off everything because they are no longer going to receive subsidies. There is a study from FEAGA, which is our body in charge of administering EU funding payments; a subsidy administrative file costs 300 euros per year in time, civil servants and so. As we are working towards “capping” which is to cut from the top and from below, beneficiaries of more than 300,000 euros are going to be taken out and beneficiaries of less than 300 euros are going to be taken out. (Spanish policy maker)

A civil society participant put this polarisation into historical perspective as a normal trend in the cooperative movement:

I think if you tracked cooperatives, sort of trends over time, you’ll see, all across the world, if this is a graph of members, certain cooperatives and over time, you will see these kind of like humps come and go, and all of this, all the time, like there are big movements that come and go and come and go...I think partially reflecting changes in society, but there are sometimes massive strategic mistakes made by big cooperatives, or by sectors or by policy makers that have led to movements being pretty decimated. I think if you were to look at movements internationally now, and we’ve had conversations with people about this, it is that people feel there are two coop movements now happening; there’s the existing and established and the new and the radical, but we probably should not forget that the existing and established were probably the new and the radical a few decades ago. (Plunkett Foundation rep.)

This dual character of the cooperative movement was also found by this research in the AC sector. The next two chapters will cover the “new and radical” cooperatives that the above quote is referring to. A key question that emerges is, if many ACs disappear as a result of the growing polarisation, while there be a tipping point from which the movement won’t recover?

Perhaps the fear is with regards to what you were talking about, to watch out, and do not create monsters, or transform ourselves into the US, which is to have four big ones and no small ones. We would lose the European essence, right? But oh well, let’s see. (Spanish policy maker).

Besides, as discussed in the previous and current chapters, the future for middle-sized ACs is not looking promising:

[...] the reality is going to make these in the middle disappear. I think in Spain we are going towards polarisation, because for sure we are not going to create an agrarian middle class²⁷. I can’t see it, but hey, I hope I’m wrong. But no political or economic element leads one to think this is leading towards homogenisation. These ones [the middle ones] will get out of the market, and these ones are going to keep going up [the big ones] [...]. If we are victims of our own success it is not a good thing. We might have to modulate this policy in a couple of years [...] if you look at what is happening in the sector, it is true that is a bit polarised, but it happens

²⁷ In Spain the “middle class” is the working class; upper-working class can be considered the equivalent of the UK middle class label

everywhere, egg, milk, vegetables, oil... there are fewer companies remaining, but those that remain are more competitive and sell more, it's logical. (Spanish policy maker).

Once again, as discussed in reference to the new Spanish law that compared Spanish ACs to Dutch ACs as a justification and inspiration for encouraging mergers in the sector, Spanish policy makers are also looking for inspiration in other European countries to reduce the number of CAP beneficiaries and support rural development:

Look, there were 904,343 CAP beneficiaries in Spain in 2012. If we cut a bit from the top and a bit from the bottom... France I think has 300,000 PAC beneficiaries and they are much more competitive than we are and they have rural development, and rural regions, and crafts... England has commercial farms much bigger and they don't dismiss crafts, rural development, one thing should live alongside the other. (Spanish policy maker)

When commenting about the concentration of food retailing in the UK with roughly four supermarkets accounting for $\frac{3}{4}$ of all food sales, the same participant pointed out that in Spain *'is very, very similar, and every day it is getting worse, much worse'*. The policy maker also spoke about Brussels's limitation to promote the legal cooperative form as such:

“R: do you think from the EU they're going to bet on the PO model or the cooperative model?

I: PO

R: And the legal model of cooperative?

I: Brussels doesn't care about that. The OCM the aim is to concentrate produce.

R: Regardless of the legal model?

I: The thing is they can't, they don't have powers, they can't get involved in the society model that one might have. Then through the OCM regulation they introduce the compulsory model of POs copying the model of milk, the milk packet, and the rewards more specifically through the 1st and 2nd pillars [...] Brussels cannot legislate the company law of member countries, so they do it through produce, no through how you manage to concentrate that produce” (Spanish policy maker).

Another concern about the future that might become an imminent problem for ACs, especially in the UK since the conservative government is strongly pushing for big data in farming, is the risk of co-optation of agronomic data, raising questions over whether the owner of the data is the AC or the farmer member (Janzen Ag Law, 2015). Anecoop, the Spanish case study analysed in Chapter 5, is already using a type of software called Visual 3.0. This software claims to help farmers submit CAP forms with fewer errors, have a register with all the requirements of the main certifications such as Global Gap v. 5 and Integrate Production (Fresh Plaza, 2016). In the UK, the conservative government is strongly pushing for a big data approach that they claim will improve the farming industry and have invested £11.8 million on a new 'Agrimetrics Centre' to promote use of big data and analytical tools across the food system (Innovate UK, 2015). Issues of misuse, power and ownership of big data remain to be tackled, plus civil society

voices claim the focus on data distracts policy action from more urgent and pressing issues in food and farming.

6.10 Conclusions

Many ACs in UK and Spain are following commercialisation, internationalisation and concentration strategies in order to remain competitive in global food markets. However, this is coming at a price. Current measures of success are based on short-term profits rather than long-term gains. Evidence presented suggests many ACs are forgetting/have forgotten their radical and transformative roots and their link to the wider cooperative movement. This evidence has been categorised in eight different themes: legal dimension, governance, issues related to sustainability, lack of cooperative education, the importance of language, the effects of path dependency, (lack of) identity as a social movement and the risks of a polarised future in the AC sector. Those large ACs ranked as the most successful often lack meaningful member participation.

Data have revealed how with industrial agriculture and globalisation, the alterity of ACs is being diluted, and ACs have lost the identity and role as expressions of alternative food initiatives at the farming level to empower food producers and tackle power imbalances in the food system. The review of the findings presented in this chapter suggests a wide range of multilevel factors are encouraging the corporatisation of ACs in the EU:

- Cooperative level: lack of continuous education of members on the history, meaning and value of their cooperative and the wider cooperative movement
- National level: policies aiming to increase the profitability of the farming as an economic sector; clear support for consolidation of the sector and larger farms
- EU level: CAP pushing for PO model to concentrate demand and facilitate trade in the Common Market and beyond
- Global level: the introduction of agriculture global trade and increasing demand from emerging economies are also pushing ACs to both become bigger players to be able to compete in their national markets and also export to foreign markets and meet the demand needs of big suppliers.

The next chapter offers a more positive take on ACs by presenting new models of small multi-stakeholder cooperatives in food and farming aiming to avoid the issues discussed in this and the previous chapters.

7. Emerging models of cooperation: Multi-stakeholder cooperatives

Much has been written about alternative food networks (AFN) and the potential of cooperatives to realise alternative food systems and reconnect consumers with producers (Kneafsey et al., 2008; Sharzer, 2012; Little et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2010; Goodman et al., 2011; Lawrence and Dixon, 2015). However, when it comes to cooperatives, most of the AFN literature focuses on consumer cooperatives, informal (not legally incorporated) buying groups and community-supported agriculture initiatives, rather than on farmers' cooperatives (Ronco, 1974; Allen, 2004; Little et al., 2010; Brunori, 2012; Cox et al., 2013; Caraher et al., 2014b). ACs are large employers in the agricultural sector and enable farmers to reduce costs and gain lobby and negotiating power. However, given the findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, it is perhaps not strange then that the ANF literature does not dedicate much attention to the research and theorisation of ACs. Instead, the literature review presented in Chapter 3 revealed that the economics discipline has dominated the study of formalised cooperatives in agriculture (Helmberger and Hoos, 1962; Murray, 1983; Oustapassidis, 1988; Karantininis and Nilsson, 2007).

In this sense, despite the cooperative model being often recommended both in farming and also downstream at consumer level, is so by still drawing a divisive line between producer and consumer cooperatives. Multi-stakeholder cooperatives (MSCs) are emerging in alternative food systems as bridges trying to cover this gap. As opposed to conventional ACs made up of farmer membership only, the multi-stakeholder model brings together producers, consumers and/or restaurateurs under one single enterprise. This chapter analyses the emergence of MSCs, their dynamics, activities and the barriers they are facing to realise their own vision of sustainability, in social, environmental and financial terms.

Given that this model of cooperative is so rare and new, this chapter starts with an introduction to MSCs, providing an overview of the history behind them. In order to understand MSCs into the historical context of the cooperative movement, a review of relevant archive records, academic literature and current thinking on multi-stakeholderism in food and farming initiatives is provided; Then, data from four case studies are presented, two from the UK and two from Spain, to explore and discuss the dynamics and challenges facing these new cooperative arrangements. The four-fold proposal for Open Cooperatives introduced in Chapter 4 is discussed and applied to the analysis of the case studies. The chapter ends with some conclusions on opportunities and challenges for multi-stakeholderism in food and farming cooperatives.

7.1 Multi-stakeholderism, an old idea coming of age?

Multi-stakeholder cooperatives are a relatively new form of cooperative that has been emerging over the last two decades in Europe and North America (Lund, 2012). These cooperatives allow and bring together different types of membership, often consumers and providers of services and goods, but sometimes also workers and buyers (Kindling Trust, 2012). In Europe and Canada, MSCs are growing strong in social services and the healthcare sector (Münkner, 2004). In the US, the movement for localisation of food production and consumption has found a helpful organisational and legal tool in the MSC model (Lund, 2012). However, little empirical research has been done to explore and discuss how the MSC movement is developing new models of food production and provision, especially in Europe (Lund, 2012). This chapter contributes to covering that gap in the literature.

Before discussing MSCs in the current context, it is interesting to first review early cooperative attempts of multi-stakeholderism in the food system. As described in Chapter 2, the cooperative social movement began in the early 18th century with the realisation that the power of organised cooperation could have the potential to transform society and reverse structural conditions that produced high inequalities (Shaffer, 1999). Food has always been a core element in cooperativism since the very beginnings of the movement in the 18th century (Burnett, 1985; Birchall, 1994; Garrido Herrero, 2003; Rhodes, 2012).

Chapter 1 provided a detailed timeline of the origins of cooperatives in agriculture. In terms of food producers' cooperation, it was the Jumbo Cooperative Society operating from 1851 to 1861 near Rochdale, the one to found the first worker cooperative farm (Birchall, 1994). Both experiments, the Rochdale store and the Jumbo farm, highlighted the active role of urban citizens in developing a new identity as workers, consumers and food producers. In this sense, Jumbo Farm could arguably be considered the first formal organisation of 'cooperative prosumers', as engaged consumers took also an active role in food production (Pirkey, 2015).

As discussed in Chapter 3, a visit to the to the National Cooperative Archive in Manchester, which holds the collections of the Cooperative Union and the Cooperative College archives, was undertaken for the purpose of this research. Historical records provided evidence of how early cooperators soon realised the potential benefits and limitations associated with the possibility of merging different types of members into multi-stakeholder (MS) ventures. The topic of multi-stakeholderism was considered important and relevant enough to be discussed at several cooperative congresses (Reymond, 1964). The integration of different types of members

into one single association is the main difference between MSCs and the more common single-membership cooperatives (Münkner, 2004). Conventional cooperatives are run by and for the benefit of their members, while the introduction of different types of members in MSCs both complicates and enriches the cooperative mission as Lund has pointed out:

MSCs are cooperatives that formally allow for governance by representatives of two or more stakeholder groups within the same organisation, including consumers, producers, workers, volunteers or general community supporters [...] The common mission that is the central organising principle of a multi-stakeholder cooperative is also often more broad than the kind of mission statement needed to capture the interests of only a single stakeholder group, and will generally reflect the interdependence of interests of the multiple partners. (Lund, 2011:1)

Efforts to create MSCs are not a new 21st century invention. The UK's Cooperative Wholesale Society (CWS), founded in 1863 to supply the more than a thousand consumer cooperatives already operating at the time in the UK, carried out one of the first attempts to bring together worker and consumer members; the challenges were soon evident as this excerpt from an Economic and Social Consultative Assembly report reflects:

For some time there were difficulties with the British CWS which had its own creameries in Ireland: was the purpose of the creameries to market the produce of the Irish peasant on the best possible terms, or was it to supply butter to British consumers at the lowest possible price? The conflict of interests led Plunkett and his colleagues to resign from the Cooperative Union and found the Irish Agricultural Organization Society in 1894. (ESCA, 1986:525)

The issue of "fair prices" is still largely unresolved today as will be discussed when introducing the case studies in this chapter. Nearly a hundred years after the CWS was founded, one of such attempts also took place in France in 1959 through an agreement between the national agricultural and consumers' cooperative organisations. A commission was set up to report on the difficulties encountered, summarised below as follows (Reymond, 1964):

1. The system proved unwieldy for handling operations through the central organisations and was recommended that the largest number of transactions were better carried out locally.
2. A process for ensuring compliance with quality standards and agreed prices had to be improved.
3. Price-fixing was a long-standing problem, and despite being in a closed, cooperative "full circle", ignoring the normal market to negotiate prices proved impossible.
4. Price variations complicating the purchasing side of the relationship.
5. There was a fear of damaging existing relations between suppliers-dealers.

The above points highlight how cooperatives did not exist in a policy or economic vacuum, but as today, they mainly struggle to survive in capitalist societies ruled by the rules of the market. Nevertheless, the French commission noted how the will to succeed from both sides was a significant strength of the model. That ideal endured, at least at the theoretical level, and more modern cooperative thinkers continued to write about the economic benefits they identified would occur when linking cooperative production and consumption efforts:

[...] if a considerable proportion of farm crops could be sold directly by farmer-owned enterprises to consumer-owned ones, the 'spread' between what farmers receive and what consumers pay would amount simply to the costs of processing, transportation and sale. (Voorhis, 1961:83)

Despite the apparent conflicting interests from producers/providers and consumers that MSCs try to reconcile, frequent cases of cooperatives extending their membership and thus the range of objectives in the membership, currently exist in other sectors other than food. An example of this is the case of mutuals such as saving cooperatives that include members with completely opposite interests: savers and borrowers (ResPublica, 2012); but it has been argued that interest harmonisation between savers and borrowers is facilitated by the fact that in the course of time, most members turn from depositors to borrowers and vice versa (Münkner, 2004). This change of identities is not as common in food, although all farmers are also consumers, and in MSCs – as the case studies presented below will illustrate – members are given opportunities to embody different identities as consumers, producers, workers or volunteers (Kindling Trust, 2012). Leviten-Reid and Fairbairn have also challenged the negative predictions that transaction cost theories make of MSCs and have proposed a new framework based on a “governance of the commons” theory to show how the MS model can be efficient and effective (Leviten-Reid and Fairbairn, 2011). Theories of the commons normally refer to the challenges of managing common pool natural resources, such as rivers, fisheries, forests and shared irrigation systems (Ostrom, 1990). But this model has also been applied to worker cooperatives in capitalist societies, proposed by some authors as “labour commons” that generate commonwealth through their practices (Vieta, 2010).

In this context of the commons, evidence from Italy, the first country with MS cooperatives providing social services since 1991, shows that a multi-stakeholder cooperative is not a zero-sum game — one cohort of members does not need to win to the detriment of others (Borzaga and Depedri, 2010). In this context, Mooney has highlighted how the ongoing ‘*rationalisation of an antagonistic economic relationship in its formulation of “producer groups” and “consumer groups” who simply carry on the battle in another sphere*’ is divisive (Mooney, 2004:86); it is also against the original cooperative vision that aimed to create an organisational

structure that could cover interests and needs for a common good.

Münkner has called for the introduction of MSCs as more efficient and locally embedded providers of public services but also because they represent '*new and attractive forms of cooperation in times where the numbers of registered cooperatives are steadily shrinking as a result of mergers*' (Münkner, 2004:50). For Münkner, the fact that MSCs are emerging all over the world is a sign of how conventional rules of cooperation are outdated and are being reinvented to '*maintain organised self-help as a relevant answer to current problems in times of rapid change*' (Mooney, 2004:65).

In similar lines, Michael Bauwens, the founder of the Peer to Peer Foundation (P2P) has also stated the limitations of current cooperative models:

The problem with the capitalist market and enterprise is that it excludes negative externalities, [both] social and environmental, from its field of vision. Worker-owned or consumer-owned cooperatives that operate in the competitive marketplace solve work democracy issues but not the issues of externalities. Following the competitive logic and the interests of their own members only, they eventually start behaving in very similar ways. (Bauwens in Johnson, 2014)

Other cooperative thinkers share Bauwens's concerns over the social and environmental externalities ignored by private companies and how cooperatives are copying the same steps in order to be able to compete financially. In 2014, Thomas Gray called for the formation of MSCs as a way to overcome three key historical cooperative tensions: (1) participation and democracy versus efficiency and capitalism, (2) localism versus globalism, and (3) production versus consumption (Gray, 2014b). Gray suggests that MSCs can help ease these tensions while also offering an integrative organisational structure that can automatically internalise the current externalisation of human and environmental costs involved in food production and consumption (Gray, 2014b). These tensions are similar to the ones earlier identified by Mooney (2004).

Lund has also studied modern MSCs in food and farming in the context of the emerging concept of value chains (Lund, 2012). In contrast to the dominant notion of supply chain, the development of the concept of value chain provides a framework for indicators beyond economic transactions; this is a key consideration in food production and consumption since these activities involve many cultural and social aspects such as taste, identity, connection with nature and community, etc. that are ignored in financial exchanges (Baggini, 2014). As opposed to other actors who predict unavoidable conversions of MSCs to private firms due to complex governance structures and cumbersome decision-making processes (Lindsay and Hems, 2004),

Lund offers a rationale for seeing membership heterogeneity as a strength rather than a barrier for efficiency (Lund, 2012). By fostering long-term relationships rather than punctual commercial transactions, Lund affirms MSCs can be transformational and overcome the higher transactional costs that traditional economic theory would expect from the involvement of several parties (Lund, 2012).

As Lund, Bauwens draws on the idea of “value chain” but goes beyond Lund and Gray by calling not only for MSCs but for a more specific new model that has been labelled ‘Open Coops’. This model combines multi-stakeholdership and the co-production of the value chain by everyone affected by a provisioning service. Bauwens believes MS is the cooperativism of the future and can help overcome co-optation trends in conventional cooperatives. The Open Cooperative framework is introduced in the next section, then investigated throughout the chapter and used to analyse the case studies presented.

7.2 The Open Cooperative Framework

So far, the ACs discussed in Chapter 5 and 6 had a conventional membership with only one category of member: farmers. This current chapter attempts to move the analysis of ACs a step further by studying case studies of MSCs. For this purpose, the need for a more specific theoretical lens was identified. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Open Cooperative (OC) framework was selected as an appropriate lens as it has emerged from pro-commons and globally connected social movements and thus, adequately suited to analyse the social movement phenomenon that the MSCs discussed in this chapter are themselves part of (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014; Bauwens in Johnson, 2014).

The open economy movement fights the increasing privatisation and commodification of knowledge, especially in the context of the internet age (P2P Value, 2016). Open economy activists are working to develop commons-based models for the governance and reproduction of intellectual abundant immaterial resources (e.g. software, apps, etc.). At the same time, the P2P Foundation is working to link up with the cooperative movement as they see cooperatives as the ideal organisational type to develop a reciprocity-based model for the “scarce” material resources we use for reproducing material life (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014). The vision is for the surplus value to be kept inside the Commons sphere itself, creating a merger between the open peer production of Commons and cooperative ways of producing value: “it is the cooperatives that would, through their cooperative accumulation, fund the production of

immaterial Commons, because they would pay and reward the peer producers associated with them” (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014:358). In this context, the OP framework calls for the evolution of the conventional cooperative model across four simultaneous dimensions (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014):

1. Open Cooperatives should include their objectives in their own statutes, and their work should be aligned towards the common good, integrating externalities into their model.
2. All people affected by the activity should have a say (this is the specific multi-stakeholder nature of Open Cooperatives), practising economic democracy.

As Bauwens has pointed out, these two characteristics already exist in the solidarity cooperatives – which is another name used in the literature to refer to multi-stakeholder cooperatives (Lund, 2012) – such as the popular social care MSCs in Italy and Canada. The P2P Foundation framework advances two extra practices that MSCs have to incorporate in order to become meaningfully transformational (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014)

3. The cooperative must co-produce commons for the common good, whether immaterial or material.
4. The final requirement is a global approach, to create counter-power for a global ethical economy consisting of cooperative alliances and a disposition to socialise its knowledge.

For a more detailed rationale on the use of the Open Cooperative (OC) framework for the specific analysis of MSCs, please refer to Chapter 4. Table 4.1 illustrates how this choice fits in with the multilevel theoretical framework used in this research. This current chapter presents interview and document analysis data. Interviewees were members of the four cooperatives used for the case studies and representatives of civil society organisations working with these MSCs. The next section introduces the four case studies from UK and Spain; data are then discussed in the framework of Open Cooperatives, followed by an analysis of the theoretical and practical implications for ACs and farming policy.

7.3 Case studies

In this chapter, four case studies, two from the UK and two from Spain are presented. As discussed in Chapter 4, these two countries have a remarkable set of differences and similarities (historical, political, economic, etc.) that offer an interesting combination to study agrarian cooperativism from many perspectives. In Spain, collaborations (some informal, some more

structured) between consumer associations and groups of farmers have been going on since the 80s and have been discussed in academic literature (Alonso Mielgo and Casado, 2000). Multi-stakeholder experiments in Spain have grown exponentially since the beginning financial crisis in 2007/08 (Calle and Collado, 2010; Saravia Ramos, 2011). In the UK, the literature on MSCs is pretty much non existing, but initiatives based on MSC values are also emerging (Cultivate Oxford, 2016), although only one food and farming cooperative legally registered as a MS was found (Manchester Veg People, 2014) and was taken as a case study. The other UK case study is actually legally registered as an agricultural workers' cooperative, but giving their strong links with their consumer members and the rarity of their legal form (as there are hardly any worker cooperatives in the farming sector), they are considered as a MSCs for the purpose of this analysis. The next section introduces the four case studies from UK and Spain and data are then discussed in the framework of Open Cooperatives.

7.3.1 UK case studies: Manchester Veg People and OrganicLea

Case study I – Manchester Veg People

Manchester Veg People (MVP) is a MSC based in the Northwest of England, the cradle region of modern cooperation, also home to Co-operatives UK, the representative body of cooperatives in Britain. Manchester is one of UK's largest cities with a population of 2.5 million people; despite its size, before MVP started trading, Greater Manchester had one of the lowest levels of access to locally produced food in the country as well as being situated in the region (North West) with the lowest number of organic farmers (Kindling Trust, 2012).

MVP was the result of a still on-going collaboration that started in 2007 between the Kindling Trust and a small group of producers and two buyers that were exploring how to best coordinate their demand. Their aim was to develop '*a new model for the local food supply chain*', MVP's strapline being: '*Keeping it fresh, organic and local*'. At the time of writing, MVP's membership comprises of five growers and 20 buyers (including restaurants, caterers and public sector organisations) and at the time of writing, four worker members. Apart from one producer who is over 60 years old and a third generation farmer, all other MVP's growers are younger people new to farming, a remarkable fact when considering that only 12% of UK farmers are aged between 25 and 34 years old and around 41% are over 50 years old (LANTRA, 2011).

Although the project started with no funding, MVP then received financial support and advice for the development of the cooperative, especially around research to develop the structure,

membership documents, policies and other background material. The cooperative received £23,500 from the UK Lottery Making Local Food Work Programme²⁸. This sum funded the development process, the coordinator's salary and other costs including early distribution costs, branding development and website, packaging, registration costs and the writing of a report to document the set up process and share best practice (Kindling Trust, 2012). The Rural Development Programme for England (partly financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) awarded MVP a grant for a coordinator for 18 months and 40% towards capital items to help expand the range of the products offered through the cooperative. Other supporters that worked with MVP and helped them through their setting up stage include the Cooperative Enterprise Hub, Plunkett Foundation and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (Manchester Veg People, 2014).

MVP self-describes on its website as '*something different*'. They indeed are so as MVP is the only MS food cooperative in the UK that links farmers and buyers. MVP was originally registered as a company limited by guarantee due to the constraints that the withdrawable share limit of £20k per member posed (this limit was national policy at the time but was raised to £100k in April 2014). MVP's early engagement with Co-operatives UK and Making Local Food Work (a five-year Big-Lottery funded programme run by a consortium of organisations to improve the sustainability of community food enterprises) expanded their network in different directions and were soon referred to Somerset Cooperative Services (SCS) to discuss their vision of forming a cooperative with weighted voting. In 2009, SCS, a Community Interest Company based in the South of England, became a sponsoring body able to register Industrial and Provident Society cooperatives with a new model of cooperative rules also known as the "Somerset Rules". These rules provide cooperatives with more flexibility than other existing model rules as they enable a heterogeneous type of membership while strictly adhering to all the cooperative principles (Somerset Cooperative Services, 2009). In MVP, the voting is weighted as follows: 45% for growers, 30% for buyers and 25% for workers. Weighted voting avoids replicating the power imbalances characteristic of the conventional food system; so far they have not had the need to vote as all decisions have been reached by consensus decision-making processes. Prices are calculated by adding 35% mark-up to cover the running costs of the cooperative to the cost of production of each crop (including seasonal variations).

As opposed to other local food schemes and cooperatives that buy produce from non-members to ensure they meet demand and a more varied offer, when MVP started, they did not buy in

²⁸ Making Local Food Work was a £10m programme that run from 2007 to 2012 to support the general public to take ownership of their food and where it comes from by providing advice and support to community food enterprises across England.

from non-members. They work to support buyer members to create more seasonal menus, but buyers can and still do use other suppliers, which as it will be discussed in the next section can create difficulties for MVP's growers due to the cost of dealing with small orders. Recently, MVP has started to sell to non-members (at a higher cost) in order to increase demand.

In 2014, MVP and the Kindling Trust received funding from the charity Ashden Trust to carry out a pilot project with three public sector organisations over a year with the aim of introducing more local organic vegetables on their menus within existing budgets (MVP, 2014). Supplying public institutions is one of their main strategies to scale up and democratise access to both organic and local food. MVP also serves the University of Manchester – their biggest buyer so far – that became a member in 2010; they started ordering for one of their kitchens and at the time of writing, MVP serves salad leaves for all their halls of residence plus 18 of their 28 campus outlets. Their unique combo of local and organic defines both their identity but also the main selling points of MVP in Manchester. By only selling locally grown produce (defined as 50 miles within the city centre, meaning short travelling distances) plus the fact that the produce is picked to order the day before delivery, MVP guarantees freshness, an attribute that translates into quality but also into a longer window of time for chefs to use the produce, thus, reducing waste.

In summer 2015, in addition to this stream of work with farmers and restaurateur buyers, MVP started a parallel venture selling veg boxes directly to consumers. The boxes are delivered to three hubs to save transport costs and consumers collect them from there. This part of the enterprise does sometimes sell produce from non-members in order to provide a more comprehensive range of vegetables on offer. They aim to incorporate fruit and other products such as dairy items in the future.

Case study II – OrganicLea

OrganicLea is a workers' cooperative based in North London following organic and permaculture principles and fostering strong worker and stakeholder engagement as part of their objectives. OrganicLea's workers' cooperative status is a rare legal form in UK farming, one of the very few of its kind in the country. The combination of its governance model and production approaches makes OrganicLea a fairly unique case in UK agriculture.

The OrganicLea project started back in 2001 on an acre of once-derelict allotment land in the river Lea's valley that inspired the cooperative's name. This valley has a long farming tradition,

as for centuries settlers have made the most of the fertile soil by the river and the area became known as the bread basket of London. Being based in Greater London, OrganicLea's vision from the beginning was to produce more "food for the city, in the city". Originally, OrganicLea had mainly a social focus, hosting events and courses and operating as an allotment, selling surplus only occasionally.

But in 2006, following a desire to contribute and bring to reality the newly born concept of the 'local food economy', the Hornbeam Centre and Cafe was opened, becoming one of the first local food hubs in the country and with it, regular trading commenced in its weekly market stall. The activities of the Centre developed even further after funding from the Big Lottery's Making Local Food Work programme was received in 2008. New initiatives included the still ongoing weekly veg box scheme (that at the time of writing had around 380 subscriptions) and the innovative Cropshare scheme that enabled local gardeners and allotment holders to sell their surplus to the project's outlets, including three market stalls. Roughly at the same time, OrganicLea took over the next-door former Waltham Forest Council owned plant nursery that vastly increased the range of crops that could be grown and traded. They estimate around 160 volunteers and trainees learn horticultural skills in their farm every year. The cooperative employs 17 members who work in production, distribution and training. Additionally, they also create paid employment through their extensive outreach programme running food growing sessions at local schools, children's centres, community centres, sheltered accommodation sites and housing associations (Land Workers' Alliance, 2015).

Nowadays, OrganicLea continues to emphasise the fact that their work in agriculture goes beyond food growing and they synthesise their wide range of activities in four main interrelated streams: 'We grow food', 'We sell food', 'We help you grow' and 'We work for change'. Their broader policy and political work and activism involves connections with wider networks, such as the Community Food Growers Network and the Land Workers' Alliance, the new union that represents small and medium scale farmers who follow environmentally friendly growing practices. OrganicLea is also part of the international food sovereignty movement, a connection formalised through the Land Workers' Alliance's membership with Via Campesina.

In 2015, OrganicLea set up a 'FarmStart' Project to support new entries into farming, following the lead of the Manchester-based Kindling Trust. FarmStart Manchester was the UK's first such initiative, based on successful models in Canada and the US that aim to help people aspiring to make a living from organic farming, or what OrganicLea refers to as: '*growing new growers*' (OrganicLea's website, 2015). OrganicLea has received funding and support from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Enfield Council and Haringey Council for this project that aims to create

at least six new incubator plots for new growers. As it will be discussed further later in the chapter, OrganicLea's case intertwines issues of access to land, feeding growing cities and the potential role of cooperativism in food and farming.

7.3.2 Spanish case studies: Actyva and Esnetik

Case study III – Actyva

Actyva is a MS initiative based in Cáceres, a city of Extremadura, a region located in Western Spain. Extremadura is one of Spain's 17 autonomous communities, with a mainly rural character, the fifth largest by area but the twelfth in terms of population numbers, with only over a million inhabitants.

The idea for the Actyva project originated in 2010-2011 when unemployed and at risk of exclusion members of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) – a long established union based on anarcho-syndicalist principles – decided to create a formal structure that could help them cover not only their own needs but also those of people around them. Extremadura has the highest rate of undeclared or shadow economy in the country at 31.1% (6.5 percentage points higher than the national average) with over 30% of unemployment (GESTHA, 2014). Actyva aims to offer both a channel to help people out of the 'submerged economy' and a model that can be replicated.

As opposed to MVP, Actyva did not receive any external funding for its development and relies on members' joining fees and investments; however, Actyva does deliver information about subsidised training courses to members. The cooperative aims to realise a model of local sustainable agriculture that follows agro-ecological and food sovereignty principles, based on mutual aid and networking and aims for social, economic and environmental sustainability. Spanish organic farmers have found bigger and more lucrative markets for their produce in northern Europe (Pratt and Luetchford, 2014:133), but Actyva's mission is to keep agroecological produce local, only exporting to Europe surplus of products with saturated markets in Spain. Other conditions for export is only selling to like-minded, politically aware buyers that align to solidarity economy practices.

Actyva's two main food initiatives are Big Brother Bio-Farming (BBBF) and '*Cáceres para comérselo*' (that could be translated as '*Caceres, so good you could eat it*'). BBBF, also called by some members '*the big brother of organic farms*', is an online platform that facilitates and

encourages small organic producers to live-stream activities happening in their farms as well as providing online courses and spaces for consumers and producers to create and develop regular contact. The name not only refers to the fact that consumers can watch what happens in the farm but also plays with the Spanish traditional street retailing expression of the three Bs: *'bueno, bonito y barato'*, which translates as *'good, nice and cheap'*, challenging the assumption that organic food has to be expensive or only for “discerning customers”. In conjunction with BBBF, *'Cáceres para comérselo'* was launched in March 2014 with the aim to support small agro-ecological local producers in their marketing and distribution activities. The aim of this programme was to sign up 300 households for a weekly vegetable box and to become members. Deliveries were going to go not only to households, but also to members' workplaces, in order to concentrate demand, increase impact of sustainable consumption and reduce delivery costs and emissions. The initiative was paused at the end of 2015 as the target was not reached and the members are considering different options on how to move this project forward, which are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Case study IV – Esnetik

Esnetik is a non-for-profit MSC based in the Basque Country. Esnetik was formed as a response to the marginalisation of local traditional shepherds that were being locked out of their conventional routes to sell their milk. These shepherds were being dropped by larger milk-collecting companies or cooperatives either because they were out of a main collection route or because they focused too much in milk quality rather than quantity. Esnetik started selling sheep-milk products in May 2012; Esnetik continued to grow and at the time of writing, the MSC employs three full time workers and a part time driver for deliveries and collections. The meaning of the name Esnetik comes from the Euskera language and is made up of two words: *esneki* (dairy) and *etika* (ethics). Esnetik likes to present itself as a cheese composed of the following slices: their diverse membership, philosophy and traditional food preparation methods. The members of the cooperative are shepherds, consumers, workers and collaborating organisations (a combination of NGOs, local authorities and rural development organisation that were approached with the aim of bringing closer the urban and the rural dimensions of food production and consumption), around 200 people in total. At the moment there are five shepherd members in Esnetik. This MSC buys 100% of their production at a fixed, fair price agreed by the shepherds, and they all receive the same price regardless of volume produced or their location; this was in contrast to their previous situation, when they were offered very low prices if they were off the main collection route, and in some cases, were refused to even have their milk collected. Some of the producers milk by hand, and in general have a traditional way

of production that does not fit the industrial model that values quantity of litres as it lowers transporting and processing costs.

Esnetik sells as much of its produce (cheese and yoghurt) as possible to its consumer members (individuals and consumer groups) and the rest gets sold to a milk parlour; Esnetik covers the price difference between the price agreed with the producers and the price the milk parlour is willing to pay. Their objective is to grow their network of consumer members so demand is enough to process more milk in Esnetik and sell less to the milk parlour.

Five members form the management board: two people representing producer members, two representing consumer members, plus a social movement group representative. At the time of writing, the supporting organising sitting on the board was the Basque farmers' union EHNE Bizkaia; this union was instrumental in making the Esnetik project into a reality. Additionally, other civil society organisations and local authorities are also supporters and members of the cooperative.

Esnetik has close links with two movements that also inform their practice and operations: the food sovereignty movement and REAS, which is the “Red de Economía Solidaria y Alternativa” (Network for Alternative and Solidarity Economy). Being a cooperative, it was easy to assume that the cooperative principles would be core to Esnetik; however, in order to avoid wrong assumptions, participants were asked to express what movements and principles they identified with more. It was interesting to learn that REAS has six principles that along with feminist and food sovereignty ones are more central and core to the *raison d'être* of Esnetik than the cooperative principles in themselves.

The cooperative fosters diversification instead of specialisation, an approach that supports new people with fewer resources into agriculture: Esnetik has noticed that a key barrier to enter the livestock sector is the large amounts of money that new entries have to invest. By not pushing shepherds to increase quantity but fostering instead diversification and production of diverse crops for self-consumption, Esnetik promotes an agroecological model that can help new producers make a living in a more sustainable way.

7.4 Can these MSCs be considered “Open Coops”?

This section analyses the findings from the four case studies presented. The following analysis is structured according the P2P Foundation's four requirements for ‘Open Coops’ discussed at the beginning of this chapter, namely: integrating externalities into their model, practising

economic democracy, co-producing commons and having a global outlook (Ajates Gonzalez 2017a). Each heading discusses a selection of the most relevant practices from the case studies rather than a list of practices for each of MSCs presented. Later in the chapter, the associated theoretical and practical implications for ACs and farming policy will be examined.

7.4.1 Internalising negative externalities

Financial externalities

As discussed in Chapter 1, farmers get an increasingly small percentage of the profits generated in the food supply system (DEFRA, 2012). Pricing is a thorny issue, not just for MSCs but also for the whole sustainable food movement (Pratt and Luetchford, 2014). The debate on the idea of a 'just price' has been going on since at least the time of Aristotle (Pratt and Luetchford, 2014:34). The multi-dimensional character of sustainability and the multiple meanings of food mean that fixing work, inputs, impacts (environmental and socio-economic) and values into a price is a daunting task with no easy method (Sustainable Food Trust, 2013). MVP's attempt to develop a still outstanding pricing formula has proved to be a task more challenging than expected. Nevertheless, by having this debate, these MSHCs are redefining and relocating value, raising questions about who enjoys the benefits of its creation; questioning whether that value is economic, social or other (Pratt and Luetchford, 2014:13) and disentangling the significance of money and monetised value in closer trading relations.

Despite being paid a fair price for their products, beginnings are hard, especially for farming businesses, and as one of the MVP members pointed out below, despite efforts to coordinate joint deliveries with other members, there was a tension between their vision and the costs of some of the initial deliveries:

The orders from MVP have been very small, so when we've been driving them to the unit, which is the other side of Manchester is actually costing us because there is nearly nothing at the back of van, but we do it because we are committed to the vision. [...] Once we get to the kind of volumes that there's potential for, then suddenly we'll have £1000k at the back of the van rather than £60. (MVP member)

Actyva in turn is trying to go beyond conventional capital by being involved in the alternative currency movement and being members of the Community Exchange System used by many Spanish MSCs (Red the Cooperativas Integrales, 2016).

Another difference in the case studies refers to their approach to organic certification. MVP's

produce is organic certified, plus their buyers also display MVP stickers in their premises to communicate their participation in the cooperative to consumers. This raises both their returns and prices and also gives them a competitive edge as the only producers of local organic food in Manchester. In contrast, Actyva opted for a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). Each strategy comes with associated benefits and risks. As discussed earlier, information about the invisible attributes of food is increasingly important for consumers, and as a result, this information has also become a selling point that needs to be communicated somehow. From a sociological perspective, Becker has discussed how physical objects get their character and meaning from the collective activities of people (Becker, 1998), conveyed, in the particular case of MVP, through stickers. A humble leek suddenly changes its value and connotations when it carries a sticker that says ‘organic’ or ‘MVP’ as it conveys political, geographical, socio-economic and quality dimensions that allow buyers to express their values when buying food (Kneafsey et al., 2013). On the other hand, the sticker becomes the replacement of trust developed through multiple encounters allowed by short distances and familiarity, allowing ‘conversion of culturally defined values into monetary value’ (Pratt and Luetchford, 2014:40).

At the time of writing, Actyva is reflecting on their *Caceres para Comérselo* project, as they did not reach their target number of orders to make it financially viable. They are considering several options, including: supplying restaurants and a catering company serving school menus; resuming the negotiation of a space in the city centre’s wholesaler market with their local authority, with the idea of using it as both storage and distribution point; establish a monthly market; and finally, trying to match the offer to consumer members’ needs more closely, for which they have identified a higher degree of involvement in decision making in the cooperative is key (Actyva, 2015).

Environmental externalities

The ILO has published emerging evidence that suggests that where cooperatives are multi-stakeholder, the capacity for businesses to push negative environmental externalities (i.e. waste and pollution) upon particular stakeholders is diminished (ILO Cooperative Branch, 2012). The topic of fair prices just discussed opens up the complex topic of sustainability since the conventional agriculture these MSCs have to compete with treats human and environmental costs as externalities and thus remain more competitive in terms of price (Gray, 2014b). As suggested by Gray, MSCs offer an organisational structure that automatically internalises human and environmental costs (Gray, 2014b); however, by internalising these costs, they create other tensions related to their financial sustainability as we can see from these MSCs that are struggling to grow their enterprises and remain financially viable.

When analysing these MSCs' approach to sustainability, a dual strategy emerges: first, the MSCs try to minimise and second to internalise normally non-accounted externalities of food production through their growing methods, governance and close connections with their buyers and locality to reduce waste and transport. Their focus on local and community knowledge and ecological sustainability based on long-term views, rather than short-term profits risks their financial sustainability, since they have to compete with other players who do not cover those externalities (Böhm et al., 2010).

These cooperatives have small-scale farmer members using agro-ecological, labour-intensive methods. Their emphasis on locality and seasonality permeates their vision and work, adapting to local conditions, varieties and needs. Esnetik's approach and understanding of sustainability is closely linked with knowledge production and conservation: by protecting knowledge of traditional and small production units, they are also sustaining more environmentally-friendly production as well as livelihoods. All producer members are required to have small herds and a type of local breed of sheep called latxa. Latxa sheep is a breed adapted to the local geography and climate and is fairly resistant and linked with a traditional local method of cheese production. Another requirement is the use of non-GM feed and recycling jars (for yoghurts).

Aspirations of autonomy are intrinsic to Esnetik's understanding and practices of sustainability. Sustainability and autonomy are linked in the way Esnetik members understand organic agriculture but also their direct relation with groups of consumers. For Esnetik, organic production is a synonym of autonomy, a key dimension of the strong Basque cultural identity. Esnetik farmers oppose organic production methods that are based heavily on reliance on external inputs, as this type of organic agriculture is considered a trap that does not change producers' dependency of agri-inputs industries. At the other end of the supply chain, Esnetik also refuses the type of organic production relying on large supermarkets for routes to markets, developing instead a network of trusted buyers (either consumer groups or small like-minded retailers); this approach offers them independence from large distributors as this quote reflects:

The biggest learning that organic livestock has given me is the capacity for autonomy it granted me. If we don't understand that organic farming, that agroecology, are means, tools for the autonomy of farmers, to produce at lower cost of production, then I think we are getting it wrong. [...] That is the problem, that a new organic agriculture is being made, [...] just as dependent as the other one. (Esnetik member)

When asking one of Esnetik's members what sustainability meant to them, they answered:

There is a lot of debate, to me [sustainability] is what allows the producer in this moment in time to live with the maximum degree of autonomy on the one hand, and to perpetuate in time the

continuity of the farm. I prefer not to enter into details, for example, around local produce, zero-km products, sterile debates from my point of view, that at the end of the day, large retailers take advantage of, because they are able to absorb them quickly and in fact they are already absorbing them and local products are part of large retailers marketing. And for that reason I say, myself who am in that struggle, we need to create a complete distribution that becomes an alternative way of consuming for people who want to participate in this process. (Esnetik member)

The above two quotes reflect participants' awareness of the risk of co-optation associated with narrow definitions of sustainability based on simplistic metrics. Some of the members of Esnetik are starting a new separate cooperative to that includes more products beyond dairy ones (e.g. oranges and olive oil from the South of Spain) from like-minded producers. The rationale for this separate cooperative is to be able to provide consumer members with a serious alternative to supermarkets by offering a wider range of products and thus covering more needs. These conceptual tensions are bringing up differences amongst members who have more purist views of sustainability based on localism, especially complicated in a country such as Spain, where the seasons, the regions and the crops are so varied. This final point reflects how definitions are constantly evolving, benchmarks changing and consensus hard to maintain.

For MVP, reducing waste both at the farm and downstream the food chain is one of their main objectives, something they achieve by investing time and resources in maintaining regular discussions between growers and buyers around crop planning, picking to order to ensure the produce is as fresh as possible and working on adapting menus to seasons. In turn, Actyva allocates similar importance to social and environmental dimensions of sustainability, reflected in their BBBFarming initiative and their determination to work with members at risk of social exclusion. OrganicLead reduces environmental externalities by following permaculture principles and growing methods.

These cooperatives are putting efforts to sustain and reproduce the farming population by working with growers new to farming, Actyva through their work with neo-rurals (former urbanites) and MVP by being involved in the Kindling Trust's FarmStart project that is also supporting new entries into agriculture. The FarmStart initiative has now been implemented in London through connections with OrganicLea (OrganicLea, 2015).

7.4.2 Reconnecting: Economic democracy

Food is rich in social meanings, not just nutrients, and the importance of making consumers aware of the invisible attributes of food (method of production, distribution, trading conditions and how beings and the planet were treated along the way) is patent in the case studies. The

industrial food system is often described as “disconnected”; however, as Kneafsey and colleagues have pointed out, never before have retailers been so connected to producers and processors through contract farming arrangements and traceability systems (Kneafsey et al., 2008). The cooperatives discussed in this chapter have identified the areas of the food system that actually need reconnecting, reflected in their attempts to bring together the two weakest links in the food system: small producers and consumers.

As commercial organisations, MSC recreate parallel versions of food systems, creating spaces where producer-consumer relations and expectations must be negotiated, agreed and managed. The case studies challenge the accepted message reinforced by supermarkets that assumes the aims of farmers and consumers are irreconcilable. Furthermore, they call for connected ‘local to local’ networks of food systems, not system, that go beyond simplistic dichotomies of local and global scale and between urban and rural. However, trying to convince others that multi-stakeholderism is a good idea is not easy as these quotes reflect:

When we originally had the idea people said it’s really hard to get even growers get together, never mind getting growers and buyers work together and everybody I spoke to said “no, no, it doesn’t make any sense, X needs to set up two different coops, a producers coop and a buyers coops” and I was saying “but that doesn’t make any sense because then you’ve got total conflict of interest going on and the only way you can sort that out is to bring people together”, and it’s just, I don’t know, it’s funny... [laughs]. (MVP member)

People say you’re mad if you try to reconcile the interests of producers and consumers because people say food producers want high prices and consumers want low prices. Our research has shown that their interests are really, really tightly aligned. And we are told they’re very different hmmm.... (Plunkett Foundation representative)

When asked by whom, the following long but illustrative reflection was offered:

It tends to be the retailers and the processors, the people who keep them apart. And our view is if you connect the two up you tend to get some really innovative examples that can be viable for the producers and convey the consumers with what they want, but so often they are so many layers apart from connecting with each other and having that conversation that people just assume that they have very different views and the cooperative movement is based on the fact, the belief that if you are in a rural community, producer cooperatives are your base because that is where your farmers are and consumer cooperatives operate in urban areas because that is where the consumers are... and that is quite wrong really, that is one of the great regrets, and our founder talked about it, they did not ever reconcile that, they didn’t ever get to a common understanding that you can meet producer and consumer interests through cooperative action. There are still today very few examples of that, which is a shame, is a shame, it makes sense. In theory it makes a lot of sense, but I think people would argue that in practice is pretty difficult. (Plunkett Foundation representative)

In conventional food systems, buyers/customers weigh up economic reasons to decide whether to exit a trading relationship, normally doing so in an indirect and impersonal way (i.e. not

picking a product from a supermarket shelf or a catalogue in the case of buyers). In MSCs, this model is turned on its head, prioritising instead the option of voice over exit (exiting the trade relationship) (Hirschman, 1970); by institutionalising the voicing of concerns and disagreements, economics become politics and social relations whilst the indirect and impersonal approach of supermarkets becomes direct and messy. Trade relations become more personal, identities are known and interdependence is not only acknowledged in principle but also in the governance of the cooperatives through weighted voting. They also remove distant anonymous shareholders from the equation, as members are local to the cooperatives.

The model involves a certain degree of contact between farmers and buyers, which is considered a strength as it increases their resilience, but also a challenge in terms of time and geographical constraints. If continuing to grow, MVP has already identified a federated model of sister cooperatives as an adequate strategy to expanding without losing close connections amongst members. But from day one, the ongoing challenge is to find ways to get all members at the same table, a hard task taking into account buyers and growers have pretty much reverse timetables. As one of the MVP members reflects: *'[some of the buyers] don't have the time or as much inclination really to get involved I think'* but it is acknowledged that it is not just a matter of timetables, but also ways of working as this quote reveals:

It is a very new thing for these businesses, new in lots of ways, firstly in how they buy from MVP, they're used to just phoning up at 11 o'clock at night at the end of their service and ask for produce that would be delivered first thing the next morning. With MVP they have to order more in advance because we pick to order. Secondly, they're not used to any fruit and vegetable supplier asking them to be involved in the business and thirdly none of the restaurants or the university were used to cooperative work. So it's new in many levels, I think quite challenging, so if their participation hasn't been as great, I think there are loads of good reasons for it. (MVP member)

The above comment reflects the complexity of bringing diverse memberships with not only different perspectives and interests but also routines and timetables together, which some authors believe will take MSCs down the route of conversion (Lindsay and Hems, 2004). However, this can also be seen as a first step and part of the mission of MSCs: coordinating and bringing together unlikely allies in the pursuit of common needs. Authors agreeing with this view suggest that having a long term perspective is key and that with time, rather than risk of conversion, what emerges is a reduced transaction costs thanks to the multi-stakeholder approach that structurally fosters communication, trust and engagement (Lund, 2012).

ACs have evolved in different ways to other practical manifestations of the cooperative movement, especially in comparison to workers' cooperatives. Perhaps the fact that members

in workers' cooperatives have to work together every day makes a difference to the way their relationships develop. Farmers do not have to cooperate daily, in fact, it could be said that hardly ever, since as Wilson and MacLead have described, farmers have delegated the act of cooperating to professional managers (Wilson and MacLead, 2012). The reasons to join a workers' cooperatives can also be different from the outset to those that farmers might have for joining an agricultural cooperative. Farmers have a passive rather than productive relation with their cooperatives, mainly attending meetings and most being distant from the own governance of their cooperative, often with a similar managerial hierarchy to that of private companies. Workers are the most critical part of the business in other cooperative sectors (Sparks, 1994), but in farming, resource-sharing and bulk buying seems to be the key elements. This is reflected in the nearly inexistent number of workers' cooperatives in agriculture. OrganicLea is an exception to this rule. When asked how they compared to conventional ACs, one of OrganicLea's members answered:

There are clearly many differences, lots of differences, but also many similarities. It means we have more in common with other worker cooperatives I suppose. But it's different because we are working together and making a lot of decisions together on a day-to-day basis, whereas in that kind of more classic AC you're coming together for buying or you're coming together for selling or you're sharing equipment but you're not really sharing that day-to-day decision-making [...] it's hard to compare, but definitely the workers' cooperative element adds another layer of working together. But also that means that cooperative relations are the total basis of the organisation, that everyone has an equal voice, everybody has an equal salary. (OrganicLea member)

This quote reflects an attempt to construct less hierarchical organisations and a more horizontal conceptualisation of leadership. This aspiration to create "leaderless" social movements can be seen as their attempt to prove how the democratic and horizontal society they wish to see is not only possible but also feasible (Sutherland et al., 2014). Consensus decision-making is time demanding and messy but is considered by these MSCs an indispensable element of participative economic democracies of food production and provision.

At the same time, having direct interaction with other groups of actors increases accountability as growers and producers know they are going to see each other regularly. This regular contact is also part of trying to introduce a variety of methods of governance beyond attending decision-making meetings. These methods include: the involvement of MVP buyers in choosing varieties grown by farmer members; or Actyva's consumer members informally auditing farmers through farm visits and discussion of the processes and quality of a members' products when compared to agreed standards, part of their SGP schemr. Reconnecting with different groups also utilises the collective intelligence of the membership, as in the case of Actyva,

where marketing experts work with small farmers to advertise the social and ecological benefits of their extensive farming methods.

7.4.3 Co-producing commons

From the environmental commons of soil, water, air, nutrients and energy used to produce food, to ecological public health (Rayner and Lang, 2012), no other topic brings together so many aspects of common goods as food does (Ostrom, 1990; Böhm et al., 2014). In this section, the concepts of local food and environmentally friendly farming are used to discuss how these MSCs' practices relate to the commons.

All the case studies have emerged in the edges of and are dependent on cities, acting as a link between urban and rural actors. When unpicking the reasons given for the geographical delimitation imposed for the produce traded by these cooperatives, short distances come up as intrinsically interconnected to discourses of provenance, sustainability (reducing food miles), quality (freshness) but also as highlighting the value of face to face contact amongst members. Localness is a cross-cutting theme that acts a normative but also identity aspect of these MSCs. At the same time, it uncovers tensions in relation to urban consumers' wants, producers' wages and fairness. Local food is perceived as a common good that needs to be collectively maintained as this next quote shows:

Everybody is talking about wanting local, sustainable food, and “*we want more local food*”, so then you have to bloody pay for it, because you can't expect people to go into a back-breaking, high risk job, you know?. (MVP member)

At the moment the average wage for a farmer is very low and we should be working towards a situation where food growers get good livelihoods for their work. So when we say we are against non-for-profit we don't mean we are against fair livelihoods, it means we are against the extraction of profit from other people's labour, so after paying livelihoods, we re-invest any surplus into the organisation or into similar organisations and that for us it is a bigger social movement I suppose, a bigger drive to try and create a more equal society and farmers and growers should be able to make a dignified livelihood from their labour, which often is impossible because of food prices. But also, we definitely think there is a problem within society, there is a problem within capitalism, just to say you are a business it's not being part of that solution. So we want to create more egalitarian methods and ways of working. (OrganicLea member)

Esnetik's political-economic conception of organic production weaves together the concepts of open knowledge transfer and sustainability:

The problem is that being an organic farmer is much more complex and demands much more training than a conventional grower, why? Because a long trajectory is needed, a lot of experience, whereas in the other agriculture, you are given everything done. When you have a

pest problem, you go to the nearest all-to-typical “pharmacy” and they give you the product. Here, people who have the experience are the ones who are going to transfer how to act against pests, how to treat the soil. (Esnetik member)

Organic agriculture as a result becomes a political act of autonomy both as an approach to production but also with regards to knowledge acquisition. These horizontal knowledge exchanges can be seen to serve three roles: on the one hand, they require farmers to be proactive, shaking them off the spoon-fed dependency spread by industrial farming; on the other hand, those processes of knowledge transfer strengthen farmer networks and interaction as well as collective knowledge in the cooperative. Finally, by fostering informal processes, rather than standard-based approaches for certifications or labels, Esnetik reduces the risk of ‘conventionalisation’ as discussed by Goodman in relation to the new depoliticised versions of the organic and fair trade movements that have been absorbed by large processors and retailers in the food system where the organic aspect is treated just as any other selling point (Goodman et al., 2012).

By engaging civil society organisations in their board and decision-making, Esnetik has both identified a barrier to producing commons and a way to overcome it:

[...] that is it in one word; that is it, to get them to roll up their sleeves. This is hard, you know? It is hard because they are very theoretical on their foundations, even in the area of consumption, it is hard because consumption has been much more theorised than production. (Esnetik member)

The underlying logic is that these organisations are operating in urban areas, and their engagement is something that Esnetik considers key for reducing the rural/urban divide and a bridge to creating partnerships with consumers. Their aim is to produce environmental commons through organic methods and financial commons through a stronger local economy and engaged participation. And linked to local food is the concept of seasonality. A recurrent criticism of narrow localist approaches highlights the fact that local food does not necessarily have a lower environmental footprint if grown out of season (Sharzer, 2012; Baggini, 2014). These MSCs aim to educate members about seasonality as part of their mission, a topic especially relevant to MVP’s work around supporting members to make their menus more seasonal (also a key strategy to reducing costs as produce is cheaper when in season, opening potential scaling-up routes through public procurement by fitting into their existing tight budgets).

This analysis of the emphasis of locality by the case studies has revealed how the rural urban divide is not considered in the Open Coop framework, but is key to food studies. Cosmopolitan localism (Morgan and Sonnino, 2010), a concept discussed in the next section, brings together

the requirements of the Open Coop framework by calling for the creation of strong and healthier local communities and economies with a global awareness and participation that look after their environmental commons (MVP, 2016). The findings suggest there are several localised commons these MSCs aim to preserve: local farming culture, by supporting new entries into this activity; local breeds and varieties as well as cooperative communities, by fostering cooperativised livelihoods.

7.4.4 Global outlook: socialising knowledge

Cooperatives can be described as potential leading actors in shortened food chains as they make possible “economies of scope” or “synergy” versus simplistic “economies of scale” (Marsden et al., 2002). Pratt and Luetchford have highlighted how political positions and political aims can act as a common ground where both consumers and producers with apparently clashing interests can meet and strive (Pratt and Luetchford 2014:181). In this context, this section discusses how the case studies bring political economies of scope and synergy to local food systems.

Evidence from the case studies reflects how MSCs can bring together economic benefits from collective bargaining while also serving as a melting pot for environmental, political, health and livelihood concerns. Their wide range of strategies to attempt change comes from their long-term vision down to their day-to-day practices. Starting with their democratic governance model, the efforts focus on re-localising trade, knowledge and financial returns as well as production and consumption in an increasingly global food market.

The uniqueness of their produce comes from how it is grown and traded, giving them a comparative advantage over competitors who cannot to guarantee either the organic and local attributes neither the values and practices associated with their production, transforming the offer in their local areas. These MSCs are also transforming purchasing practices away from inertia by sharing knowledge about food issues with members and asking them to get involved in collaborative crop planning, farming activities or adapt menus to seasonal ingredients.

Despite their focus on locality, cooperative members interviewed for this study were aware of the dangers of short-sighted “defensive localism”. This term has been defined by Morgan and Sonnino as a *‘narrow, self-referential and exclusive’* alternative to the conventional food system”. Instead, these cooperatives have opted for what the authors refer to as *‘cosmopolitan localism’*, which in contrast is *‘capacious, multi-cultural and inclusive’* (Morgan and Sonnino, 2010 and 2012). Apart from being formed of heterogeneous memberships, these MSCs are also

part of wider networks, connecting with other players at local, regional, national and international level, being active and aware of the ‘global struggles’ striving for a better food system and a fairer economy (for evidence of involvement in wider networks and projects see the following references: Kindling Trust, 2012; LWA, 2014; Actyva, 2015; CASI, 2015; Esnetik, 2015). These practices are partly in line with the last condition for Open Coops with regards to socialising their knowledge, but work to create closer connections amongst other cooperatives needs to be developed. Some efforts in this direction have started, e.g. Actyva regularly attends national meetings of MSCs in Spain; MVP and OrganicLea are collaborating in rolling out their FarmStart initiative; Esnetik is exploring a potential agreement with a cooperative of drivers to reach more consumers and overcome logistic barriers, etc.

As opposed to other actors in the food system who are concerned with offering a unique service to retain a comparative advantage, MSCs *want to be copied* (but not co-opted) and make an effort to share their experiences and business plans to encourage a localised reproduction of their models (Kneafsey, 2015). Esnetik also engages other actors in the cooperative as equals, including consumers, local authorities, rural development organisations, unions and civil society organisations. Their management board is formed by producers and consumers plus a representative from a social movement group. Currently, the regional farmers’ union EHNE Bizkaia is on the board, while other organisations representing social movements and local authorities are also supporters and members of the cooperative. When asked if engaging external partners from social movement groups was a strategy to have external people providing objective advice to the board, the following response was offered:

No, it is because we need to join efforts also from social movements that have to move from cooperation to development of local projects too that can foster the transformative development of society and food sovereignty. (Esnetik member)

In terms of barriers and opportunities, the following quote describes a key example of processes of knowledge exchange that take place in the cooperative and the challenges alternative food systems face in this area:

There is a message around technology and knowledge, that is all privatised at the moment, and we need to share the message with people, that it is impossible to buy both technology and knowledge. It is impossible. If we do not approach it collectively, it’s pointless. It’s in our hands. Look, an example, making a Camembert version cheese like the one we have produced - the first shepherd here developed it and it cost him 10k euros, of course, when they sent him the bill his face went...but he passed on the knowledge for free [to Esnetik]. Then, why don’t we do it collectively? Why don’t we develop alternative products to stand up to industry?. (Esnetik member)

The above points highlight the dual relationship between open knowledge and autonomy that is core to Esnetik's vision and practice. When Esnetik members talk about autonomy, it is mainly referring to autonomy from agri-inputs companies, an aspect closely linked to sustainability and their desire to share their knowledge in order to achieve their vision of close loop production systems and collective consumption networks. The second aspect of autonomy discussed by the members was with respect to large retailers; in this sense, they had developed their knowledge of local networks and potential allies to protect their autonomy in terms of market access and logistics to reach their consumer members.

Being part of wider national and international networks, (e.g. the Solidarity Economy European Network, Via Campesina, Oxford Real Farming Conference or the Land Workers' Alliance), these MSCs are socialising their knowledge and practices with other groups working on related issues (alternative currencies, food sovereignty movement, etc.). For example, MVP's work is "inspired and guided by a radical perspective that identifies the need for significant social change" (MVP, 2016). MVP also has openly shared its original business plan to encourage the growth of other MSCs. MVP operates an Open Book policy and shares their accounts with any member who has been a member for six months. This emphasis on openness and transparency is also followed by Actyva, reflected for example on their willingness to publish their performance online and share the learning from their first months and initiatives.

Through these networks, they are also building a sense of interdependency with other weaker groups of actors in the food system (e.g. the individual consumer) but also with other sectors of the (solidarity) economy. These wider and looser networks interlink '*multiple, rhizomatic grassroots movements*' (Böhm, 2006:167) that enables them to gain strength and share ideas in order to increase their impact but also as their way of reflecting their values in their activities.

Another example is Esnetik's vision for a '*feminist, solidary and sustainable economy*' (Esnetik member). For Esnetik, reaching out to NGOs and local authorities is a way of expanding their impact, not a sign of weakness. For their producers, to be organic means to be autonomous. Autonomy is not understood as unconnected independence; the members' sense of urgency and real awareness that they must become allies of consumers and the environment has shaped what could be termed as an '*autonomous interdependence*' model of interrelations and dependencies amongst producers, workers and consumers in their own terms. Their approach to co-production of knowledge has helped them see and situate themselves as an element of a complex autonomous local system of production and consumption that exists within a bigger system of national and international partners and struggles. This awareness of being but a piece

of a bigger jigsaw puzzle is intrinsic to Esnetik's efforts to transform food systems and scale up solidarity economies.

This is in line with Böhm and colleagues' analysis of grassroots organisations in which the project of autonomy is seen as essentially collective (Böhm et al., 2010). For the authors, autonomy cannot be completely fulfilled, as it is a constant risk of being co-opted by dominant political and financial regimes, creating an ongoing but fruitful tension:

[...] autonomous practices are rarely completely captured by existing institutions. This means they continue to produce the possibility of resistance and change. Thus, we want to conceptualize autonomy neither as a positive force of unconstrained creativity nor as part of the ongoing movement of negative dialectics. Instead, we rather emphasise the antagonistic tension between positive forces of creation and negative dialectical challenge involved with autonomy (Böhm et al., 2010:27)

Debates and struggles about autonomy generate contested meanings and practices, creating opportunities for change (Böhm et al., 2010). In the case of farming, Patrick Mooney saw this potential of ACs as organisations that can legitimise and sustain class struggles, tackle power imbalances and improve workers' conditions (Mooney, 2004). In this sense, Mooney noticed ACs provide the space for those tensions to emerge, become visible and provide innovative solutions in contrast to the neoclassical economics model that in contrast presents those tensions as barriers to profit-making efficiency (Mooney, 2004).

Münkner pointed out that the MSC is not a brand new concept, but "it corresponds to the original mission of cooperatives to render services in all aspects of life (Münkner, 2004). In this sense, MSCs are also challenging modern models of cooperation, especially Actyva that offers other services beyond food. As one of its members put it in these words:

This is not a new approach, but a return to the original vision of the movement 'the cooperative models of the 19th century [...] were very inclusive, all facets of human life; maybe this aspect has been a bit relegated in the 20th century but it is being incorporated again. (Actyva member).

Another effort to create a wider impact is their work to change public procurement has been identified as a key route to a fairer and greener food system (De Schutter, 2014). Actyva is considering this route and MVP is already tapping into this scaling-up strategy, spreading the common good of local, fresh organic food to a wider range of eaters. MVP values public procurement collaborations as they see them as a way of democratising locally produced organic food and an opportunity to scale up their initiative in order to create more jobs in farming.

By aiming for a multidimensional vision of sustainability, they can attract the interest of those interested in specific aspects, e.g. organic, or local or fair pay, educating them later about existing interconnections in the food system. As highlighted by Mooney, '*in the realm of social relations, cooperatives provide an interesting site for the exploration of tensions [...] on the social relations of production and social relations of consumption*' (Mooney, 2004:80-81). Furthermore, they act as urban-rural links and their networks with civil society organisations go from local to global. Nevertheless, local initiatives cannot achieve change unless replicated at a global level, something that Actyva's members are aware of:

Change has to be global, otherwise it does not work. It is something we should have learnt from history. Partial change not only at functional but regional level end up being absorbed; they either get diluted or recaptured by the system. [...] But it is true that [the cooperative model] exists in a capitalist economy where what matters is not what you do but what you have. In that sense, who has the capacity of influence whom? Cooperatives over capital or capital over cooperatives? Because capital permeates, inundates everything. Even ourselves, right? Without people who have it very clear behind the cooperative so that it doesn't itself let go, it is very difficult... it's very difficult really. (Actyva member)

This accepted view of ACs as being "for profit" is reinforced by the current legal framework in which ACs are seen as associations of farmers that pursue economic benefits, disconnecting the cooperative model from its traditional solidarity roots (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012).

7.4.5 Legal aspects

When undertaking thematic analysis to investigate the dynamics and experiences of these four MSCs, the theme of cooperative legislation emerged several times and it is discussed here as it adds an extra layer to the Open Coop framework.

In fact, the legal aspect of Actyva is one of the most complex and interesting dimensions of this case study. At the time this research was carried out, Actyva's aim was to register as a non-for profit integral cooperative. The integral cooperative model is similar to but goes beyond the UK's MSC form, as it not only involves different types of members but also different cooperativised activities. Actyva's mission is to provide members not only with food, but other products and services that members identify as needs. The current 1999 estate law includes the integral form, with at least two principal cooperative activities/members, but few autonomous communities such as Catalonia (where most integral cooperatives are based) and Asturias recognise the integral form in their regional legislations. Extremadura's law dating from 1988

does not include the IC model; however, this might soon change as this law is being updated at the time of writing. The regional government undertook a consultation process and Actyva was approached for their input even before they were legally incorporated but locally active.

Actyva is currently registered in Extremadura as a non-for-profit consumer cooperative with secondary activities, but this legal form is not a fair reflection of the commitment and engagement of different types of members and for this reason they are actively seeking to register as a multi-stakeholder cooperative that recognises the decision making powers of different groups of members. At present, Actyva has two options to achieve this: either register in Madrid under the state law or lobby their regional government to include the integral model in the upcoming legislation. Both routes have been pursued and at the moment members are waiting to hear which one gives results first. In Extremadura they have already introduced a new legal change: the non-for-profit route was not an option for cooperatives in the regional law. They might also be unintentionally changing or at least, questioning, legislation at state level. When registering an integral cooperative of any type, members are asked to specify their activities; when trying to register in Madrid, Actyva stated their wish to have both agriculture as one of their activities but at the same time being non- for-profit, their request clashed with the administration's more conventional idea of what ACs are for. Once registered, if the central administration accepts their request, the cooperative will have a diverse membership of workers, producers, consumers and social members (those at risk of social or economic exclusion).

In the UK, the legal framework is completely opposite to the Spanish one. There is no cooperative legal form as such in Britain, and it is a internal constitution what makes a cooperative (Mulqueen, 2011). In 2009, the Somerset Cooperative Rules were created to specifically support MSCs wishing to weight the votes of their different member types (Somerset Cooperative Services, 2009).

There is a historical lack of clarity about what type of cooperative is best for rural or urban contexts as a cooperative worker from the cooperative development agency that create the Somerset Rules (the specific set of governance rules for MSCs) explains:

Agriculture poses some particular challenges for cooperation, it tends to involve people spread out over quite a large area, maybe working most of the time by themselves or very small groups, so perhaps it is not immediately straight forward to create agricultural cooperatives. And it's also I think the point with the two great traditions of cooperation: workers cooperation and consumer cooperation, sort of collide, but...there's a general assumption that in retail one expects consumer cooperatives and in manufacturing one expects worker cooperatives but in agriculture

it's not all together clear and people have tried different approaches and I think what we decided to do in SCS was to say, well, maybe both stakeholder groups are of more or less equal importance and we want to find somehow a way of balancing the voice of the large number of consumers with the voice of the smaller number of producers, and so that was something that was very much on our minds. (Somerset Cooperative Services representative)

MVP welcomed the new Somerset Rules for MSCs, but the model is still very new and members, especially those not familiar to cooperative working, have to be introduced to it, which requires time and resources. The model helps the cooperative to avoid replicating the system they are trying to change. These MSCs remind us how legal frameworks often lag behind social practices.

7.5 Challenges and opportunities ahead

When applying the four-attribute framework of the P2P Foundation for Open Coops, it can be said that these MSCs meet all the four dimensions at different degrees, however, all the members shared their concerns about the struggle to remain financially viable while adhering to their principles. The case studies suggest MSCs operating in food and agriculture have the potential to generate a diverse range of more-than-economic benefits associated to their cooperative structure and operations. These potential benefits emerge when bringing together actors who are used to thinking they have opposite interests and by questioning the shortcomings of the hegemonic food system, challenging and competing with long-established cultural, legal, dominant cooperative imaginaries and economic norms. The opportunity of the benefits being realised thus often encounter difficulties, creating a push-pull dynamic characteristic of initiatives that are operating in a specific socio-economic context that they are trying to transform at the same time. These benefits and counter-arguments can be classified as follows:

7.5.1 Cultural

The dominant culture of consumer choice is one of the pillars of the conventional food system that is confronted by the MSC model. By mainly offering crops that can be grown locally, these MSCs are challenging conventional understandings of progress based on ample choice. However, at the same time, they are offering choice of new varieties and new local products not available at large retail units. They are also maintaining the local food growing culture by supporting new entries into farming.

7.5.2 Sectorial

MSCs put into question the simplicity of the old reductionist agricultural paradigm characterised by its focus on yields and its clear divided market roles. The integration of different actors involves a process of negotiating expectations and clashing interests in order to achieve a middle point specially around the uncomfortable topic of agreeing a “fair price”; they attempt so by prioritising voice over exit mechanisms, which is time and energy demanding but can be a resilient and sustainable governance approach in the long term (Lund, 2012).

Over the decades, the dominant reductionist paradigm of agriculture has invested a lot of effort and capital to transform peasant growers into business entrepreneurs and change the rural image of farming in order to project a more business-like one. The “get big or get out” motto of conventional agri-businesses aiming for more mechanisation and less reliance on human labour is however not necessarily a synonym of success for these MSCs, especially because one of their objectives is to create more employment opportunities in farming, not fewer. In this sense, these MSCs are challenging mainstream meanings of efficiency and indicators of success. Intrinsic to their multi-stakeholder structure, there is also a challenge of conventional definitions of “member” in agricultural cooperatives by opening their doors to consumers and workers. But their resistance goes beyond membership. Agricultural cooperatives are also pushed to get big or get out. In this context of chasing perpetual growth, these MSCs are proposing a post-productionist version that goes beyond the bulk savings and dividends focus of conventional farming cooperatives.

7.5.3 Legal

Relatively new legal forms for MSC arrangements in both Spain and the UK indicate a different way of doing things is possible and gradually being recognised by the legal establishment, but it is very resource demanding to set up. However, the MSC legal model is new and complex and relies on willingness of members and forward thinking business advisors to propose it to new social entrepreneurs as it is not very practical or convenient to get established as there is a general lack of knowledge and expertise available.

7.5.4 Economic

All the case studies are struggling to achieve financial sustainability, with their abundant social capital compensating for the lack of financial capital. Despite the small scale of their operations, the fact they exist is sufficient (similarly to the organic or fair trade movement) to create debate and help to push higher standards, keep mainstream retailers on their toes (Sanchez and

Roelants, 2011) and maintain the ongoing ‘rural struggle’ alive (Mooney, 2004). However, currently the price of food items is not often related to the cost of production as retailers and subsidies distort this relationship. A formula for pricing still missing; fair pricing and true cost accounting for food and farming are still unsolved problems (Sustainable Food Trust, 2013). Produce from MSCs is perceived as expensive as it incorporates externalities of food production (but less waste means overall price per unit can be the same). Often, MSCs can be not convenient or efficient in the short term, their benefits being primarily long term, struggling to survive in market economies guided by short-termism.

7.5.5 Policy context

MSCs highlight the unfriendly policy contexts for both subsidies and public procurement contracts, while also providing a route to challenge and improve current practices. MVP - and perhaps for Actyva too if its members decide to go down that route – is actively attempting to tap into and transform public procurement easy and long established contracts that seek value for money at the expense of quality and fair returns to producers. However, finding champions with a long-term vision and willing to invest the time to explore how to navigate contract requirements in public institutions and test new seasonal menus that still match their tight budgets is not an easy task.

Despite their local focus, MSCs are – at a local level and a national level through their networks – contributing to the debate on self-reliance versus global food trade promoted by policies formulated by the European Union and the World Trade Organisation (Lang et al., 2009; The Land, 2012). These MSCs do not exist in isolation with the freedom to shape trade to their vision, but in a complex policy arena of multilevel governance.

7.5.6 Academic

MSCs pose a challenge to academia’s often divisive disciplinary lenses. As Goodman and De Puis (2002) have highlighted, agricultural economics is separate from cultural theories of consumption and this division needs to be overcome. In cooperative studies, a new sociology of cooperation in production and consumption has been called for by Mooney (Mooney, 2004); MSCs’ experiences provide a further reason for food scholars to develop this line of research. Data presented so far suggest the gap still has not been covered and cooperatives in food and farming involve a degree of cultural complexity that deserves to be studied beyond reductionist measures such as turnover or size.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter started by reviewing historical attempts to create MSCs initiatives in food and farming and then discussed the current literature on MSCs. The evidence presented shows how the introduction of different types of members seems to both complicate and enrich the cooperative mission, both theoretically and in practice (Moog et al., 2015). The findings suggest that cooperatives in the food sector striving to go beyond economic benefits are moving into the arena of the solidarity economy and linking up with other global social movements. Often, their endeavour to aspire to multidimensional definitions of food sustainability hinders their financial sustainability. Other economic, policy, cultural and sectorial barriers that preclude MSCs' potential to create systemic change were also discussed in relation to Bauwens and Kostakis' (2014) "Open Cooperative" framework. This framework was introduced and applied to four case studies of MSCs based in Spain and the UK. This framework calls for a model of open MSCs that meet four requirements: dealing with negative externalities, participatory democracy, co-production of commons and global outlook.

At a time when capitalism is concentrating not only capital but also its workforce (namely consumers) in cities, MSCs represent an innovative model with the potential to decentralise power in the food system, e.g. diffusing supermarkets' control of food sales. However, the MSC model requires robust efforts from both ends of the food chain: farmers going downstream and consumers and buyers going upstream, adopting more relational ways of trading, based on geographical and temporal connections. The findings from the four case studies presented show that the MSC model is demanding and messy, reflecting a genuine and passionate attempt to realise all the criteria of multidimensional sustainability, linking environmental and health concerns with a call for social justice (Tornaghi, 2014; Kneafsey et al., 2016). Being agents of transformation, MSCs' practices are both oppositional and alternative, putting into practice politics of collective responsibility.

The MSCs discussed are aspiring to transform the food system following two strategies: first, by raising awareness of and reducing unaccounted externalities of food production. Second, by aiming for multidimensional sustainability, creating a wider-campaign space where efforts to address the new fundamentals are coming together. Ostensibly, they seem to have unclear objectives with regards to co-production of commons: are they about realising a closed local economy? Championing greener methods of production? Or providing affordable food? Creating farming jobs and getting a good return for producers? Different from the "monoculture cooperativism" only covering one aspect of members' lives, MSCs exemplify a much more diverse and diffused notion of cooperation, the multiplicity of their objectives being a reflection

of the increasing policy stretching that global food governance is experiencing.

At the organisational level, if principles, governance and outward networks are cultivated, MSCs can become a connecting link between bottom-up initiatives and top-down food policies, a link with the potential to be scaled-up by collaborative public procurement strategies. Their heterogeneous memberships and networks make them complex but also give them resilience, contacts and a voice at different platforms of the multilevel governance of global food policy.

The policy implications of the findings will be discussed in detail in Chapter 9, however, it is interesting to highlight here that the findings suggest an adequate legal framework is not sufficient to encourage MS initiatives due to the bottom-up nature of these associations. Nevertheless, a suitable legal framework can be part of creating the right policy context and can minimise the diversion of much needed cooperative resources. This point also raises questions with regards to current farming subsidies for rural collaboration and if these funds might be better invested in fostering new models of MS cooperation that foster links between rural and urban development. EU policy makers should consider what kind of cooperation they want to reproduce through subsidy support. However, the challenges facing MSCs are not only related to multilevel governance, but also to long established cultural and social norms and expectations around choice, price and progress that affect perceptions of farming and buying habits, both at the domestic level and in public procurement.

8. Fighting the cooperative corner: interrogating alterity

8.1. Introduction

Chapter 7 has discussed how in an AC sector dominated by competition, vertical growth and focus on markets rather than members, some new emerging alternatives in farming still look at the cooperative form as a useful mechanism to realise their objectives, instead of as an outdated model to distance themselves from. Chapter 8 offers a deeper examination of the practices these alternative AC models use to reduce the risk of co-optation by dominant trade dynamics of powerful players.

Policy makers and industry actors are not short of evidence on the impacts that the industrial food system has on both the environment and public health: a spiralling obesity epidemic now claiming more obese people than underweight globally (NCD-RisC, 2016); increased pests and decreased diversity of diets and taste (Lang et al., 2009); ongoing reduction in biodiversity of breeds, plant varieties and wildlife, stagnating yields and damaging soil fertility; standardising purchasing and consumption patterns dominated by a handful of large retailers (Thrupp, 2000; FAO, 2010a). However, these are just symptoms of a dysfunctional system. It can be argued that the biggest challenge of all facing the food system is in fact the continuous co-optation of potential solutions by the dominant regime, which perpetuates current dynamics and suffocates benign alternatives. One example of this trend is the organic movement that first started as a grassroots initiative and gradually became absorbed by large retailers as a mere additional product line (Buck et al., 1997). While the reduced use of chemical pesticides is still a win, the fact that many organic products are grown in monocultures often miles away from their place of consumption, is a defeat that the organic movement is having to negotiate. The fair trade certification has had a similar development, (Jaffe, 2010) with a new label for products including ‘unfairly traded’ ingredients combined with fair traded ingredients attracting criticisms.

The ‘conventionalisation thesis’ has been put forward to explain how oppositional solutions able to catalyse transformation and social justice end up becoming institutionalised by codified regulatory bodies that incorporates them into the logic of markets and consumer choice (Goodman et al., 2011). This thesis analyses how alternatives to the dominant industrial and large-scale food production and retailing units become “conventionalised” and absorbed by the same system they try to convert. Conventionalisation means quantity, standardisation and price become new benchmarks that favour large monocultures and penalise diverse production. Profit

is prioritised over diversity, quickly moving from ‘value for money’ to ‘values for money’ (Lang, 2010).

Data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 revealed a growing trend of co-optation of ACs that are adapting to instead of challenging dominant food system practices. In this context, how relevant is still the legal model of cooperatives for innovative experiments in farming in both Spain and UK? Are the ICA cooperative principles still significant to emerging cooperative models bringing together consumers and producers? What strategies do alternative ACs use to remain alternative in their practices and reduce the level of co-optation by the industrial food system? To complement the four case studies from Chapter 7 and provide a more comprehensive picture of the richness of alternative agrarian cooperative initiatives that have been developing in Spain since the beginning of the 2007/08 financial crisis, two additional case studies are included in this chapter (see Table 4.4), presenting in total data from six case studies:

In the UK:

- Manchester Veg People (Manchester): a MSC of growers, workers and buyers from restaurants, cafes and the University of Manchester who are growing, trading and educating about local organic food.
- OrganicLea (London): a workers’ cooperative growing food following permaculture methods and doing direct selling.

In Spain:

- Actyva (Extremadura): MSC of producers, consumers and a variety of workers including media and PR professionals that support the promotion of good farming practices.
- Esnetik Milk coop (Bilbao): MSC of sheep shepherds, workers, organisations, buying groups and individual consumers.

And two additional case studies:

- Catasol (Aviles) a MSC that is also a worker’s cooperative. All members share the ownership of the land.
- Central de Abastecimiento Catalana (Catalonian Supply Centre or CAT), the food branch of the Cooperative Integral Catalana (Catalonia)

The chapter starts by introducing the concept of third space as a frame to discuss how these MSCs embody and reproduce third spaces to remain alternative. The following section analyses the degree of alterity of these MSCs’ practices and how they operate to still survive financially. Here, innovative strategies and governance approaches are traced through to uncover the

creation of physical and metaphorical third spaces in which new identities and ways of cooperating in food production and provision are negotiated and adopted.

8.2 Conceptualising third spaces of cooperation

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 revealed a wide range of ACs and diverse practices. Chapter 7 provided evidence of how some new ACs are attempting to colonise the spaces between the more corporate cooperatives at one end and the more radical, non-legally incorporated and more informal initiatives at the other end of the continuum. Human practices existing in between two very different spaces of praxis are not new phenomenon, having been theorised long ago in anthropological studies. The concept of *'third space'* was developed by post-colonial writer Homi Bhabha (1994), who interested in the cultural and social impacts of colonisation, theorised the overlapping spaces that some native people found themselves in, new spaces that combined features of their old culture and the one imposed by the colonisers. These hybrid or third spaces were contested territories in which new identities, languages and hybrid cultures emerged, characterised by an *'unpredictable and changing combination of attributes of each of the two bordering spaces'* (Muller 2007:53).

Bhabha's concept of third space has become highly influential and has transcended disciplinary boundaries: Bachmann-Medick (1996) applied the concept to translation theory; Soja (1999) proposed a theory of third space to reconceptualise space and spatiality. The term has also been used in planning, education and linguistic studies (Grenfell, 1998; Gutierrez et al., 1999; Moje et al., 2004). As the next sections will advance, the third space construct is a powerful lens to analyse the practices of MSCs and transcend restrictive and sterile dichotomies in the study of alternative food and farming initiatives.

8.3 Opening up spaces of possibilities and closing gaps to maintain resistance

This section will present the themes that emerged from the data, namely: informal cooperative behaviours, governing third spaces and diverse memberships, MSCs as social movements and the legal implications of the MSC model.

8.3.1 Informal cooperative behaviours and social capital amongst members

Informal cooperative practices are an important element in the culture of these MSCs; the conviviality and commensality of work, eating and cooperating is promoted and reflected in different ways: celebrations, open days, shared-labour days are frequent happenings to encourage regular interaction between workers, growers and consumers members; all of them also offer volunteering opportunities. Some like Actyva, have a strong communications strategy, providing a media platform for their producer farmers to connect with the outside world, become aware of the value of their sustainable practices and take pride on them. An example of the significance of the platform is reflected in the story of one of Actyva's producers, the last goat shepherd of his region who works in a beautiful but very isolated spot and who has accrued a considerable social media following interested in his didactic tweets and photos of the valley where he herds his local bred flock and makes cheese following traditional methods. The informal cooperative behaviours are also part of the rural culture as this quote reflects:

Some are very used to meetings, and to discuss things and make decisions; others aren't, others are more like let's meet, we have a barbecue and we can talk about it then (...). And I think it is because in reality villages do not have decision-making spaces as such, what they had were breaks from work that used to coincide with collective festivities and that was when deals were agreed (...) in villages there is another culture, in areas of a more rural character, because people see each other on a regular basis (...) it is very difficult to separate decision making spaces from leisure spaces and gossip spaces. (Actyva member)

These informal behaviours also take place across regional and national borders. Despite being in two countries, some of these cooperatives connect through wider events such as the gathering of MSC cooperatives in Spain, where Actyva and CIC coincided. In the UK, a connecting forum is the Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC, 2016), an increasingly popular and well-attended 2-day event organised by the Campaign for Real Farming. Held in Oxford every January, the ORFC takes place at the same time as the more conventional Oxford Farming Conference (2014) where the big players of the food system meet (ORFC, 2016). At the alter-ego event, the ORFC, growers, activists and academics working on creating alternative food systems come together to network and share ideas, concerns and information as one of the organisers told me:

[...] it is quite a good example of what we mean by an alliance, because everyone is doing their own thing but they convene long enough to talk to each and then they set up relationships between themselves of an ad-hoc type like Actyva and OrganicLea. (ORFC organiser)

8.3.2. Governance models for diverse memberships

MSCs have a diverse membership, with different stakeholders but also different types of membership options, with some cooperatives allowing consumer members to volunteer hours instead of paying with money. Members can be considered prosumers, because they contribute goods and services but also play a consumer role. Esnetik offers an interesting case, as its membership counts with individual members, buying groups but also six legal entities, including a local council, a NGO and a rural development organisation. Initially those organisational members were supposed to be there only to offer support with the governance and business model, but they have ended up placing orders with the cooperative and thus becoming consumer members too. Some of Esnetik shepherds regularly buy a lot of produce from the cooperative, reinforcing their dual role as producers and consumers.

New words and identities emerge in these cooperatives, a characteristic aspect of third spaces (Bhabha, 1994). An example of this point is the case of the neo-rurals, a term used to refer to urbanites moving to the countryside to start a new life in farming. However, not all neo-rurals connect with these cooperative models as this quote shows:

An ideologised neo-rural is one who has built around ecological agricultural or agroecology, not only an approach to production, but also their cosmovision, to interpret society, a former space perhaps filled by other ideologies, right? Those people are perhaps not as enthusiastic with BBBF [Actyva's Project], but people who are more in the periphery of the agroecological world so to speak, that have not made of agroecology an identitary element, so yeah, those people love it, that there is information but also an informal atmosphere, combining quick and immediate advice to farmers who need it with a medium-long term plan of transformation, not only of agriculture, but also of society. (Actyva member)

These MSCs are emerging in the margins: between the margins of urban and rural areas; between the margins of included and excluded members of society; some even between the margins of the legal and the illegal as it will be discussed later. Some such as Actyva, Catasol and Esnetik were founded to create spaces for producers who were being pushed off the margins of the industrial food system. In the case of Esnetik, the cooperative emerged to meet the needs of shepherds that did not fit the logistic requirements of big industry players. All the producers in Esnetik were in the margins of the dairy system, they were either not on the right route of the tracks collecting milk – which meant they were offered low prices for their milk –or their production was too traditional (e.g. milking by hand), not fitting the rewarded model of more litres at lower prices.

As discussed in the previous chapter, when researching this diverse membership models, the question of how MSCs can deal with this high governance complexity arises, since they have to take into account different stakeholders views and objectives. A way to manage different opinions and bring consumers and buyers in to the decision making process is through weighted voting (e.g. MVP) or weighted representation in the board (e.g. Catasol or Esnetik), which helps these cooperatives to control power concentration in a single type of membership. It is interesting to point out that all the case studies are set to have decision-making by voting according to their constitutions, however, in practice, all of them aim for consensus as their preferred option. In this aspect, they fit the model of leaderless organisations based on more or less overt anarchist ideologies (Sutherland et al., 2014):

What we've done so far is we changed our model from a model where everyone was a director and everyone was involved in all the meetings and from now we've moved to what's called the sociocratic model where we have different work areas. One is production, distribution and infrastructure, one is training, volunteering, one is system change, one is finance and fund-raising, one is policy and these spokes send representatives to a directors' hub that is composed from representatives that are elected from the spokes on a 2-year term and then there are various mechanisms in place to ensure that the decisions come from everybody and that those directors aren't creating the decisions, the decisions come from the entire body. But obviously, the bigger you get, the more difficult that would become, and the harder it would be to have a real sense of everything coming through the membership. (OrganicLea member)

Sutherland and colleagues have discussed how the strategy of rotating roles is used by other grassroots social movement organisations to avoid having dominant leaders taking control and to reduce the risk of domination, conformity and over-dependence (Sutherland et al., 2014). Over-dependence on particular individuals has been reported in the literature as a key factor contributing to the demise of many informal consumer cooperatives (Smith et al., 2012; Caraher and Dowler, 2014). This is not only an issue in terms of the practicalities of relying on just one person to lead a group, social movement or organisation, but involves a deeper ideological rationale, as it is fundamentally against the democratic-participative principles that are the *raison d'être* of cooperatives (Sutherland et al., 2014).

The case studies also adopt network governance (NG), a more humanistic, complex but effective governance paradigm that moves away from conventional models rooted in economics (Pirson and Turnbull, 2011). The idea is to distribute power via multiple boards, checks and active stakeholder engagement. It is argued that NG offers a competitive advantage to organisations as their consumers (in this case also members) can voice information and provide data that conventionally-run companies might not have access to. This exchange of information can help improve services and thus, customer satisfaction (or in this case, member satisfaction) and therefore, organisational longevity. At the same time, NG approaches aim to

foster relationships with members based on voice, not exit (Hirschman, 1970). It has also been suggested that NG reflects models of self-governance universally found in nature and as such, are more able to help reduce the environmental externalities of businesses' activities (Turnbull, 2012; Turnbull, 2013).

8.3.3. Putting the movement back into agricultural cooperative

All of these MSCs follow multilevel crosscutting collaborations at different levels, following the '*act local think global*' motto. They believe that social transition comes from social movements and the social base. As discussed in the previous chapter, these MSCs have horizontal and vertical links with other cooperatives, movements and civil society groups both national (e.g. Campaign for Real Farming in the UK, GRAIN in Spain) and international such as Via Campesina.

The CIC was founded in the margins between the legal and the illegal with money swindled from banks by activist Enric Duran (Kassam, 2014). CIC, the overarching network of the Catalan food cooperative (CAC), is a highly organised network working to transform, not adapt, to the capitalist system. The CIC is working closely with the P2P Foundation developing FairCoop, a global coalition of '*Open Coops*' (see Chapter 7 for more details on the Open Coops movement). This contrast with their strict localised view of the CAC that only operates in Catalonia, balancing space between the local and global action.

From 2006-2008, Duran took out 68 commercial and personal loans from 39 banks, borrowing around half a million euros with no intention to pay the money back; instead, he gave the money away to fund and strengthen community-led initiatives at the margin of capitalism because, in Duran's words, "capitalism won't allow us to create alternatives", so the aim of the group he is part of is to create better parallel financial, health, food, education models etc., that '*make capitalism become the marginal option*' (Duran, 2016). In 2009, Duran, named by the media as "the Spanish Robin Hood" (Kassam, 2014) was arrested; an anonymous supporter paid his bail and facing eight years in jail, he decided to become a fugitive and has been in hiding since, living in voluntary exile but proud of the alternative opportunities his action generated (Duran, 2016).

Another example of these MSCs' relations with wider movements and the contradictions that arise from these links comes from Esnetik. This MSC based in Bilbao is working with Emaús, a local NGO to develop a Fair Trade label for their products that would be a first of its kind for

growers in Europe. An interviewee from Via Campesina shared his concern about how a label could increase the absorption of Esnetik products in conventional retail chains and export markets. Esnetik also organises ‘*mercados éticos*’ (ethical markets). One Esnetik member explained that the main purpose of these markets is: *‘to organise a market and make a lot of noise to get people’s attention, to explain the problems in the sector, try to raise awareness and change a bit consumption habits’* (Esnetik worker).

In all these cooperatives, people from very different backgrounds – many not from farming backgrounds – come together, creating diverse and unlikely groups with a wide range of skills and experience difficult to replicate in more conventional food circles. It is interesting to point out that some of the producers interviewed had been employed in workers’ cooperatives not related to farming before becoming growers; others had shared experiences in trade unions or the green political party, bringing principles, views and practices from the workers’ cooperative movements into farming, a rare find in conventional ACs.

The diverse backgrounds of these MSCs’ members, many new to farming, challenge gender, age and background stereotypes of how farmers should look and sound like. Perhaps, for this reason, these cooperatives are becoming centres of convergence for different issues around land, crop varieties and breeds, seed varieties and control, gender (and gendered Spanish language). For example, one of Esnetik’s requirements for producers is to use the local ‘*latxa*’ breed of sheep.

When asking the ICAO (that is the International Cooperative Agricultural Organisation, i.e. the farming branch of the ICA) about what makes some farmers more interested in the social movement dimensions of cooperatives than others, their view was that:

Farmers get more interested in the civic movement as they are exposed to the outside of their farms and their rural areas; those farmers want to have the more authentic governance system in the cooperative movement. (ICAO representative)

This quote seems to be in line with what is happening in the case studies presented. These MSCs also aim for diversity in their offer of services and products to members beyond food items, especially the Spanish ones. The English cases focus more in offering workshops and facilitating new entries into farming, as it is the case with the FarmStart programme run by the Kindling Trust, the organisation instrumental in setting up MVP. FarmStart courses are now being run to help other people set up similar projects in other regions. OrganicLea was the first one to follow the lead and is, at the time of writing, setting up a sister FarmStart Project in the

Lea Valley in London. The CIC also coordinates a network for education and banking amongst others. This more inclusive approach to cooperation that aims to cover different needs and dimensions of members' lives is more in line with the original vision of the early cooperative movement (Birchall, 1994; Münkner 2004).

Some cooperatives, like Actyva and MVP, are trying to move away from working only with activists consumers, trying to reach out to more people. In the case of MVP, they do so on a regular basis through their relationship with buyers. Actyva developed a '*social membership*' option for members at risk of social or financial exclusion. Others members shared their concerns about only reaching the most conscious consumers and aware of this point, all the Spanish case studies are expanding their offer of goods and services to present themselves as more serious and wide-ranging alternative way to cover needs, starting with but going beyond food into other household products (e.g. environmental friendly cleaners and beauty products).

When consumers become members of these multi-stakeholder initiatives, they are offered a space in which their attitudes to food and their buying and consumption routines can change and evolve. These cooperatives are facilitating the passage from individual reflexivity to the collective action needed to resolve contradictions between values and patterns of daily life that move the action from individuals to collectives (Ostrom, 2009; Brunori et al., 2012; Anderson et al., 2014; Gray, 2014b; Cox et al., 2013), facilitating a shift from assumptions to reflections about food.

8.3.4. Multi-stakeholderism as a legal model

Cooperatives exist in capitalist economies, and in order to trade and protect their members, they have to incorporate as legal entities. This section explores how the case studies negotiate their existence as legal entities with their vision for distributed power and democratic participation.

Having a formalised legal structure can be seen as the first risk of co-optation and corporatisation (Mulqueen, 2012) but at the same time, it can act as a protective tool that more informal food initiatives cannot make use of when conflict arises. As one academic interviewed put it:

Governance [...] and structures and constitutions (they) become very important at times of crises [...] [...] when the informal cooperation (...) is threatened or breaks down, how do you settle those things? I see it as ice on a river, the ice kind of reflects the river and if the river goes away and you just have the ice, it then becomes very fragile, if you just had the structure,

but without the substance that is supporting it, then it becomes fragile, open to demutualisation, to capture, to the kind of corruption we had in the Coop bank, etc. and in the Coop. (UK academic)

Legally incorporating as cooperatives convert groups of cooperators in trading bodies (Mulqueen, 2012) that exist in neoliberal capitalist economies. Many are very aware of that and some have come out with mechanisms to create their own economic spaces or as one of the ORFC organisers put it: *'in the short term farmers have to create economic micro-climates where they can start doing good things, protect themselves from the neoliberal non-sense of the global market'*.

An example of these microclimates is Actyva's and CAC's acceptance and promotion of alternative currencies to pay for services and goods. The alternative currency community is another platform they work and link with. They also have inter-member trading and partnerships with buying groups as strategies that allow them to create new spaces to exchange their produce in more controlled conditions.

Actyva has implemented three interesting criteria to avoid attracting members with a mere interest on financial benefits: they are non for profit and have capped salaries to 150% of the equivalent in the normal labour market; third, they have a cooperative structure and a relational way of working, with democratic decision-making and a list of ethical and anti-sexism principles that would put off those looking for easy and quick way to profit. In Catasol and OrganicLea, all workers are on the same salary rate – a practice difficult to replicate in more conventional models. However, as pointed out by Goodman et al. (2011), these principles complicate their financial sustainability and reproduction, as one of Actyva's member expressed: *'it is like being on a tightrope between pragmatism and idealism'*. In order to survive financially, some of these cooperatives have started to sell their produce to non-members (e.g. Catasol, Esnetik and MVP). Actyva's producers sell part of their produce to other buyers outside the cooperative. Nevertheless, when selling to shops, they aim for like-minded enterprises selling products aligned to their principles.

These cooperatives also have different ideas of growth compared to conventional ACs. Some prefer to limit their growth to a specific geographical area such as the CAC. Others, if successful, see themselves growing in a horizontal legal model into sister cooperatives, as is the case of MVP. All the cases value the flexibility of the MSC model (and the workers' cooperative model in the case of OrganicLea). A CIC member explained how they opted for the MSC legal form as it offered them a more flexible way of existing in the capitalist system while preparing a transition to overcome it.

Another innovative move difficult to replicate by large retailers is Esnetik's introduction of double labelling, which consists in labelling all produce with a breakdown of the price and percentages that go to producers, packaging, processing and commercialising. The pride members feel about the resistance to co-optation that this strategy grants them is transmitted in this quote:

When I arrived it was already in place and it was one of the things that attracted me to participate in the project... Often from the agro-industrial model, many of the initiatives or the language end up being absorbed as their own, they commercialise their own organic lines even if they come from monocultures or far away places from the place of consumption [...]. The local food discourse has also been integrated in the discourse of many big retailers, even if the produce also comes from big farmers, from monocultures following intensive methods, or with no fair pay to local producers. So then we thought that what characterises big retailers is the impoverishment of the peasantry, the more you deliver, the more indebted you become, tightening prices all the time even more and the other conditions in the contract, so they are not going to be able to copy this [...] And when the commercialisation goes over 20%, then they are never going to be able to do double labelling. (Esnetik member)

In summary, the evidence suggests that these MSCs perceive their cooperative legal form as a vehicle to operate in a capitalist economy, but flexible and accommodating enough to be a reflection of their founding principles, philosophy and objectives. The governance structure and practices associated with their multi-stakeholderism and worker democracy mean that the legal form is also being used at the same time as a tool to reduce co-optation and create economic micro-climates.

8.3.5 Cooperative principles: how relevant are they in regulating third space practices?

How do these MSCs feel about the cooperative principles? Are they helpful, limiting or just not transformative enough for them? The answer to this question is something along the lines of: *'we know of them but that is not where we are coming from or working towards'*.

None of the people I interviewed could list the seven cooperative principles even though some were familiar with them and their constitutions included them explicitly or implicitly. One of Actyva's members for example, pointed out that cooperativism is *'implicit but not explicit, our context and cosmovision relate more to social movements, no cooperativism strictly, so that is why it is not there (in the members' mind)'*. Others have come up with their own principles, in the case of CIC, 24 grouped under the headings of social transformation, society, economy, ecology and political organisation.

Esnetik guides itself more as an organisation by Solidarity Economy principles. The concept Solidarity Economy was developed in France and certain Latin American countries during the last quarter of the 20th century in relation to ‘social goods’ or ‘merit goods’. For supporters of this approach, economy revolves around the poles: the market, the State and reciprocity (Monzon and Chaves, 2008). Esnetik is a member of REAS, the Network for Alternative and Solidarity Economy, and aims to follow REAS’ six principles:

- Equity
- Labour
- Environmental sustainability
- Cooperation
- Non-for-profit
- Commitment to local embeddedness

It is interesting to note that cooperation is only one of the principles for the Solidarity Economy movement. The other key pillar for all the case studies presented was food sovereignty and the principles related to it. One of the founding members of Esnetik was also one of the founders of Via Campesina and this link is very strong both in the vision and day-to-day running of the coop. One of Esnetik members felt they had more in common with a *‘feminist organisation for example’* than with the cooperative sector because *‘coops, there are many’* and *‘many just focus on exporting tomatoes without worrying about their environmental and social impact’*.

OrganicLea, as the workers’ cooperative it is, places more importance on the ICA principles. As for the rest MSCs, the evidence seems to suggest that the cooperative principles are an implicit part of their practices but not central to their vision. These cooperatives have grown out of the ICA principles, and are becoming point of convergence for different social movements.

8.4. Multi-stakeholder cooperatives’ practices: generating third spaces and valuing the marginal

The data presented in the previous sections reveal these cooperatives’ efforts to overcome the fate predicted by the conventionalisation thesis discussed at the beginning of this chapter (Goodman et al., 2011). Their endeavours aim to effect long-lasting and transformational change by creating alternatives that are harder to be appropriated by large powerful players.

Sullivan and colleagues have pointed out in their study of social movements, how practices or organisations gaining significance in contesting and escaping the structuring enclosures of dominant regimes often become labelled as ‘uncivil’ (Sullivan et al., 2011), when in fact, many would argue the ‘uncivil’ are the defenders of the status quo. This is the case for example of Enric Duran using money from banks to fund an anti-capitalism movement. Many social movements, campaigners and organisations engaging in contentious politics often oscillate between being perceived as ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’, depending on shifting contexts and the different actors and organisations involved (Sullivan et al., 2011).

Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity and third spaces opens up a window to the fertile environments generated by these MSCs; these ‘*in-between*’ spaces that ‘*provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself*’ (Bhabha, 1994:2). This is in line with the findings from the case studies, setting off on often economically precarious journeys to define new identities and new relationships with nature, people and in ways of trading. Thanks to this contestation of identities and practices, room for reinterpretation and renegotiation opens up in third spaces. Being in this in-between space, reality and temporality fosters creativity, since ‘*cultural production is always more productive where it is most ambivalent and transgressive*’ (Bhabha, 1994:2). This creativity is reflected in for example Esnetik’s double labelling strategy to avoid being copied by supermarkets or in the use of alternative currencies.

Other disciplines have found the concept of third spaces useful, including IT studies. When applied to information technology participatory design, the benefits of fostering third spaces (in between the user’s domain and the technology developer’s domain) have been described as “creating the conditions for ‘*challenging assumptions, learning reciprocally, creating new ideas, which emerge through negotiation and co-creation of identities, working languages, understandings, and relationships, and polyvocal (many-voiced) discussions across and through differences*’ (Muller, 2007:166). As described in the previous sections, new relations and identities also emerge in the spaces created by these MSCs, when different groups of members agree to work together to make the project happen. Peer to peer learning takes place allowing the co-creation of prosumers identities to develop.

In retail, the idea of third spaces has been increasingly appropriated by outlets, especially clothes shop chains, in an attempt to fight digital commerce by focusing on providing experiences to customers and creating spaces that encourage shoppers to visit retail spaces, (Walter Thompson London, 2014; JWT Intelligence, 2014). In food, venues such as the “Third

Space” café in Dublin have emerged in the shape of a social business venture that describes third spaces on its website as ‘*neighbourhood places where people can gather regularly, easily, informally and inexpensively*’ (Third Space, 2012). Bigger players have also entered the third territory; Starbucks has been positioning itself for over a decade as a third space in between home and the office, a place to relax, but also work and hold meetings (Smchitt, 2003).

At the other end of the supply chain, third spaces around food production have also emerged with the rise of urban agriculture, creating new asks and new challenges for urban planning and municipal regulations. Front gardens and public areas become symbolic spaces, often creating conflict between conceptions of culturally appropriateness and legitimate uses of space that stir debate (Schindler, 2012). In this context, efforts by municipalities to separate agriculture from residential uses are interrogated, and the question of what is land for arises.

Despite the explicit reference to the term ‘*third space*’ in the retail context, their conception of third spaces is quite narrow, both spatially (with a clear focus on urban areas) and demographically (organised by fairly homogeneous groups of people); these retail initiatives do not attempt to question and transform the wider systems they exist in. The findings of this research suggest that more transformative third spaces are being opened by these MSCs that bring together not only different actors in alternative food systems, but also across other social movements, such as anti-capitalist initiatives, feminist movements and alternative currency systems. Additionally, the spaces opened up are not only at a horizontal level, but also vertically, linking up with national and international movements such as Via Campesina, the European solidarity economy movement and the Open Coop movement.

The actual label of ‘*third space*’ has been rarely applied to describe people, however, it has been used by the media to refer to the growers of Los Angeles’ South Central Farm. This farm was considered at the beginning of the current century, the largest urban farm in the US, cultivated by urban dwellers, mostly from Latin American descent. During their long struggle to remain in the land that resulted in eviction, they received much media attention (including the documentary film *The Garden*) and were described as ‘*third space farmers*’ as their activities were compatible with the needs of the community and had a combination of “human and natural capital” (Katz, 2006). The farm had a high number of plant species and varieties that were considered and used by their growers not only as food, as conventional commercial farmers do, but also as medicine, for spiritual purposes, infrastructure (for example using cactus patches as natural fencing and food) and companion plants (Peña and Foucault, 2006). By bringing plants and a variety of uses from their cultural traditions, these farmers were making place and making home away from home. Similarly, for some of the case studies presented,

using local varieties was a key principle of the cooperatives. For example, for Esnetik, all the producers were required to use a local breed of sheep as a way to support tradition and diversity.

A second concept that helps theorise the findings from the case studies is the notion of *edge* and the associated premise of ‘*valuing the margins*’ promoted by the permaculture movement (Mollison and Slay, 1991). Permaculture is a design approach popularised by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the late 1970s, often land based and related to food growing, but increasingly applied to other types of projects or dimensions such as furniture design, relationship with time, money or wellbeing (Social Landscapes, 2014). Some authors considered permaculture to be an expression of agroecology, with a fixed set of ethics and principles that are based on interconnections and interdependence of elements in natural ecosystems (Garnett and Godfray, 2012). One of its twelve design principles is “use edges and value the marginal”, based on the idea that productivity and number of species are higher in shared edges or boundaries where two ecosystems come together, as the resources from both sides are available to support life (Peeters, 2011).

The multi-stakeholder cooperative ‘*ecosystem*’ has revealed the importance its members with to living and valuing the edge of and third spaces created between cities and rural areas, between *urbanites* and *ruralites* and the marginal – from people at risk of social and financial exclusion to disappearing breeds and varieties – all have the potential to become active and useful parts of the whole.

Another aspect in which the concept of edge emerges from the data is with regards to the different idea of growth and success these cooperatives have: instead of pursuing the conventional vertical growth strategies preferred by larger ACs, horizontal and distributed growth of sister and networked cooperatives sharing resources are preferred. In the same way, they move away from the specialisation trend that runs through conventional agriculture as another expression of deviant mainstreaming. All of the cooperatives encourage their producers to grow a range of produce rather than focusing on a monoculture. They value diversity in their membership and in their fields.

Bringing together different groups of stakeholders under the umbrella of the commons and of mutual needs and objectives threatens what Ulrich Beck observed as being the basis of the neoliberal project: a conception of divided citizenship (Beck, 1992). In these MSCs, consumption is seen a new political space where ‘*the political possibilities of consumption (are) less than the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism but more than merely a niche marketing opportunity*’ (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002:18).

The evidence presented suggests the case studies are struggling to survive financially while also maintaining their adherence to their principles and original vision. These findings support the counter cooperative-degeneration argument put forward by WIRC (Wales Institute for Research into Cooperatives) and back up the validity of their concepts of deviant mainstreaming and incremental radicalism (Arthur et al., 2008). The concept of deviant mainstreaming was put forward by the team after studying cooperatives for seven years with the aim to capture the internal dynamics of autonomous transformative social ‘spaces’ that try to remain ‘deviant’ and sustain a degree of alterity while surviving in the dominant system, i.e. neoliberal capitalism (Arthur et al., 2008). In turn, the concept of incremental radicalism weaves together the process and outcome of organisations applying deviant mainstreaming; it refers to the organisations’ capacity to inspire others, resulting on more transformative spaces becoming ‘*emancipated*’ and creating the conditions for being ‘*more widely challenging of the processes of domination*’ (Arthur et al., 2008:31).

All the strategies discussed so far are employed by the case studies as mechanisms with three objectives: reduce co-optation, preserve their alterity while maintaining their economic reproduction and spread their incremental radicalism. These three objectives related to Goodman and colleagues’ concerns over usual claims in the literature about how the transformative potential of AFN experiments ‘*rest on the premise that the alterity of locality food networks is separable from the processes of their economic reproduction*’ (Goodman et al., 2011:78). The authors also point out that many AFNs are presented as oppositional even when they still rely on capitalist market relations and/or the estate for their reproduction (Goodman et al., 2011). However, in the case of these emerging niche cooperatives, their deviant strategies and incremental radicalism are opening up small spaces of possibility in opposition to the dominant agri-food regime (Goodman et al., 2011). For example, the diverse expressions of informal cooperative behaviours in these MSCs serve as deviant mainstreaming strategies, since they follow Goodman and colleagues’ argument that AFNs based on relations and processes rather than on fixed standards – such as the fair trade label and organic – are less likely to be co-opted and appropriated by the conventional food system (Goodman et al., 2011).

Aspirations of democracy, fairness, solidarity and participation were fundamental to each case organisation. The cooperatives discussed in this chapter emerged from and are underpinned by these values. In turn, these values are reflected on their ongoing efforts to apply them on a practical level to their governance structures and the way they operate amongst themselves but also with external actors. This influence of values at both ideological and practical levels can be understood as prefigurative politics that push their members to commit to a way of organising and operating akin to the type of solidarity economy and cooperative relations they

wish to see in the wider society they exist in (Sutherland et al., 2014). Those “caring and reconnecting practices” can also be conceptualised within the framework of “ethics of care” that has its origin within the feminist movement (Kneafsey et al., 2008). MSCs’ members are able to articulate their sense of connection to and responsibility for others in the food system, including animals and the environment, through their decisions to participate and shape their practices and those of their cooperatives.

8.5 Conclusion: Distributed governance and distributed economy as methods of resistance

This chapter has analysed the practices of six relatively new cooperatives based in Spain and the UK that are attempting practices opposed to those of conventional ACs and to the mainstream capitalist model of agricultural production. The case studies are part of a new wave of cooperatives born during the worst years of the financial crisis that started in 2007/08. The evidence presented revealed these MSCs’ attempt to colonise the spaces between the more corporate ACs and one end and the more informal and non-legally incorporated food initiatives at the other end of the continuum of cooperation in the food system.

Homi Bhabha’s anthropological notion of ‘*third space*’ and the permaculture principle that urges us to ‘value the marginal’ (Mollison and Slay, 1991) emerged as helpful explanatory concepts to unravel and frame the social innovations that are emerging out of shared *deviant* food spaces, both physical and ideological and in between rural and urban spaces and people. These concepts proved to be a suitable lens to help unravel the complex overlapping of issues and interconnections taking place in these MSCs, blurring the fuzzy borders between producers, workers and consumers; as members, they all consume and many of them contribute in different ways goods, labour and services to the cooperative. In these spaces, there is a more holistic representation of farmers as people with different hats and different needs, people who produce but also consume, challenging simplistic perceptions of growers. For farmers themselves, it is an opportunity to reflect on their own identity as consumers, about what they buy and how it affects their own farming practices.

Similarly to processes of food policy stretching, these cooperatives are stretching both their mission (moving beyond a single-group membership and becoming actors of transformation) and the spaces they represent: they exist as work spaces, learning spaces but more importantly, generating third spaces for cooperation where consumers, workers, buyers and producers can

come together, re-think, produce and reproduce alternative ways of covering their needs. They are relational, open, internally diverse and externally stretched out. In some instances, they are stretching to uncomfortable spaces outside their comfort zone, for example having to negotiate their relation with the administrations and subsidies.

Adopting more reflexive network governance models is another strategy used by the case studies to resist co-optation. The dispersion of power offered by network governance is only an internal innovation within the cooperative. However, these MSCs are also trying to be part of and grow a new economy beyond the private/public, centralised/decentralised dichotomies towards a distributed model. They are recreating historical attempts to elevate cooperatives as f for education, innovation, transformation and communication flows; while on the one hand they bet on a relocalised model of cooperation, on the other hand, they link it to efforts addressed at bringing about wider transformations beyond their regional borders. The most interesting initiative in this sense is Fair.coop, CIC's project to create a global coalition of Open Coops.

As cooperatives, they are reversing to the very original '*world-making*' vision of the movement away from the tame '*shop-keeping*' and "*dividend*" versions of it. They try to distance themselves from simplistic identitary back-to-the-land and '*radical ruralities*' labels, even though some of their members are '*neo-rurals*'. They have a focus on progressive distributed economic models, based on creating decent employment opportunities and livelihoods in rural areas (especially key in the Spanish case studies). They are examples of the infinite creativity of people trying to organise to meet their needs and re-invent their food systems.

Drawing on the concept of '*deviant mainstreaming*' and '*incremental radicalism*' (Arthur et al., 2008), evidence from the cases studies shows how that degeneration of ACs is not a contingent fate, but not an easy one to circumvent. These MSCs are on a tightrope between adhering to their principles, surviving as enterprises and being able to forward and realise their visions of alternative food systems, the economy and society.

This critical approach has offered us an account of the resistance strategies of MSCs in two different countries. These ACs are organising both internally and externally in line with more place-based and reflexive governance approaches that focus on processes and relations rather than on standards that are more likely to be co-opted, as it has happened to some extent to the organic and fair trade movements. These initiatives are normalising less common (such as sharing farmland) and less conventional ways of working and cooperating. Through their activities, they are also trying to resist current processes of abstraction of the supply chain and

agricultural investment, which are being increasingly disembodied in hedge funds and globalised multinationals with a highly untraceable subsidiary structure that obscures accountability. For this reason, it can be argued that these emerging cooperatives are opposite models to conventional farmer cooperatives that use cooperation as a means to perform better in the current system, without challenging it or attempting to transform it.

MSCs offer inclusive umbrellas where struggles, but also skills, energies and hopes, converge. Creative forms of governance and exchange give people, beyond typical classifications that label them as consumers or growers, a new identity as members of connected networks and an avenue for collective action (Ostrom, 2009). Based on the importance of processes, not labels or certifications, the risk of replication becomes minimised as these modes of production and exchange are harder to copy by large players.

Inspired by food systems thinking that goes beyond reductionist and mechanistic models, these initiatives emerge from the awareness of being small pieces part of the bigger jigsaw puzzle that food (livelihoods, taste, tradition, etc.); their starting point is to question whose voices are missing in the current system. The systemic approach of these strategies is characterised by their strong local character combined with a deep awareness of and participation in global struggles. A bold next step for these MSCs could be the addition of a representative for the environment and for future generations in their management boards to ensure all voices are heard.

The food system needs systemic change. There is a growing humble awareness amongst grassroots innovators that no one thinker or group is going to achieve single handed a fair and food-secure future. The solution lies in the hands of many allies across and beyond food movements becoming together under a solidarity economy model able to create solid alternatives for regenerative ways of eating and living. These projects suggest grassroots innovation is limitless and constantly bubbling up new initiatives, while becoming more savvy and aware of the danger of being co-opted. Now it remains to be seen if, as one of the interviewees stated when asked about the future of these MSCs, *'today's niche businesses are tomorrow's staple'*.

9. Theoretical implications: a new analytical framework for deconstructing agricultural cooperatives

9.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 to 8 have presented new data about different types of ACs in Spain and the UK. How do the data relate to the empirical and theoretical issues set out in the first four chapters? How do the findings contribute to a better understanding of the current trends and challenges faced by the AC sector, and have they answered the research questions? This research set out to answer seven research questions:

RQ.1 What does the comparison between the UK and Spanish ACs sectors reveal about those countries' food policies and current trends in the European AC sector and AC policy?

RQ2. To what extent are ACs part of a social movement adopting cooperative principles or a mere section of the agricultural economic sector? And to what extent can they be both at the same time? [While this question has been discussed in the literature in similar terms before, this research aims to explore ACs both in the context of the wider cooperative movement but also other social movements in the food system in theory grounded on sustainability and social justice principles, such as organic, fair trade, relocalisation and food sovereignty].

RQ3. How is the dominant AC sector in Spain and UK in the context of European farming policy contributing to multidimensional food system sustainability?

RQ4. How do these findings contribute to the theorisation of agricultural cooperatives and alternative and sustainable food systems?

This chapter first analyses the theoretical implications that emerged from the data collected in relation to the above research questions and the literature review. The second part of the chapter offers a grounded theoretical conceptualisation on cooperatives based on and interested in identifying and providing a framework for the analysis of patterns of action and interaction between actors, coalitions of actors and their role in shaping sustainable production practices.

The case studies of Farmway and Anecoop and the experts' perspectives presented in Chapters 5 and 6 have shown how despite a wide range of diversity, ACs in Spain and the UK are developing an increasing market-oriented character aligned to the needs of large processors, retailers and globalised trade. Evidence suggests this a wider European trend (Bijman et al., 2012). This has had tangible effects in governance, the transfer of power to non-member managers and the prioritisation of financial over social objectives. The dominant strategies used

by these large ACs to both compete in the European agri-food sector and benefit from EU food and agriculture policy include growing through mergers, acquisitions and internationalisation to concentrate power and be able to compete with private companies. The case studies in Chapter 5 offered an insight into the developments and impacts of these practices. This consolidation process is being supported and promoted by governments in Spain and UK. In Spain, this policy aim is transparent and clear, as the new Law for the consolidation of the AC sector shows. As described in Chapter 5, the limit of withdrawable shares for UK cooperatives has recently been increased to £100,000, despite warnings this might benefit only the biggest and richest ACs' members and might risk democratic practices if those members who are able to invest more are given more power and influence. These trends show how these governance models can become very far removed from both the cooperative model and principles and evolve to resemble and copy the strategies of investor-owned firms. Another tension in the sector is the increasing growth in number of POs across Europe, often formed with the sole aim of tapping into subsidies to cover the costs of pooling and marketing produce.

For COGECA, the body representing ACs in Europe, sustainability is mainly seen in terms of effective production methods and profitability, as its support for sustainable intensification and GM feed suggests (see Chapter 6 for more details). The focus on exports that many ACs across Europe are increasingly adhering to, are also contributing to intensive monocultures of export crops and food miles. Anecoop is a very clear example of this trend in Spain, growing water thirsty crops in Almeria (the driest region in Europe with the only true desert climate in the continent) and exporting nearly 90% of its production to other countries.

Furthermore, farming ministers in Spain and UK are looking at Denmark and the Netherlands as examples of competitive agricultural cooperative sectors to follow, aspiring to achieve the same high degree of consolidation and average turnover for ACs in their own countries (MAGRAMA, 2012; CNC, 2012; EFFF, 2014). However, despite this obvious corporate trend, there are still many EU member states in which farming cooperatives remain highly atomised; for example in Spain and other Southern European countries, the sector is characterised by a plethora of small ACs and only a handful of large ones with a high turnover that dominate most of the trade (Bijman et al., 2012).

The case studies presented in Chapters 7 and 8 on the other hand, suggest that while the dominant model for ACs has clearly developed very permeable boundaries and is adopting characteristics and practices typical of privately-owned firm models, there is still a lot of diversity and innovation taking place in agrarian cooperativism. A new generation of cooperatives are exploring innovative forms of governance and aligning themselves with

solidarity economy principles and practices. Alongside the long-established smaller ACs and the more corporate ones, there is a growing number of producers who still see value in using the cooperative legal form as a tool to formalise their alternative ways of operating in the food system (Manchester Veg People, 2014; Ecological Land Cooperative, 2015). These new cooperatives are firmly embedded in alternative food networks and the relocalisation of food production in conjunction with the global food sovereignty movement.

Going back to the original theoretical framework, this research has provided an insight into the extent dominant ACs in Spain and UK adhere to the Productionist Paradigm defined by Lang and Heasman (Lang and Heasman, 2004). While most of the ACs presented as case studies are still composed of family businesses (e.g. Farmway, Anecoop, Esnetik, etc), they are however embedded in the industrial and globalised model of food production at very different degrees. This finding is in line with van der Ploeg's distinction between capitalist and peasant farming (van der Ploeg, 2008). Many of the interviewees from multi-stakeholder cooperatives defined themselves as peasants. Food sovereignty activists are reclaiming the word peasant, aiming to remove any negative connotations such as "unevolved" or "unprofessional" from this term. At the same time, advertently or inadvertently, they are adding new layers of political meaning to the word, as well as connotations relating to the agroecological farming methods adopted by these "new peasants". The variety of ACs studied reveals the tensions in the sector and the resistance to the increasing degree of assimilation by the "Empire", defined by van der Ploeg as the concentrated corporate control of the global food system and the dominance of profit-seeking and not sustainable practices (van der Ploeg, 2008).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the theoretical benefit of combining the frameworks of the food policy paradigms (Lang and Heasman, 2004) and van der Ploeg's new peasantries is the complementarity these theories offer to the different levels of analysis of this research: van der Ploeg's theory informed the organisational analytical level (the cooperative) to analyse how the different types of ACs align themselves to or resist the "Empire". In conjunction, Lang and Heasman's food policy paradigms approach elevated the level analysis of ACs to the wider food system, providing a framework to assess their relationships with other actors (e.g. policy makers and retailers). The Open Coops framework proved a suitable lens for the analysis of MSCs. However, the findings and the fact such diverse theories had to be brought together to be able to account for all the richness and contradictions in agrarian cooperativism reveal a theoretical gap and a need to further theorise the specific dynamics and role of ACs as key actors in the food system. How can such a wide range of realities and diverse experiences, from Anecoop to OrganicLea, get labelled under the same cooperative banner? The literature review, document analysis and interview data have revealed that dominant economic approaches to

study ACs are at their best limited, and at their worse, damaging to the cooperative movement, farmers and the environment due to their reductionist attempts to measure success. Informed by these findings and the noticeable theoretical gap that this research has highlighted, this chapter proposes a new framework based on a multi-level and multidimensional theorisation of agricultural cooperation beyond the dominant reductionist economic analysis. The chapter starts by discussing how the new framework relates to the theories that informed the research process (see Chapter 4) and tries to overcome different epistemological biases that emerged from the data presented: a reductionist understanding of cooperativism focusing on measurable financial indicators of success over social and environmental dimensions, coupled with a worrying trend to “export” this corporate model of ACs to developing countries. The new theoretical framework is broken down into two levels. The first level of the framework focuses on deconstructing the different elements that made up individual cooperatives. The higher level of the framework puts ACs in the context of the wider food system, analysing the relationships that any given AC might have with other actors in the food system (e.g. supermarkets, consumers, etc.). Finally, the concept of *cooperative sustainability*, which brings these two levels together, is introduced.

9.2 Overcoming biases in the study of agricultural cooperatives

9.2.1 Beyond quantophobia: overcoming the reductionism of ACs

The literature review showed that the discipline with the largest body of academic literature on ACs is economics (see Gray, 2014a for a detailed discussion on this point); there are a numerous studies comparing ACs’ performance to that of investor owned firms, mainly highlighting how ACs tend to do worse because they end up being undercapitalised and they have a demanding democratic governance structure. This approach reflects a methodological conservatism that has crept upon social science over the last ten years (Denzin and Giardina, 2008), evident in governmental and funding agencies’ preference for research that is quantitative, experimental, and statistically generalisable (Tracy, 2010). This preference is the reflection of a wider obsession with financial survival in capitalist economies through the generation of higher revenues and strategies that secure competitiveness (Slaughter and Larry, 1997). As discussed in Chapter 4, the productionist paradigm that is still strongly embedded in global food policy since WWII, reduced metrics of success of agricultural policies to pretty much a single and easily measurable indicator: yields (Lang and Heasman, 2004). Thus, the study of ACs is not the only food and agricultural realm in which the effect of quantophobia is apparent, but also

palpable across policy and research approaches that create institutional lock-ins that reproduce reductionist and productionist paradigms (Vanloqueren and Baret, 2009).

Pitirim Sorokin, the first chairman of Harvard University's sociology department, coined the term quantophobia in the early 1930s. The term refers to a fixation with and a preference for factors that can be easily measured, resulting in the misapplication of quantitative methods to sociology. The repercussions in public policy are obvious: potential policy solutions become reduced to a limited menu of options selected for their measurability (Sorokin, 1956).

Sorokin's criticism was not directed at quantification per se, he acknowledged the value of quantitative methods when applied to the right problems, but he argued they should not be imposed by default and used as solutions looking for fitting problems. Paquet's concise explanation of Sorokin's argument deserves to be quoted here:

The problem arises when the use of such tools becomes the basis of a *cult* roughly captured by the motto that if it cannot be measured, it does not exist. Such a cult distorts the appreciation we have of socio-economic phenomena, and this mental prison acts as blinders that have toxic unintended consequences for public policies when they are shaped by an apparatus thus constrained (Paquet 2009:2).

In the context of ACs, two decades ago, Mooney and colleagues identified how the reprivatisation discourse of neoclassical economics fuelled the depoliticisation of US ACs in the 1980s and 1990s (Mooney et al., 1996). This coincided with the wider adoption of a universal framework for economic analysis. The choice of this framework also permeated academia and education on cooperatives. Kalmi has argued that this paradigm shift from institutional to neoclassical analysis resulted on "a neglect of the potential of cooperatives in addressing social problems" (Kalmi, 2007:625). By becoming the dominant discourse, neoclassical economics' theories become self-fulfilling through institutional design, social norms and language (Stofferahn, 2010).

Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3 when presenting the findings of the literature review that informed the research process, the evidence shows a reductionist economic approach continues to be dominant in the study of ACs (Sanchez Bajo and Roelants, 2011; Nilsson et al., 2012). Even New Institutional Economics perspectives that take into account human transaction dimensions still base their analysis on costs and have the research objective of quantifying the governance costs of ACs compared to IOFs (Iliopoulos, 2005). Management teams in ACs do not have instruments to measure or even estimate the loss of social capital that takes places when they undertake growth strategies. As that loss is not quantified in any way, it is not taken

into account when making decisions about the future of the cooperative (Nilsson et al., 2012). The cooperative principles have also been subject of reductionist re-writings. Reviewing the history of the USDA three AC principles, the USDA advisor, Bruce J. Reynolds, an economist, concluded the diluted principles were a “reduced form approach” developed through the “lens of economics” and prepared by economists to exclude values from the definition and identification of cooperatives (USDA, 2014:3).

Capital has completely subsumed the social and environmental spheres of life (Böhm and Land, 2009). However, these two spheres are especially interwoven in food and farming practices: identity, place, animal welfare, commensality, biodiversity, abundance, etc., dimensions that cannot be reduced and that are complex to measure. Nevertheless, pervasive measurement and an evaluation culture are part of the way the capitalist regime reproduces itself, and food and ACs have not escaped its reach (Böhm and Land, 2009). In this sense, Allen has discussed the constriction of intentions that happen to sustainability discourses when principles become operationalised (Allen, 2004:18). The findings have shown a similar constriction in cooperatives’ principles.

The complexity of integrating social justice at both the production and the consumption levels brings us back to the topic of existing structures and processes to measure sustainability using existing methodologies and understandings (see Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion). The inability to accurately measure social capital has been a weakness of proponents of cooperatives as a business model, as cooperatives always seem to lose out when compared to IOFs in organisational performance studies in the economics literature. Similarly, alternative food systems such as CSA, organic, agroecology, etc., are frequently deemed as expensive niches when in fact they are simply internalising many of the costs that conventionally food producers or retailers still do not include in their prices, in other words: cheap food is not cheap (Sustainable Food Trust, 2013). Therefore, the false sense of choice that the globalised and industrialised food system has brought to consumers is the deceiving shallow top layer of deep quicksands (Allen, 2004). The repercussions on ACs affect not only the public and industry perception of the cooperative model but also the definition of a cooperative and what a ‘successful cooperative’ looks like, i.e. shaping criteria and indicators of success.

9.2.2 Western epistemology's three fundamental biases: ethnocentrism, androcentrism and anthropocentrism

Perez Neira and Soler Montiel (2013) have put forward what they consider to be the three epistemological biases that the globalised food system suffers from, culprits of what the authors call a “Western epistemological crisis”. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that studies what is accepted to constitute valid knowledge and how it can be obtained (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009). The first of the biases proposed, the ethnocentric bias, refers to perceiving and constructing understandings of other cultures and peoples as inferior, a trend that has been discussed in reference to some European ACs’ impact in developing countries. Androcentrism highlights here the male dominated socioeconomic, political and cultural structures of the food system. Finally, the authors highlight a third bias around anthropocentrism, reflected on the dominant approach of aiming to control rather than work with nature (Perez Neira and Soler Montiel, 2013). These biases are intrinsically linked with the quantophrenic bias, as they define what is important and what should be reproduced in whose image. This research has discussed how these biases have permeated ACs in Europe, their relationship with their members and the version of ACs exported to other countries and cultures. Chapter 6 discussed how European ACs are exporting a top-down version of agricultural cooperativism to developing countries, with implications for small farmers, gender issues and sustainable practices. The proposed framework aims to overcome the above biases and offers a theoretical space and a language that can be of use to actors involved in alternative food systems and farming cooperatives when mapping, negotiating and understanding different cooperative endeavours.

9.3 An integrated theoretical framework for agricultural cooperatives

9.3.1 The cooperative triangle

Based on the findings from this research, this section puts forward a new framework that presents cooperatives as undertakings that can be deconstructed into four components that become expressions of cooperativism across four continua: legal form, governance model, social movement and informal cooperative behaviours (the latter predate all other layers) (figure 3). These components are depicted in a cooperative triangle that has both theoretical and empirical value. Firstly, it offers a theoretical representation of how certain elements associated with agricultural cooperativism can be easily absorbed into capitalist industrial food supply chains while others offer more resistance. Second, it can be used to deconstruct and map

any given AC and create a picture of where the organisation stands in each of the four dimensions.

In any given AC, each of the four subtriangles will have a different size, depending on the cooperative's adherence to each continua, namely: adherence of their governance model to cooperative principles, their higher or lower degree of embeddedness in capitalist industrial food systems at one end or their alterity and commitment to the cooperative social movement at the other end. The other two continua refer to the implications for members of the legal form selected and the social capital amongst members reflected on informal cooperative behaviours, as opposed to other cases in which members do not know each other and use the AC as a service to buy inputs or market their produce.

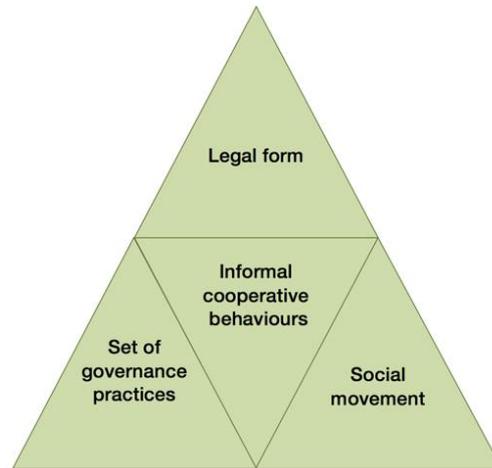
The borders of each component triangle are seen as sliding scales in which different ACs' realities can be mapped, creating a cooperative triangle made up constituent subtriangles of different sizes according to each cooperative reality. For example, a triangle mapping Farmway would have a well-defined legal sub-triangle with a smaller one for cooperative governance and pretty much invisible or non-existent social movement and informal cooperative behaviours dimensions. In the case of a more informal buying group purchasing food directly from farmers, but without being legally incorporated as a cooperative, the sub-triangle for the legal form would be represented as a smaller portion of the whole triangle, while in turn the informal cooperative behaviours and social movement would occupy a more prominent place.

In the case of ACs, this multifaceted character is increasingly being fragmented by the mainstream food system, which is co-opting the less radical elements of cooperativism that can be easily absorbed without requiring a wider transformation of neoliberal industrial practices. The next sections offer a brief description for each of the subtriangles as well as explaining how they relate to each other and the findings of this research.

a. Informal cooperative behaviours

This dimension refers to informal and unregulated expressions of cooperation amongst food producers. These informal cooperative behaviours pre-date all other elements of cooperatives that developed later; the benefits of cooperating in order to survive and grow enough food were recognised by farmers well before formalised cooperatives were created (Chloupkova, 2003). However, law and institutions often lag behind established social practices, in this case, cooperative practices in farming (Chloupkova, 2003; Sennett, 2012).

Figure 9.1 Cooperative Triangle: illustrating the multi-dimensional character of agricultural cooperatives



Source: The author

Informal cooperation in farming long preceded consumer cooperation. When consumer cooperatives became formalised in the mid 19th century, agricultural cooperatives followed copying the model of the existing consumer ones. Fighting adulteration and achieving better prices were shared objectives by both consumer and farmer cooperators. In the last few decades, informal initiatives and associations trying to connect producers with consumers have mushroomed. These practices are only gradually being recognised and formalised into existing legal frameworks, for example, with the creation of the multi-stakeholder cooperative model.

b. Legal:

This component refers to whether an AC is incorporated or not as a legal body and if so, in which form. The legal form and legal provision for cooperatives developed very differently across Europe and still today, legislation of cooperative societies varies enormously amongst countries (Bijman et al., 2012). Some countries have dozens of cooperative laws such in Spain, while in others such the UK and Denmark, a specific cooperative legal form does not exist. This component triangle urges us to reflect on the legal form adopted by the organisation if any, and the implications for members; for example, is the AC member-owned exclusively or does it accept investments from non-producer members? What is the minimum investment required for new members and how does this affect smaller farmers in the region?

For farmers considering different ways to cooperate, this dimension raises questions such as: What are the legal options available to farmers thinking of setting up a cooperative venture? Should they opt for the cooperative model that restrict their initial investment and probabilities of success or should they opt for another legal form? Cogecca's representative revealed the tensions between POs and established ACs. In Spain, there are already concerns about how the

more liberalised producer associations might threaten the cooperative model if they become eligible to access the support that cooperatives enjoy at the regional level, while not been expected to comply with the cooperative principles (Giagnocavo and Vargas, 2012). This reflects how the elements of ACs that enable the concentration of produce for processing or marketing purposes are favoured over the social elements related to the cooperative principles; new organisational forms of agricultural cooperativism ignore the latter in different degrees, such as the PO model that has been discussed extensively throughout the thesis.

This legal dimension also reflects the policy and political context. For example, when this research project took place, both Spain and the UK had conservative governments (a Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition in the UK followed by a Conservative administration) promoting their understanding of the cooperative economy. Both countries underwent cooperative legislation changes at the time of the data collection stage. As discussed in earlier chapters, Spain introduced a new law in 2013 to promote mergers and acquisitions in the AC sector. In 2014, the coalition government in the UK approved the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, bringing cooperatives into the agenda and combining seventeen pieces of different legislation that had not been updated for decades. At the same time, many consumer and farmer associations not legally incorporated emerged. A new legal model, the multi-stakeholder cooperative, is bringing different types of members (consumers, workers and farmers) together under the same cooperative organisation.

Traditional informal networks of mutual help and assistance in farming communities (unincorporated cooperation) are in competition with legally incorporated forms of cooperation that allow access to subsidies. Some authors suggest that by receiving funding from the government and the EU, ACs have essentially lost their independence from the state; that loss of independence has distorted and jeopardised the cooperative principles, which are increasingly disregarded in order for ACs to remain financially competitive and attract bigger farmers and more funds to survive in an extremely challenging sector (Zeuli et al., 2004). Birchall has pointed out that capital needs autonomy from the state to care beyond profit (Birchall, 1994). When analysing an AC, their approach to subsidies should be analysed. Are members opposed to or in favour of seeking and receiving subsidies? On what basis? Subsidies were a bone of contention in some of the emerging cooperatives interviewed, creating disensus amongst members with different opinions. For some small cooperatives, subsidies were perceived as the only way to get started. For others, a threat to their independence.

c. Governance

Closely related to the legal form of a cooperative is its governance model; this component refers to the set of governance practices followed by any given AC but also includes the effects of the wider food governance context ACs exist in. In countries such as the UK where cooperatives can take many legal forms, their internal constitution is what defines cooperative governance and identity. This dimension also takes into account an AC's degree of adherence to the cooperative principles in the way it operates.

When analysing an AC, the governance model should be closely examined. Do they follow the one-member one-vote rule? Or is voting proportional to patronage? Are all workers offered the chance to become members and take part in decision-making processes or is there a proportion of second class workers? (e.g. some ACs are outsourcing their operations to developing countries without allowing farmers overseas to join as members (Berthelot, 2012)).

The case studies presented by this research have reflected a variety of arrangements, from those with one member one vote, to newer forms of multi-stakeholder governance models where members still retain their vote, but each stakeholder group has a voting percentage, as in the case of Manchester Veg People and Esnetik (see Chapter 7 and 8 for a detailed analysis of these governance models).

d. Social movement

Challenging economic conditions are a fertile ground for cooperation; cooperatives, both at the consumer and producer level, first emerged as a response to meet the specific needs of groups of people who struggled to access food or the land and inputs to produce it (Birchall, 1994). The first formal cooperatives that started in the UK and Ireland were not designed as or perceived by their originators as an end in themselves, but as means to self-provide food and fund industrial cooperation projects in an attempt to transform society (Oakeshott, 1978). For them, the practical and financial gains of their cooperative transactions were not the final purpose; instead they had a more ambitious vision that involved the creation of a new society based on cooperative principles. In contrast, the findings from this research suggest the current purpose of many ACs is to conform to, rather than transform, the capitalist industrial food system.

Can alternative food networks be considered a social movement or are they something more modest? (Allen, 2004; Kneafsey et al., 2008). This is a question we can also ask about cooperatives. Cooperatives are part of an ongoing and evolving social cooperative movement; they are the expression and reflection of the problems and needs of the societies they exist in

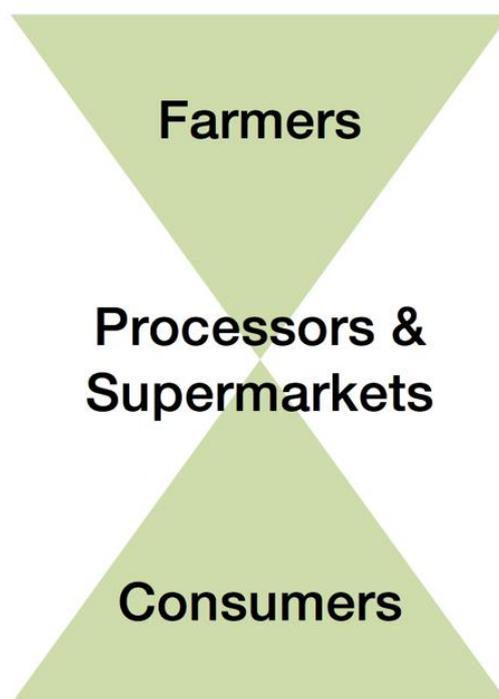
and they can only be as fair as the system they exist in. In that sense, cooperatives, as social movements, are dynamic rather than static; they try to resolve new challenges through bringing individuals together to cooperate based on their own understanding of what a cooperative is and what they should exist for (e.g. access subsidies or change the world).

Next, the higher level of this new theoretical framework places ACs in the context of the wider food system, analysing the relationships that any given AC might have with other actors in the food system (e.g. supermarkets, consumers, etc.).

9.3.2 The double cooperative hourglass

Power structures and inequalities in the food system are often depicted by an hourglass (Figure 9.2) to reflect how a handful of powerful processors and retailers act as the bottleneck of profits and control between millions of producers and millions of consumers (Pimbert et al., 2001; Vorley, 2003; Thompson et al., 2007; Patel, 2012).

Figure 9.2 Food system hourglass



Source: The Author

However, this hourglass diagram ignores the evidence this research has revealed regarding the powerful role ACs play in current food systems. Based on the findings of this study, a new

double hourglass is put forward as the second core component of the theoretical framework proposed. Building on the cooperative triangle, this higher level of the framework analyses ACs in the wider context of food systems.

Figure 9.3 focuses on illustrating power structures not just for supermarkets and processors but also agricultural cooperatives. It represents how many farmers sit in between supply ACs at one end, and marketing ACs at the other end. Obviously, some farmers are not members of any AC, but as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, that is rare.

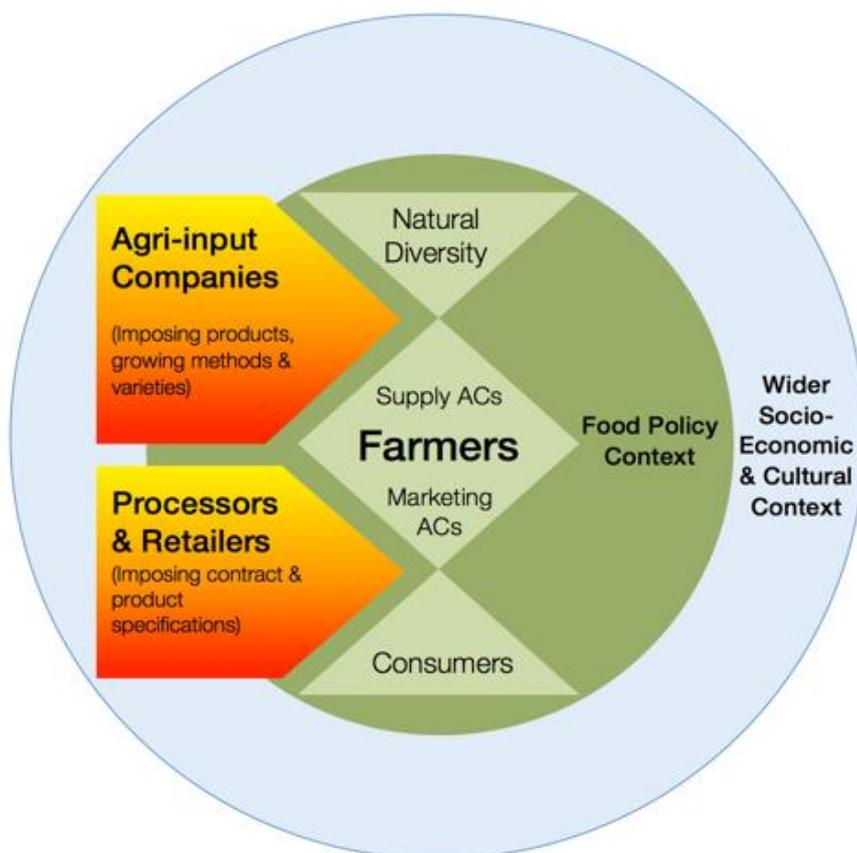
The double cooperative hourglass depicts how ACs can exercise power either in an outward direction, either towards a) the agro-inputs industry at one end or b) the processors and retailers past the farm gate; or inwards, towards their own farmer members. This framework proposes that when one or more of the four components of cooperatives from the cooperative triangle are missing or become disjointed, cooperatives start to behave in a more corporate-like way and invert the direction of their power from outwards, as it traditionally happened, to inwards. In contrast, some of the new cooperative models discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 are working hard to revert the direction of farmers' collective power (and in the cases of MSCs, they do so in conjunction with consumers' collective power) to go outwards again, aiming to regain control over what they grow, how they grow it and how they sell their produce.

It is important to mention at this point that the food system is not linear, but circular (although not a neat closed system, but a messy, complex one), and that there are waste and environmental impacts in every link of the chain affecting the capacity of nature and biodiversity to reproduce itself and in turn, the food system. Therefore, this model does not advocate a simplistic linear vision of the food system that assumes infinite resources at one end and a limitless capacity to absorb waste at the other. This model is just zooming in and providing a closer look at the power relations in which ACs are involved.

The diagram shows how supply cooperatives sit between farmers and natural diversity. This level highlights supply cooperative's power to introduce certain varieties of crops and not others to large groups of farmer members. Numerous cultural, economic, political and environmental factors shape the narrow selection of crops that societies chose to cultivate for human or livestock consumption. The agri-input industry acts as a gatekeeper to nature's abundant diversity by commercialising a limited number of varieties of a limited number of crops (91% of the 1.5 billion hectares of farmland worldwide are dedicated to mostly monocultures of wheat, rice, maize, cotton, and soybeans (Altieri, 2007)). Monoculture and homogenous yields are favoured over multiple cropping and natural diversity. Closely

associated with the intensive model of farming, agri-inputs companies introduce pesticides that reduce biodiversity and natural pest predators in farms (Soberania Alimentaria, 2013). The hourglass explains this trend by reflecting a reversal of the pressure and resistance exercised by ACs. In their origins, ACs exerted pressure outwards by offering resistance to supply companies selling over-priced or adulterated inputs or buyers offering low prices for produce (Birchall, 1994). The argument this research puts forward is that nowadays, that resistance has been reversed and external actors (retailers and agri-input companies) use cooperatives to squeeze farmers and impose products, varieties, growing methods and specifications. Power strongholds in the system are illustrated in the figure by the large players on the left creating bottlenecks in the hourglass. In order to serve as an analytical model, no arrows showing the direction of the “pressure” have been included as its purpose is also to serve as a template to map actors and dynamics for specific ACs, each creating an individual hourglass with different numbers and size (importance) of players and power flows.

Figure 9.3 The Double Cooperative Hourglass: Are ACs offering outward resistance towards external powerful actors in the food system or inward pressure towards members?



Source: The author

ACs highly embedded in industrial food systems have developed governance structures and growth strategies that create unequal power relationships and lock-in situations for members. Additionally, their impact in developing countries and their increased co-optation by the dominant industrialised food regime (Friedmann, 2005) fuelled by practices of ‘co-opetition’ (Walley and Custance, 2010; Pathak et al., 2014) show theoretical parallelisms with the conventionalisation thesis advanced by Goodman and colleagues in relation to the organic and fair trade movements (Goodman et al., 2012). As the cooperative movement, both organic and fair trade could also be considered social movements that can either have a legal stamp or not (certification in the case of organic and fair trade or legal incorporation in the case of ACs) and can adhere to the original principles and visions of the movement or not. Many large supermarkets have created their own organic product lines coming from monocultures and with no intention to create more resilient and diverse agricultural systems – the original aim of organic farming – still following the same logic of bringing into the farm external artificial inputs, just making sure that these meet the requirements for certification. The same conflict arises with the fair trade movement. Some authors have warned of how organic and fair trade labels have been appropriated and become mere selling points (Goodman et al. 2011; Griffiths, 2012). In this sense, the signifiers (e.g. the organic label or the cooperative name) become uncoupled from the signified (e.g. transformative organic principles or cooperatives) to mean something new (e.g. a set of standards in the case of organic or an organisation that facilitates the concentration of produce for easier processing, transporting and marketing). Fragmentation of what it means to be organic, or fair-traded or cooperatively produced has given way for the most market-friendly dimensions of these (alternative) ways of production to be absorbed by the dominant food regime, becoming part of it and no longer aiming for a wider transformation as was the root cause of these original movements.

This institutionalisation of a standards-based and measurable approach to organic farming, fair trade or agricultural cooperativism, is encouraged by policies that require groups of farmers to tick certain boxes to be eligible for certain certifications or subsidies. In this sense, there is a rupture from original visions of transformation, as these movements are diluted by substituting their process-based approaches to standard-based ones of what could be called ‘allowable inputs’ or in the case of ACs, ‘allowable principles or practices’. Current literature (both from academia and civil society) is discussing a similar danger of co-optation in the realm of agroecology (Levidow et al., 2014).

9.3.3 The role of policy

As reflected in the double cooperative hourglass, the wider food policy context shapes the relationships amongst actors and the power dynamics in which ACs are embedded in. At the same time, the socio-economic context also shapes the way ACs embody the organisational dimensions illustrated by the cooperative triangle (figure 9.1); for example, a national policy that facilitates the legal incorporation of cooperative enterprises will foster cooperative initiatives with a strong legal dimension. This section discusses the role food policy has in shaping the flows and pressures that take place in the double cooperative hourglass.

Agriculture has always been a sector characterised by heavy state intervention and a busy policy arena, where both private and public actors have been closely linked (Davey et al., 1976; Bijman, 2010); these links have created tensions around policy objectives that are often presented as conflicting, such as sustainability and high yields. Beyond the CAP, the current discourse in most European countries is based on the perception of the state as a facilitator and the need to encourage farmers to become more entrepreneurial and business-like. Lockie (2009) has pointed out that this strategy is a means by which government can transfer food production responsibility from the state to farmers, also transferring accountability.

With regards to ACs, farmers' decision to legally incorporate or be part of informal models of agricultural cooperation is shaped amongst other factors by the policy context, which can either hinder or encourage specific models of farmer collaboration. Due to the complicated policy arena where domestic and international levels of food governance often clash (Lang et al., 2009), farmers find themselves having to take into account CAP subsidies, competition law regulations and EU directives. The consistent contradictory message is that farmers should both compete and cooperate, now promoted and encapsulated in the term 'co-opetition' (Galdeano-Gómez et al., 2015).

According to the ILO guidelines for cooperative legislation, state intervention in cooperative affairs should be restricted to four functions: legislation, registration, dissolution/liquidation, and monitoring the application of the law by the cooperatives (ILO, 2005 in Henrÿ, 2012). The ILO guidelines take the premise that:

[...] the main objective of a cooperative law [should] be to guarantee minimum government involvement, maximum deregulation, maximum democratic participation and minimum government spending by translating the cooperative principles into a legally binding framework for the organization of self-determined self-help. (ILO, 2005:vi in Henrÿ, 2012)

However, as it has been discussed in Chapter 7, while on one hand the EU is not able to dictate the legal form of farmer enterprises, on the other hand, through subsidy signals, is actually fuelling forms of cooperation that neglect the cooperative principles, either by focusing on capital, not members, or by providing funds to POs and other looser forms of cooperatives. In this sense, EU policies have cognitive effects on the strategies of societal actors and their incentives to mobilise and/or build coalitions and collaborate (Skogstad, 1998). Those effects also take place at the national level through domestic policies and legislations.

Richard Fletcher (in Coates, 1976:179) pointed out that Britain '*has turned to cooperation as a form of self-help at the times of economic crises*'. Change triggered by crises is a typical phenomenon in food policy. In the UK for example, this is clear from the history of government-led food policies, especially during wars and farming crises such as BSE or Foot and Mouth disease (Lang et al., 2009). Sadly, as this research has revealed, paradigms such as productionism have an enduring impact on policy once they become institutionally embedded and it takes a severe crisis or shock for attempts to change it to be considered. This paradigm has not only created path dependency in food and farming policy (as discussed in Chapter 6), but has become the interpretive framework through which actors in key political institutions and organisations view the world, frame policy problems and potential policy solutions (Skogstad, 2000). In the case of cooperativism, ACs are no longer perceived my most as transformative projects, but functional enterprises aligned with the aims and logistics of the productionist paradigm. However, as Hall, Fletcher and Lang and colleagues have pointed out, crises jeopardise ideologies and overthrow paradigms (Hall, 1993; Lang et al., 2009).

Is there an ideal policy context that can foster a type of cooperative that can help farmers balance short-term and long-term objectives and gains and in turn inform a less short-term food policy approach? In fact, when considering ACs as part of food and farming policy, their potential as helpful institutional actors that can help link the international, national and subnational spheres (an inclusive term for the more unclear regional and local levels), becomes apparent. However, some authors have argued that many food policy issues are still at an early embryonic stage (Lang et al., 2009). Problem definition of food policy agendas may lead to agreement, but agreeing on the solutions needed to address those problems is not as easy. For example, there is general agreement on the need to increase collaboration amongst farmers (problem formation), but less on the policy solutions. For example, agriculture policy makers and the food industry may agree on the problem of lack of collaboration but frame the solution within the neoliberal paradigm – e.g. with the creation of liberalised POs – as opposed to proposing the wider transformation of the food production system and broader economic relations. Depending on the perspective framing the problem, cooperatives can be put forward

as a means to a wider transformative end or as a mechanism serving the current dominant system.

The notions of collaboration and cooperation are used as discursive concepts to promote concentration of produce and agricultural policy entitlements and subsidies, whilst still encouraging post-productivist agricultural policy measures. This is possible due to the flexibility of the cooperative model and its scope for political accommodation. As the cooperative triangle showed (figure 9.1), an AC can be legally registered as a cooperative but have nothing to do with the wider cooperative movement or indeed any food movements. However, this research has revealed that empty discourses of cooperation in farming are highly problematic: on the one hand, those discourses project a positive image of ACs and which serve as a strength when lobbying for more funding for the AC sector. But that same image of halo effect makes it difficult to identify at first sight the real impact of and underlying reasons for encouraging collaboration and cooperation in the food system at a big scale. While this empty discourse can be useful at that level, it becomes a liability when it comes to practical implementation settings. This challenge around problem and solution framing is also common in multi-functionality discourses in farming, which highlights how the productionist paradigm is the underlying common denominator:

For although multi-functional discourses go some way towards explaining the need for a transition from productivist to post-productivist agriculture, they do not set out how this process should be enacted, how organisational responsibilities should be assigned, or, crucially, specify implementation goals or endpoints. (Clark, 2006:347)

In a similar way to multi-functional and sustainability discourses, cooperative discourses do not explain how to reach the desired end: should we achieve sustainable food systems through GM and sustainable intensification? Or by promoting agroecology and food sovereignty? In the case of cooperation, should we foster cooperation amongst farmers through the ICA model of cooperatives? Or through vertical integration through contract farming between producers and large retailers? This research suggests cooperatives are just a vehicle to reach many diverse objectives.

What is the potential of the social model of cooperatives to help shape consumer demands (e.g. through shortened food channels, food hubs, etc.) as opposed to the dominant AC model often based in long supply chains and foreign trade? Can or should policy makers tap into ACs and foster, rather than inhibit, their social aspects for wider gains? Can the dominant AC model help achieve both food security and sustainability goals and bridge issues of food safety, food control and food democracy? Evidence seems to suggest not. A high degree of polarisation in the ACs sector fuelled by a combination of subsidy policies and the concentration of power

down the food chain (in processing and retailing), is leaving behind small and medium ACs in favour of more financially competitive and larger ACs (Gray and Stevenson, 2008). In Spain, the government has started an overt battle to eliminate uncompetitive medium-sized cooperatives from the market in order to improve the efficiency of the Spanish agricultural sector (and the efficiency of subsidy payments). At the opposite end, large ACs are benefiting from subsidies and rewards when increasing size. Cartwright and Swain have explained how big players in farming are enjoying subsidies they do not really need or deserve by using a similar nearly empty imaginary:

The farm lobbies of the western European countries successfully mobilise political support for agricultural policies which disproportionately favour the big, 'Northern' farmer by invoking the needs the small farmer the 'peasant', for whom farming is becoming in reality increasingly marginal. [...] First, 'North' and 'South' are not accurate geographical terms. The 'North' and the 'South' are present in every country. In this sense, every European agriculture has a dual structure, but the European Union has singularly failed to recognise this duality in its policy formulations. (Cartwright and Swain, 2003:12)

Governments and civil society can encourage cooperation but at the end of the day, it is farmers who are risking their capital and way of living when joining an AC. As the academic from ISEC mentioned, many farmers feel trapped in ACs that have a model of intensive agriculture for exports, which represents a social and political issue, not a technical one. Technical and yield-related challenges were the main policy problem post war food policy had to tackle, and it did so by focusing on edaphology, agronomy, biology, logistics, etc. to increase production, reduce food costs and improve distribution. Nowadays, current challenges facing European food policy are fundamentally social and political: how to change consumer habits to reduce waste, how to improve the health of the environment and the population and how fairness and food democracy can be achieved for producers, workers and consumers (Lang et al., 2009). However, the productionist paradigm is still strongly rooted in and embedded in the current food policy-making logic (Lang and Heasman, 2004) and the AC sector has not been spared from its influence (Giagnocavo and Vargas-Vasserot, 2012). As depicted in the double cooperative hourglass (figure 9.3), ACs can be used or can act as mere convenient shortcuts to concentrate produce and tap into large groups of farmers in order to: 1) sell them inputs more easily (useful for agri-industries); 2) buy their products (useful for large retailers) and 3) process subsidies or implement regulations (useful for policy makers and civil servants). In this sense, ACs' practices and new models of cooperation are not a straightforward reflection of the cooperative discourse itself, but also, or mainly in the case of agriculture, the policy and institutional frameworks they exist in.

9.3.4 Policy differences and similarities between Spain and UK

In terms of policy contexts, four main similarities between the UK and Spanish policy arenas with regards to AC have emerged from the document and interview data collected. Figure 5 summarises these parallelisms that are having an impact on the AC sector. At the international level, two key influences emerge from the data: multi-level governance and policy transfer:

1. Influence of Multi-level Governance (MLG)

One topic that most informants discussed at length was the Europeanisation process that shaped the development of the AC sector in both countries. This concept refers to the penetration of the European Union (EU) into the political spheres of domestic policy makers, either through subsidy policies, directives or by changing their established patterns of decision-making and actor behaviour (Kohler-Koch, 1999; Clark and Jones, 2011). In the second half of the 20th century, multilevel governance brought a re-emergence of agricultural cooperation in UK (late 60s) and Spain (mid 80s) as a driver to resist competition from and take advantage of the newly formed Common Market, strengthening export potential. As it was discussed in Chapter 2, marketing cooperatives in the UK were not really needed until the 1960s, as Marketing Boards had statutory powers and farmers were more worried about production than marketing. This situation changed when the UK joined the Common Market, and in 1967 the Central Council for Horticultural and Agricultural Co-operatives (CCHAC) was created to assist farmers market their products. CCHAC became Food from Britain. Support for agricultural cooperation in the UK was then halted in the mid-80s. In the same decade, the Spanish Association for Agrarian Cooperatives was set up (only three months after the country joined the Common Market in 1986) as part of the strategy to enter the EU market.

Both British and Spanish public policies for ACs have been greatly influenced by MLG effects associated to their EU membership. On the one hand, EU polices have promoted and subsidised the formation of member-owned enterprises in member states; however, the cooperative model is currently being affected by a conception of cooperatives that the EU is indirectly imposing through CAP subsidies. The EU is promoting a model for rural associationism that can gain acceptance in all member states (including new Eastern Europe countries that still have a distrust for the cooperative label due to their own recent history). But that model is also conveniently unregulated and increasingly liberalised: Producer Organisations (POs). POs can either be legally incorporated as a cooperative or not, it is not a requirement to access subsidies. This flexibility creates tensions within COGECA as discussed in Chapter 6, as long-established ACs feel threatened by their competition. As illustrated in the cooperative triangle (figure 9.1), it is important when studying any given producers' association, to map and consider their legal

and governance model as a way to understand their underlying rationale for cooperation and the objectives of the organisation.

At the same time, multilevel governance has also continued to shape differences in agricultural cooperation in UK and Spain. Higher yields in Spain increase farmers' reasons to cooperate in order to access international markets, as the Spanish market cannot fully absorb domestic production. This is not the case in the UK, where there is a trade gap, as the country consumes significantly more fruit and vegetable than it produces. Internationalisation takes place in the UK with the aim of bringing food into the domestic market, rather than out (Bijman et al., 2012) in absolute terms, but the UK government is currently pushing for the internationalisation of British farming by increasing global trade through food exports (of mainly unhealthy foods and drinks, such as whiskey and biscuits) (DEFRA, 2016).

2. Influence of policy transfer

The effects of policy transfer in the development of European agricultural cooperation are bifold:

- Transatlantic influence: One of the areas in which policy transfer has been noticeable is at the inter-sector level with regards to the solutions that have been attempted to tackle the problem of undercapitalised ACs: e.g. transferring and adopting strategies from the private sector into the AC sector, such as the New Generation Cooperatives (NGCs) in the US that allow capital investments from non-members. NGCs (discussed in Chapter 3) were proposed in the late 90s by a significant number of authors as a solution to the lack of competitiveness of the EU agricultural sector at the time.
- Crossnational EU influence: A second area of policy transfer is with regards to the UK and mainly the Spanish government's aspiration for their AC sectors to become as concentrated as the Dutch and Danish ones and have legislated accordingly to follow their example (MAGRAMA, 2012; CNC, 2012; EFFF, 2014).

The above influences have contributed to a change in the power dynamics of and on ACs as explained when discussing the double cooperative hourglass (figure 9.3). These models of "competitive cooperation" have reversed the direction of pressure ACs used to exert outwards to protect members' interests to inwards, pushing their own farmers to accept the pressures and practices of agri-input companies, processors and retailers.

At the national level, two more influences have created increasing parallelisms in the development of the AC sectors in Spain and UK: legislation changes and cultural and political connotations associated with cooperatives.

3. Legislation changes: whether affecting cooperatives across sectors such in the UK, or specific legislation regarding ACs, the cooperative model seems to be back in the policy agenda of both countries, some say fuelled by the financial crisis and the search for alternative economic models. Chapters 2 and 6 have dealt in detail with these changes.

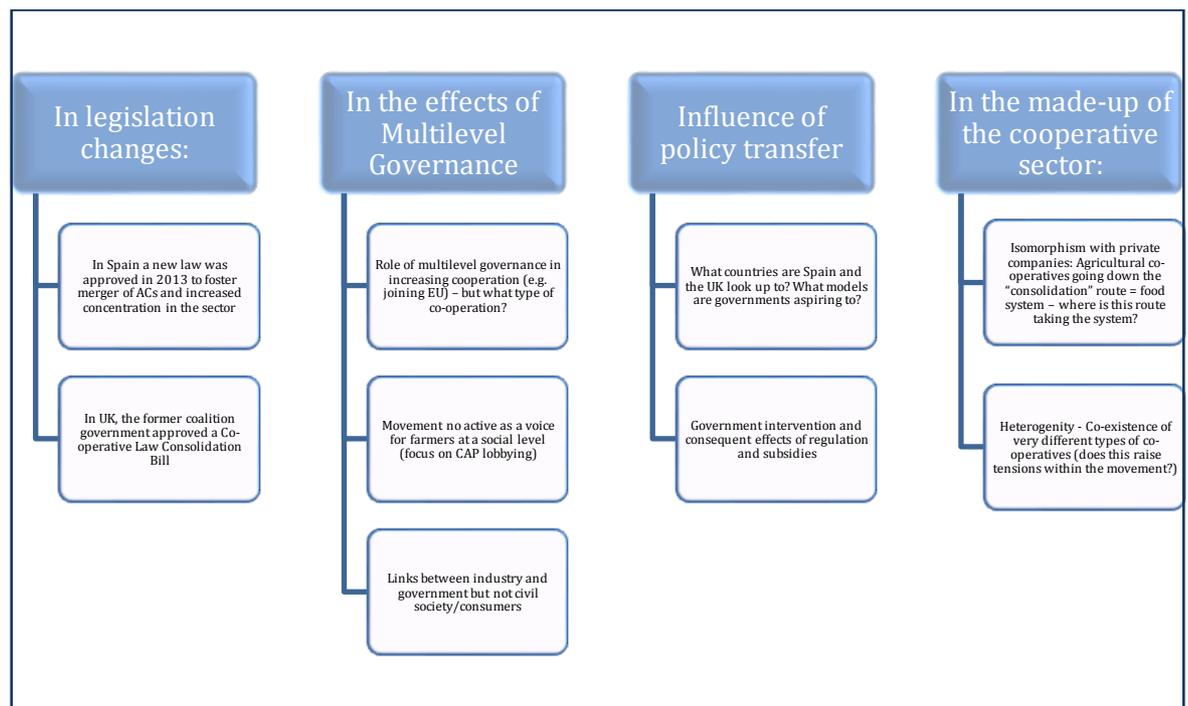
4. Cooperatives are still a politically charged term: As discussed in the introductory chapter, ACs across the world have had complicated dealings with governments of different ideologies that over the decades have tried to promote them, control and/or shape them to achieve their own agenda. Despite the model's principles to be independent of government and creed, both left and right parties have realised the benefits of workers cooperatives for decades (Coates and Benn, 1976). Factors such as land availability, ownership and cultural dynamics such as religion (Morales Gutierrez and et al., 2005; Spear, 2010) shaped the development of ACs in Europe. In the continent, ACs still mean different things to different countries: in the UK, the term 'farmer-owned-business' is commonly preferred and fuelled by the vast array of legal forms that cooperatives can opt for under UK law; in fact, the word "cooperative" does not appear in many ACs' name. Wilson and McLean found that many ACs try '*not to look like co-ops as the co-operative identity is seen as "old-fashioned"*' (Wilson and McLean, 2012:537). In Spain, the government is offering groups of farmers not registered as ACs increasing support, and a common term used in policy documents is "*associative entities*", a label more encompassing than ACs (MAGRAMA, 2013; CNC, 2012). This reluctance to use the cooperative label can be explained by former failures of big cooperatives (especially in the case of the UK) and not wanting to be linked to the stereotype of cooperatives being unable to project a sufficient business-like image, increasingly expected from farming. In the UK, this reluctance also sprang from the wider context of a neoliberal economy and lack of government support for ACs. Existing policy frameworks have sent contradictory messages for years, encouraging farmers to both compete and collaborate as well as trying to transform farming at the same time into an increasingly 'professional business'.

As a result of all the above influences, an increased strategic isomorphism between dominant ACs and private agro-industries is palpable. Instead of breaking down power concentration in retailing and processing, policy makers are keen to concentrate the farming sector through subsidies that encourage liberalisation of cooperatives and facilitate mergers. In summary, the above similarities in the policy contexts they operate in mean ACs are moving from operational

approaches more focused on benefits for members and the cooperative movement into more strategic approaches. This move transfers more emphasis onto the enterprise dimension of their identity (competing both horizontally with other food companies and vertically with retailers) rather than on their social dimensions.

Nevertheless, it is fair to recognise that there is still huge heterogeneity in the sector. This heterogeneity not only refers to those thousands of ACs that are between those ranking in the charts and those alternative ones that have found their niches (about 90% of ACs in Spain are in this in-between category). While there is variety out there, the underlying productivist model is the same for most. However, there is a thought-provoking side to this heterogeneity. In Spain for example, approximately 425 common-land cooperatives exist, where members co-own the land and cultivate it jointly (OSCAE, 2014). Several examples of cooperatives that link producers with consumers have also been found in both countries and have been discussed in detail in Chapters 7 and 8. These multi-stakeholder models do not exist thanks to the food policy context, but despite it; these organisations are emerging with increased awareness of risks of co-optation and regained efforts to protect the alterity of their cooperative models (through a variety of strategies presented in Chapter 8), sharing knowledge and joining efforts with other global social movements.

Figure 9.4 Spain/UK similarities in the policy contexts affecting the agricultural cooperative sector



Source: The author

9.3.5 Cooperative sustainability

This section introduces the notion of “cooperative sustainability” (CS) to refer to the sustainability of the cooperative itself, its essence, especially with regards to the social movement dimension of ACs, but also with interwoven environmental connotations.

With economic edge being the main *raison d'être* for a majority of ACs, cooperation becomes a specific means to an end, seeking continued short-term profitability, as opposed to cooperation as part of a social movement with the final ambition of transforming society into a cooperative one (Oakeshott, 1978; Mooney and Majka, 1995). Large ACs can be made to fit two purposes: achieve more measurable and financial objectives as part of a process of professionalisation of farming cooperatives; and second, fit the state-supported agricultural paradigm, by facilitating eligibility assessments for the allocation of farming subsidies. The double hourglass showed in Figure 9.3 helps illustrate this point. At one end of the food system, we have nature, with outstanding biodiversity. Supply ACs become the first point of contact between the consolidated agri-inputs industry and farmers. A handful of agri-inputs corporations controls most of the market and thus, controls the varieties that are commercialised.

As ACs grow more focussed on monocultures, they become more dependent on these companies and contribute to loss of diversity and increased “bioterrorist threats” (Mooney, 2004:96). In this level of the hourglass, power imbalances already appear as despite the high number of cooperatives existing in the EU, a very small group accounts for most of the trade, which is also the case for marketing cooperatives (Bijman et al., 2012). Large marketing cooperatives fit well within the logistics model of large processors and supermarkets that find it much easier to deal with one cooperative salesperson than five thousand individual farmer members. In the context of sustainability, Copa-Cogeca has highlighted how the fact that the market does not remunerate the provision of public goods is an issue, and that financial incentives within and beyond the CAP are needed, as the CAP is neither a research, nor a climate change policy (Copa-Cogeca, 2011). In the meantime, COPA-COGECA is adopting a more reductionist conception of sustainability based on sustainable intensification (Copa-Cogeca, 2011; Berthelot, 2012; COCERAL, 2015a; COCERAL, 2015b).

Thus, sustainability is not a result or an area of internal AC policies. Rather, different understandings of sustainability inspire different groups of producers (sometimes experienced growers, sometimes neo-rurals) to start new cooperatives. The conventional ACs use cooperation as a means to maximise profits and reduce costs. MSCs see cooperation as an end, as the right thing to do, not just with other farmers but also with consumers. As discussed in

Chapter 7 and 8, a renewed focus on alternative approaches to cooperation and integration in the food system has given way to an innovative legal model: multi-stakeholder cooperatives.

In this sense, these new MSCs demonstrate a post-productionist approach, while the conventional ACs studied in Chapter 5 and 6 are still stuck in the productionist paradigm, with farmer members suffering and reproducing the problems caused by this model. While MSCs are moving away from productionist definitions of success, sustainability and efficiency, they do not exist in a vacuum, so tensions and compromises are ongoing.

The notion of CS brings together both the cooperative triangle and hourglass as the data exposed that the factors weakening cooperative sustainability are bifold and interlinked with issues of specific understandings of “professionalisation of farming” on the one hand and lack of cooperative education on the other as discussed previously. Based on these data, I define CS as the ability or capacity for an AC to maintain the four dimensions indicated in the cooperative triangle while also fostering environmental sustainability.

Former debates around CS have been mainly on the legal dimension proposed by the framework presented in this thesis, primarily around conversion debates to IOFs (Mooney et al., 1996; Dunn, 1988). The concept of CS contributes to this literature both theoretically and methodologically. Theoretically, the CS concept expands the debate to other dimensions of ACs beyond their legal form, governance and investor profile. Methodologically, CS is a construct that can be evaluated, explored and further developed through the application of the theoretical framework proposed in this chapter as a tool for assessing individual case studies; the application can be done on either specific cooperatives or to assess the potential impact of policies relating to ACs and agriculture by analysing how a particular policy intervention can impact cooperative sustainability based on the effects/implications for each of the cooperative dimensions proposed.

This research puts forward the concept of CS to suggest that unless ACs succeed in integrating the four elements of the cooperative triangle (Figure 3), their model will eventually become something else, no longer cooperative and no longer transformative. The findings from this research suggest the key factors that could help achieve cooperative sustainability with wider benefits for the wider food system are:

- 1) Reverting pressure outwards towards large players in the food system instead of inwards towards members

- 2) Overcoming Western epistemological biases of anthropocentrism, ethnocentric and androcentrism and,
- 3) Overcoming quantophrenic definitions of success

9.4 Conclusion

This chapter has put forward a new analytical framework that emerged from a multi-method approach based on the examination of multidisciplinary literature, policy documents and diverse sources of new data. From the wide variety of data and informants used, a conclusion emerges: cooperation in farming can come in a sliding scale of a) formality (from informal “neighbourly” behaviours to legal incorporation that varies greatly across countries) and b) of adherence to the cooperative principles and the wider cooperative social movement.

Over the years, as a result of the above factors, components of ACs have become disjointed. The pressure that ACs were originally set up to exert outwards has become increasingly inverted towards cooperative members themselves, blunting their transformative power. Before ACs used to exert resistance against powerful actors upstream and downstream the food system: both by protecting and empowering farmers to deal with the agricultural inputs industry and with large buyers from processing and retailing firms. This research has shown how certain elements of ACs can be more susceptible to co-optation than others; evidence presented showed how powerful actors in the agro-inputs, processing and retailing industries can turn the advantage of having many producers grouped in a single AC to their own benefit. Agroindustries use ACs as an entry point to introduce products lines and varieties; processors and retailers also benefit from ACs by imposing quality standards and logistic demands to a large numbers of ACs’ members in one go, rather than having to negotiate with many farmers individually. ACs fit well the model of purchasing and logistics of the industrial and globalised food system.

The growth of larger and more corporate ACs reduce farmers’ options at several levels: there are fewer number of ACs farmers can join, and once they become members, they experience more top-down control from their ACs in terms of what to grow and how to grow it, and face lock-in situations hard to scape. This control over farmers is even more critical for poor and illiterate AC members in developing countries, where neo-colonialism and the globalisation of food production are being crystallised in the creation of top-down ACs.

Research in this particular topic of co-optation of the cooperative model raises a number of difficult issues around ACs and highlights some uncomfortable – but potentially analytically fruitful – tensions between cooperative governance and cooperatives’ survival. At the same time, the new theoretical framework presented provides explanatory power to differentiate between cooperatives as organisations and cooperative practices. The double cooperative hourglass (Figure 4) can help illustrate these ongoing tensions between the cooperative economic model and the market economy they exist in. The critical theory put forward as part of this research also allows to analyse trends in labour relations and dynamics of production and power in European ACs as well as their impact overseas, a key issue in an increasingly globalised food system.

The proposed framework builds on and it is complementary to Goodman and colleagues’ conventionalisation thesis of the organic movement (Goodman et al., 2011). Other food movements, such as organic and fairtrade, are also struggling with processes of co-optation. The framework reflects how ACs can be situated in a continuum of alterity, from those that are highly embedded in the dominant food regime to those that aim to create a new economic system starting with elements of food provision. Therefore, ACs can be considered either part of the alternative food systems or embedded in the industrial food regime depending on where on that continuum of alterity they sit.

The preference for vertical integration in the market economy and globalised food system has taken over the horizontality and equality principles that formed the original roots of cooperatives. This chapter has put forward the concept of cooperative sustainability to suggest that unless ACs succeed in integrating the four elements of the cooperative pyramid, their model will gradually become something else, no longer cooperative and no longer transformative. Strategies to achieve sustainability include reverting pressure outwards towards large players in the food system instead of inwards towards members, overcoming Western epistemological biases and quantophrenic definitions of success. For this reason, when promoting cooperatives as a way to achieve more sustainable and fairer food systems, we need to be careful and more specific about the type of cooperatives and cooperation we want to promote.

10. Conclusions: implications for agricultural cooperatives, food policy and alternative food initiatives

This closing chapter includes final conclusions, reflections and recommendations for further research. It starts by discussing the implications the findings have for the agricultural cooperative sector and wider alternative food initiatives. This is followed by reflections on the research questions and methodology, considering what we can learn from comparisons and how cross-national research can help develop our knowledge and understanding, not only of others, but also of ourselves (Baistow, 2000). The final two sections discuss implications for farming and cooperative policy and opportunities for further research.

10.1 Implications for the agricultural cooperative sector

This thesis has portrayed 21st century agricultural cooperation in Spain and the UK in the context of EU food and farming policy. By combining a thorough multidisciplinary literature review of agricultural cooperatives and food sustainability with a comparative case study methodology, the thesis has covered a wide range of theoretical and empirical ground. Empirically, this thesis has documented the first analysis of food MSCs in Europe. The data and analysis provided have stretched binary understandings of conventional versus alternative discourses dominant in food studies. Additionally, the thesis has attempted to unpack and theorise the diversity and possibilities of different cooperative forms in agro-food systems and how they evolve to adapt or resist wider policy and power dynamics in the food system. As a result of its theoretical and empirical contributions, this study has opened up a new research agenda in the field of interdisciplinary food studies that will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

This research has aimed at providing a comprehensive history of ACs in the two countries, as well as also analysing the challenges and contradictions faced by contemporary ACs. In relation to the historical dimension covered in Chapter 2, when tracing back the historical roots of ACs, the more popular element of the UK cooperative movement focused on food retail, whereas the Spanish tradition has always been more land-based; this difference makes social and cultural sense when considering where the main bulk of the labour population lived in each country (urban or rural areas) at the time the cooperative movement developed, and what needs cooperative initiatives were able to cover (production or consumption related). Nevertheless, while there are still wide-ranging differences between Spanish and British ACs due to

entrenched historical and socio-economic factors, this research has highlighted two trends common to both countries: increased liberalisation and consolidation in the AC sector. This thesis has presented evidence on the general lack of engagement most of the AC sector has with the wider cooperative movement. The theoretical starting assumption of this research was that ACs were once expressions of alternative food systems at the farming level to empower food producers and tackle power imbalances in the food system. With industrial agriculture and globalisation, that alterity is being lost.

The wide variety of data and informants used in this research have revealed how cooperation in farming can come in a sliding scale of:

- a) Formality (from informal ‘neighbourly’ behaviours to incorporation into legal frameworks that vary greatly across countries) and,
- b) Adherence to the cooperative principles and the wider cooperative social movement.

The findings from this research show that factors increasing the corporatisation of ACs in the EU are multilevel:

- Cooperative level: lack of continuous education of members on the history, meaning and value of their cooperative and the wider cooperative movement.
- National level: policies aiming to increase the profitability of farming as an economic sector, including clear support for consolidation of the sector and larger farms.
- EU level: The CAP pushing for the PO model to concentrate demand and facilitate trade within the Common Market and beyond.
- Global level: the introduction of agriculture in the World Trade Organisation in 1995 and increasing demand from emerging economies are also pushing ACs to both become bigger players to be able to compete in their national markets and to export to foreign markets.

This research has demonstrated how certain elements of ACs can be more susceptible to co-optation than others. Evidence presented showed how powerful actors in the agro-inputs, processing and retailing industries can turn the advantage of having many producers grouped in a single AC to their own benefit: using ACs as an entry point to introduce products lines and varieties (useful for agro-industries) as well as quality standards and logistic demands (useful for processors and retailers) to a large numbers of farmers in one go.

This thesis then discussed the role and potential of emerging MSCs to decentralise power and control over supply channels in the food system at a time when capitalism is concentrating not only capital but also its workforce (mostly net consumers of food) in cities. Data presented showed how the MSC vision is based on and requires politics of collective responsibility for it

to succeed, as it aims to adopt more relational ways of trading, based on geographical and temporal connections. The findings from the case studies presented indicated that the MSC model is demanding and messy, reflecting a genuine and passionate attempt to realise all the criteria of multidimensional sustainability.

The MSCs presented in the case studies are aspiring to transform the food system following two strategies: first, by raising awareness of and reducing unaccounted externalities of food production. Second, by aiming for multidimensional sustainability, creating a multi-campaign space where efforts to address the new fundamentals are coming together (Lang, 2010). In contrast to mid 19th century's class-based cooperativism, MSCs exemplify a much more diverse and diffused notion of cooperation, the multiplicity of their objectives being a reflection of the increasing policy stretching that global food governance is experiencing.

At the organisational level, if principles, governance and outward networks are cultivated, MSCs can become a connecting link between bottom-up initiatives and top-down food policies, a link with the potential to be scaled-up by collaborative public procurement strategies (e.g. supplying school and hospital canteens). Their heterogeneous memberships and networks make them complex but also give them resilience, contacts and a voice at different platforms of the multilevel governance arena of global food policy. The emergence of MSCs highlights the need for a post-productivist model of cooperation, one that acknowledges the challenges that consumers and producers are facing in the 21st century food system, opposing the outdated approach to food policy that confines them to isolated silos and striving for integration, an essential condition to achieve truly sustainable food systems.

This research has built identified theoretical parallelisms between the agricultural cooperative movement and the organic, fairtrade and agroecology movements, which are also struggling between conforming and transforming the dominant industrial food regime (Levidow et al., 2014). The new proposed theoretical framework situates ACs in a continuum of alterity: from those that are highly embedded in industrial and globalised food systems to those that aim to create a new economic system starting with elements of food provision. Therefore, ACs can be considered either part of alternative food systems or embedded in the industrial food regime depending on where on that continuum of alterity they sit.

The theoretical framework presented in Chapter 9 has a multilevel character to reflect the complexity of the food policy context ACs exist in. The first level of the framework, the cooperative triangle, focuses on deconstructing the different elements that made up individual cooperatives, namely, informal cooperative behaviours (that predate all other layers), legal

dimension, governance model and level of connection with the wider cooperative movement. The second level of the framework, the double cooperative hourglass, puts ACs in the context of the wider food system, analysing the relationships that any given AC might have with other actors in the food system (e.g. supermarkets, consumers, etc.). Finally, the concept of cooperative sustainability brings the previous two levels together by referring to the sustainability of the cooperative itself, its essence and principles, especially with regards to the social movement dimension of ACs, but also with interwoven environmental connotations. The multilevel framework suggests that unless the four elements of the cooperative triangle (Figure 9.1) are balanced, ACs will eventually become something else, no longer cooperative and no longer transformative, putting pressure into their own members rather than the powerful players they were originally set up to resist.

This new framework offers a new perspective to examine ACs and contributes an analytical tool that can be used for the evaluation of specific ACs or individual policies; more importantly, it introduces a new language to describe and analyse cooperatives in food and farming that those involved in alternative food initiatives can use to situate, negotiate and understand different cooperative endeavours. Can cooperatives resolve the dilemmas of living in an unsustainable food system? The evidence suggests that is not necessarily the case, but cooperation grounds the process, it adds coherence and injects a human perspective to the debate.

10.2 Reflexive practice

10.2.1 Reflections on the research questions

One of the most celebrated practices of qualitative research is self-reflexivity and how it shapes the research process and the methodological approach (Tracy, 2010). Tracy has defined self-reflexive researchers as those who:

[...] examine their impact on the scene and note others' reactions to them. In doing so, these researchers think about which types of knowledge are readily available, as well that which is likely to be shielded or hidden. Their field notes include self-reflexive commentary about subjective feelings and sense-making (Tracy, 2010:468).

This thesis includes appendices that provide evidence of the self-reflexivity approach that informed the process of this research. These appendices include samples of transcriptions, translation of Spanish quotes and field notes.

The original PhD proposal presented a view of ACs that turned out to be simplistically idealistic, as discussed in Chapter 4. The in-depth literature review and fieldwork uncovered the less-friendly and more commercial side of cooperatives and it was a firm reminder of the need for objectivity in research at all times. Other authors such as Hinrichs and Allen have warned of the dangers of this halo effect that wrongly embellishes certain models of food relations such as organic food, local food initiatives, farmers' markets etc. (Hinrichs, 2000; Allen, 2004); this cognitive bias inclines us to ignore the negative aspects of certain alternative initiatives, which in turn predisposes us to create an overall impression of things or people based on one or a few positive traits. Putting reflective practice into action, this research followed Hinrichs' advice on challenging alternative food systems rather than assuming that they are delivering what spread imaginaries expect them to provide (Hinrichs, 2000). Patricia Allen has also used this critical approach to her study of alternative food networks (Allen, 2004). The underlying logic applied in this study was that of open-mindedness and a constructive critical approach when assessing ACs.

While the first research questions included in the original PhD proposal were somehow naïve, they still served a good purpose. These questions were an adequate starting point to the research process as they reflected the general-held public view of ACs, so they were a perfect way of building up and documenting the evidence that supported and contested that image. Moreover, the original research questions drove this research to the final findings and emphasised the need for reflexive practice and a critical approach at all times and for all subjects and objects of study.

Reflexive practice takes the research beyond a reflective practice approach. Being reflective that does not necessarily imply changing one's practice in view of the reflections made (Finlay, 2002). Reflexive practice in turn actually shapes the research process, in this case by starting with a very naïve view of ACs and then proactively adapting the research design and research questions after becoming aware of the need to be critical and check evidence first as a way of minimising halo effects and non-evidence based assumptions. Greenhalgh and Taylor have defended critics who accuse qualitative researchers from moving their own goalposts by highlighting that an iterative approach shows "a commendable sensitivity to the richness and variability of the subject matter" and thus it is a strength, not a weakness, to alter the research methods and the questions as the study progresses, in the light of evidence collected along the

way instead of knowingly sticking with inadequate methods or irrelevant questions (Greenhalgh and Taylor, 1997:740).

10.2.2 Reflections on methodology and methods

Chapter 4 explained the adequacy of case study methodology for this research; the benefits went in fact beyond the actual research and expanded to the development of the actual researcher using this methodology too. In this context, Flyvbjerg has highlighted the fact that humans become experts in certain areas or skills by gradually experiencing learning in consecutive specific cases (Flyvbjerg, 2004). The author argues that studying cases is an advisable and adequate methodology to develop researchers' learning and skills. Being the main purpose of a PhD to develop the author's research capabilities, this argument became an additional reason for using case study methodology.

Reflecting after the interviews also helped me consider whether participants were finding the research process and questions comprehensible and meaningful. It was a constant reminder that I had to present my research with clarity, avoiding jargon to communicate in an effective manner in order to make participants feel at ease and understood, and to maximise the quality and relevance of the data.

One of the methodological challenges was dealing with the ongoing process of receiving information through email networks and list serves. Despite having to deal with a high volume of emails, some of the content accessed via these channels was identified as valuable data and provided a source of information with regular updates that would have been impractical and very time and resource consuming to be aware of otherwise (e.g. cooperative newsletters from some of the cooperatives selected as case studies).

In terms of cross-country comparisons, it was important not to mix levels of cases, that is, not to extrapolate conclusions about countries (macro level) on the basis of drawing on evidence gained at other levels, for example at the meso level of the cooperative or at the micro or individual level of the particular cooperative members. Claims about such cases were first made in relation to the specificities of the contexts from which they were selected.

With regards to the ethics procedure, consent forms in Spain raised more conversations than when interviewing UK informants. In Spain consent forms in research are still mainly the domain of clinical trials. Some participants commented on how they perceived the forms as very formal. It was expected the forms would put some potential interviewees off from

participating in the project but that was not the case. The forms in some interviews helped initiate discussion. At the same time, the forms were also a thermometer of the participants' attitudes toward bureaucracy and institutions. As discussed in Chapter 4, one of the participants, a member of a MSC, agreed to be interviewed but refused to sign the consent form as for this person the form represented the system his MSC is trying to avoid and replace.

As discussed also in Chapter 4, the importance of multivocality was a fundamental aspect of the methodology and findings of this research. Food is a nexus where all humans (wearing different hats as producers, consumers, retailers, policy makers, etc.) and many dimensions converge (cultural, nutritional, environmental, socio-economic, political, etc.). The core of this research was trying to reflect how that nexus is characterised in the case of agricultural cooperation and ACs. The major challenge in developing capabilities to communicate and respond to that complexity of actors and relations is reflected in immediate policy pressures and deeper political dynamics, including within research itself. This required not only asking hard questions about the methods and whether they were going to be not only practical, relevant or effective, but to reflect on what these three qualities even mean and to whom. The literature review demonstrated the limitations of quantophobia and the dangers of using practical and effective methods to measure some indicators and ignore others. The methods employed to study agricultural cooperation and other alternative initiatives that aim to rebalance power relations in food systems should not be limited those suiting the most vocal, privileged or powerful users of research; instead, methods that best enable the most marginalised and vulnerable people and that dare to measure and discuss benefits that are key but intrinsically difficult to be quantified, should be prioritised (Stirling, 2015). This is especially so when considering the hard to grasp more than economic benefits of cooperation and the social, environmental, health and commensality dimensions of food production and consumption.

This research has strengthened a desire to develop a deeper knowledge and practice of participatory research. This aspiration has emerged from a realisation that a systemic approach is needed and no one discipline or type of actor (in this case researchers) will be able to solve all the entwined challenges facing the food system.

10.2.3 Acknowledging limitations: Reflections on methodological choices

Denzin and Lincoln have highlighted how qualitative researchers acknowledge the ideologically driven character of research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). In line with this

argument, rather than ignoring that research is never value-free, through introspection, before starting the fieldwork, I identified how my own biases and demographic factors could influence the data collection process. Biases and limitations of the methods were acknowledged and reflected on before and throughout the data collection to minimise affecting participants and results and were categorised into two main groups, i.e. demographics and conceptual limitations:

- Demographic profile of the researcher: The main limitation identified was regarding the representational limitations of the method to capture reality; I, as a researcher, have to acknowledge that even though every effort from my part was made to reflect participants' understanding of their understanding of the AC sector and sustainable food systems, my account was an interpretation of their interpretation. This point is a commonly cited limitation in anthropological research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998) but it also applies to this research as it attempted to make sense of the farming community and different types of cooperatives.

I was aware that my affiliation with the Centre for Food Policy and my links to the UK Food Group (the UK network for NGOs working on global food and agriculture issues) shaped and are still shaping my experience and conception of food policy issues and cooperativism, especially around elements of social justice, sustainability and food democracy. As discussed, I soon became aware of my own positive pre-conceptions of cooperatives as well as of my own understanding of what a sustainable food system should look like (fair, egalitarian, healthy and environmentally sound). The first step to neutralise the effect of my potential bias on the study results was to identify them. Additionally, a critical approach was used to avoid assumptions not based on evidence (e.g. move away from idealising the cooperative model). To the best of my abilities, I aimed to convey my interviewees' views in an objective manner following multi-level triangulation and other strategies detailed in Chapter 4 to maximise the validity of the data.

In the same way, views based on agrarian populism that refuses the acceptance of external knowledge and authority were considered a potential barrier to this research due to my academic affiliation. The increasing scientification of farming that undermines farmers' knowledge has been identified as a risk related to how the researcher's legitimacy is perceived by some participants, especially when, as it is my case, the researcher does not come from a farming background. Agrarian populism was partly experienced in Valle del Tietar and Valle del Jerte in Spain when talking to small farmers there who voiced their suspicion of food policy researchers that were "making rules without knowing anything about farming". Rejection of the concept of sustainability was also noted, as some believed it was just a word to control

farmers and sell them “the same old wine in new bottles”.

Additionally, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) have pointed out that the researcher’s gender, class and ethnicity can shape the process of inquiry. As it will be discussed below, these factors can also affect data collection due to the participants’ perception of the researcher and the degree of engagement they decide to exert from it. With regards to individual socio-demographics factors, my gender and age could have potentially become an issue, as farming is still an ageing and male-dominated industry both in Spain and the UK. Before the data collection stage started, it was identified that on one hand, the reliability of the data could suffer from potential negative attitudes of participants with remnants of outdated agrarian ideology who might still maintain a traditional perception of women as “supporters” of male farmers and male-led farm activities. On the other hand, it was anticipated that the more conservative participants might feel ‘less threatened’ by a young female and more willing to share their non-official views about the cooperative sector. Overall, the latter proved to be more the case, especially in Spain.

- **Conceptual limitations:** An important methodological aspect to reflect on is how “cooperative expertise” was conceptualised, as this understanding determined: a) who was perceived as an expert and b) the choice of participants that in turn determined the type of data collected and thus, the results. Expertise was conferred in two ways: 1) institutional affiliation and/or role 2) (more fluid) reputational. In order to avoid the selection of participants based on a subjective perception of expertise, this research strived to use objective indicators. Theoretical sampling based on the findings from the literature review was used to identify relevant participants in the basis of their expected capacity to provide data that would help answer the research questions. This type of sampling allows to actively identify relevant participants and make sense of the data, always based in a comparative analytical exercise between the data collection and emerging findings (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Chapter 4 dealt in detail with the sampling strategy of this study.

Another dimension to take into account was whether interviewees were speaking for themselves or representing an official position. This question was especially relevant as the research focused on analysing the level of corporatisation of cooperatives, a topic that was perceived as controversial for some actors as it clashes with the traditional cooperative discourse based on principles and democracy. In this context, psychological studies have provided clear evidence that non-verbal communication is more difficult to fake (Knapp and Hall, 2010). Audio-recording interviews allowed time to observe and take notes of the non-verbal data provided by participants.

A final conceptual limitation was regarding the variability in meaning of the word cooperative and the variability of terms used to refer to ACs. The findings from the literature review warned of a potential degree of explicit or implicit rejection of cooperatives due to their political and socio-economic connotations in favour for other terms such as farmer-owned business. This prediction was corroborated by the data. Furthermore, the common use of the verb “cooperate” and the noun “cooperation” in everyday language as well as the increasing variety of terms that are frequently used interchangeably (POs, farmers’ owned businesses, etc.) could have created potential misunderstandings with participants. In order to minimise this risk, consistency of terms was used and participants were asked to clarify during interviews if they were referring to informal or legally incorporated types of cooperation.

10.3 Value of this research: theoretical, disciplinary, methodological, empirical and social contributions

This section describes and reflects on the multi-level value of this research, including theoretical, disciplinary, methodological, empirical and social contributions that will be discussed below in detail. Research in the topic of co-optation raises a number of difficult issues about the ACs as it highlights some uncomfortable – but potentially analytically fruitful – tensions between cooperative governance and cooperatives’ survival.

In theoretical terms, this research has offered an alternative perspective to the economics discipline that dominates the study of ACs; this thesis has presented a mainly qualitative study from a food policy and rural sociology perspective. Additionally, a wide range literature from a variety of disciplines was reviewed, converging complementary perspectives in the study of cooperatives. The findings of this research have shown how no one discipline but a multidisciplinary approach is required to start unravelling the complexity of cooperative enterprises and all the aspects they entail.

At the same time, the new theoretical framework presented in Chapter 9 provides explanatory power to differentiate between cooperatives as organisations and cooperative practices. The double cooperative hourglass model can help illustrate these ongoing tensions between the cooperative economic model and the market economy they exist in. The critical theory put forward by this thesis also allows to analyse trends in labour relations and dynamics of production and power in European ACs as well as their impact overseas, a key issue in an increasingly globalised food system. This framework builds on Patrick Mooney’s work on tensions in ACs (Mooney, 1996 and 2004) and contributes to what Mooney called ‘a sociology

of cooperation' (Mooney, 2004:96), aiming to resume the debate on the de/repoliticisation of agricultural cooperatives (Mooney, 1996 and 2004).

Since the creation of the European Common Market, ACs have been gaining greater institutional legitimacy and subsidies, advancing the cooperative model, presenting it as a business case claim rather than a socio-political agenda of transformation. For this reason, the conventionalisation thesis was also used to explain the political skimming of ACs. The double cooperative hourglass offers sufficient explanatory potential to be applied to the case of organics and fair trade as those words were once mainly used to refer to movements and nowadays they are mainly used to refer to labels and certifications. In a similar process of co-optation to ACs, the organic and fair trade movements did once empower farmers, but existing evidence suggests the certifications are now being used as a checklist of allowable inputs (in the case of organic) or allowable working conditions and price paid per product (in the case of fair trade); the labels once used to identify and represent the movements are in many cases becoming mere selling points for new 'ethical' product lines for aware and affluent consumers (Goodman et al., 2011).

The new concept of cooperative sustainability (CS) put forward by this research contributes to the literature on ACs and alternative food systems both theoretically and methodologically. Theoretically, CS expands the debate to other dimensions of ACs beyond their legal form, governance and investor profile. Methodologically, CS is a construct that can be evaluated, explored and further developed through the application of the theoretical framework proposed in this thesis as a tool for assessing individual case studies.

A potential future use of the cooperative triangle and double hourglass framework can involve its application to individual cooperatives. Additionally, the framework also proposes widening the range of perspectives used to examine ACs. It proposes a tool for mapping ACs' practices and to create a language that those involved in alternative food systems and cooperatives can use to negotiate and understand different cooperatives endeavours. The four proposed dimensions can be seen as sliding scales in which ACs realities can be mapped. Furthermore, the original application of the anthropological concept of 'third space' has offered a new and original approach to study the alterity and resistance of alternative food networks.

Additionally, interwoven with the disciplinary contribution, the methodological significance of this thesis emerged from the qualitative study of an object of study, ACs, that has previously been examined mainly quantitatively and through a business performance lens.

The multilevel analysis of comparison including inter-country (taking into account the EU

context), intra-country, intra-cooperative sector and longitudinal comparisons of the evolution of the ACs chosen as case studies, presented a unique and richer approach going beyond conventional cross-country comparisons.

This thesis has also made a bifold empirical contribution (Rowe, 2011); first it has offered a new account of an empirical phenomenon – different expressions of agricultural cooperation – that has challenged existing assumptions about cooperatives. Secondly, it has revealed something previously undocumented in the literature: the rise of multi-stakeholder cooperatives in European food and farming.

Finally, the societal value of this research refers mainly to the evidence provided of different types of strategies aimed at reducing the risk of co-optation currently being implemented by cooperative members in contemporary innovative models. Evidence on these strategies has been captured and theorised and it is hoped that this research will be useful to the future study and development of fairer and more sustainable food systems. Furthermore, the multivocality approach of this project has also offered smaller cooperatives and less powerful actors in the food system to voice their opinions and raises issues about trends in the AC sector in their own words.

10.4 Implications for food policy and agricultural cooperatives' policy

This research has put forward the concept of cooperative sustainability (CS) to suggest that unless ACs succeed in integrating the four elements of the cooperative triangle, their model will gradually become diluted and no longer transformative. Mechanisms to protect and foster CS include reverting pressure outwards towards large players in the food system instead of inwards towards members and overcoming Western epistemological biases and quantophrenic definitions of success. For this reason, when promoting cooperatives as a way to achieve more sustainable and fairer food systems, we need to be specific about the type of cooperatives and cooperation we want to see, and this comes with associated policy implications.

The new analytical framework put forward in this doctoral project can potentially be used by policy makers as a tool to formulate and assess the impact of policy proposals by analysing how a particular intervention could impact cooperative sustainability based on the effects/implications for each of the cooperative dimensions proposed. The framework can also be applied to specific cooperatives to analyse how they have evolved over time and map their relationships with other actors in the food system.

In terms of policy lessons, this research has revealed that an adequate legal framework is not sufficient to encourage MS initiatives due to the bottom-up nature of these associations; however, a supportive legal framework can create the right policy context and minimise the diversion of much needed cooperative resources that often go wasted in the process of legally registering a MSC. The case studies raise questions of whether current CAP subsidies for rural collaboration might be better invested in supporting new models of MS cooperation that foster links between rural and urban development. EU policy makers should consider what kind of cooperation they want to reproduce through subsidies. However, the challenges facing MSCs are not only related to multilevel governance, but also to long established cultural and social norms and expectations around food, price and consumerist conceptions of progress.

Food democracy and social justice are the underlying issues highlighted by this thesis (Lang, 2005; Caraher and Dowler, 2014). Food democracy not just understood as striving to achieve safe, justly produced and sustainable food for all (Lang, 2005), but democracy in the food policy-making process itself and in the power relations in the food chain. ACs and especially MSCs can bring democracy into the equation. Some authors have proposed ACs as a way to counterbalance and reverse the supermarketisation of society (Lawrence and Dixon, 2015), but this is only possible if their vision focuses on relations, rather than on labels, certifications or legal forms that can be easily co-opted and appropriated by the dominant food regime.

At the wider level of national food policy, a bold suggestion emerges from this thesis. Governments should consider the creation of two parallel food systems in each country: one not-for profit for domestic consumption in an attempt to increase self-reliance and a second one for export. Currently, there is a mismatch between local consumption and local needs unmet by a global and international food system. Additionally, evidence presented by this research has highlighted a second mismatch as many ACs have become too large to be able to meet the demand for local food of their communities. Due to the scale of the operations, they are forced to find larger buyers, decreasing their embeddedness in the rural areas where they operate and their social significance. Bello Horizonte in Brazil is proposed as a well-known case study of a successful food policy programme that is highly reliant in the cooperative model (Sonnino, 2009). Based on the principle of social justice, Bello Horizonte has achieved a better life for its citizens and small-scale farmers through valuing and engaging small and medium ACs that are able to cover local food demand. Successful cooperatives' policies will have to tackle the issue of scale to match local demand. The case studies also showed logistics are a barrier to trans-local or local to local initiatives between like-minded cooperatives based in different countries.

10.5 Opportunities for future research

The findings have highlighted areas where further research could be undertaken, especially from a sociological perspective, to offer an alternative analysis to the abundant economic literature on ACs. A key suggestion for future research refers to the application of the proposed theoretical framework put forward by this thesis to individual case studies, including emerging multi-stakeholder models and agricultural workers' cooperatives, to assess differences across the wide cooperative diversity that exists in food and farming across different European countries and beyond Europe. It would also be interesting to assess potential policy scenarios exploring the advantages and barriers of redirecting CAP subsidies from POs to MSCs. An additional under-researched topic is the evaluation and comparison of farmers' cooperative behaviours in informal versus institutional/legally-incorporated cooperative environments.

If any, the most pressing issue that requires further academic and empirical contributions is around researching strategies to protect the alterity of transformative food and farming initiatives. A good start has been made in Chapter 9 of this thesis, but more work is required in this area. No cooperative, organic or fair trade movement is going to achieve its objectives if co-optation and appropriation become an unavoidable fate. The key question raised by this thesis is: How can the alterity and the transformative potential of these food and farming movements be protected and fostered in order to achieve fairer and more sustainable food systems for all?

1. Appendices

Appendix I. Why are Spain and UK two interesting case studies to compare?

This table summarises the similarities and differences discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 4 that make Spanish and UK AC sectors two interesting case studies to compare.

Factor	UK	Spain
Differences		
Historical	1 st country to have a formalised co-operative (Rochdale legacy).	Early agricultural cooperativism (beg. 20th century) became a control tool used by the church and fascist regime to counterbalance communist and anarchist ideologies.
	Historical roots of cooperative ideology: - Owenites - Chartism	Historical roots of cooperative ideology: Bakunin and French revolutionary ideas, but high levels of illiteracy and poverty hindered the development of cooperatives.
	1 st country to undergo Industrial revolution and 1 st country to transform its agriculture into a highly industrialised economic sector.	One of the last 17 Eurozone members to industrialise agriculture.
	2 nd country to consolidate farming (after Denmark; by 1980s UK had the largest farms in Europe).	Concentrated land ownership but still very atomised farming sector.
Sectorial (AC):	Agricultural cooperation developed less and slower than consumer and industrial co-operation.	Agricultural cooperation has a longer tradition than consumer and industrial cooperation.
	Agricultural cooperation became a tool for economic protection and of top-down measures.	Combination of both a tool for economic protection with top down measures and cooperation as resistance and struggle.
Retail sector	One of the earliest to develop. Highly integrated, reducing farmers' need to find markets for their produce: 367 supermarkets were operating by 1960.	Late development, only 44 stores in 1962.
Coop. policy	Since the Curry report in 2002, government's focus on "collaboration" rather than formal cooperation.	Currently, 2 nd strongest co-operative economy in EU.
Farming exports/ imports	UK is a net importer of food, with exports exceeding US\$ 23 billion compared to imports of around US\$ 54 billion.	Spain is a marginal net exporter: exports of 33.5 billion vs. 33 billion imports.
Similarities		
Political	Both countries currently have conservative governments in power promoting cooperatives as part of their economic discourse.	

Legislative	Consolidation of cooperative legislation: In 2014, the Conservative and Lib Dem coalition approved a consolidated act that brought together 17 different pieces of legislation that had not been updated since 1965.	The Popular Party (Christian conservative party) approved a new law in 2013 to foster the integration of agricultural cooperatives and other types of associative agrarian entities.
Economic	Power imbalances and power concentration at producer, processor and retail level created by increasing market concentration and asymmetrical bargaining powers.	
Importance of farming and cooperatives in each country		
Total area (Km2)	244,101	505,365
Total population ('000 inhabitants)	61,176	45,283
Number of holdings (1000 holdings) 2007	300	1,044
UAA per holding (ha) 2007	53,8	23,8
Employment in agric. (%)	1,4	4,3
GVA/ GDP	0,5%	2,2%
Number of farmers ('000) 2008 (UK has same numbers in 2008 and 2012)	300	1,160,3
Number of farmers members of ACs (including membership in several cooperatives) 2008	150,000	972,380
Number of cooperatives (all sectors) (2008 for Spain and specified for UK)	4,820 (2008) 5,933 (2011)	24,738
Number of jobs in cooperatives (2008)	236,000	456,870
Number of jobs in ACs (2008 for Spain and 2010 for UK)	7,950	90,308
Number of ACs	450 (2012 figures) 621 (2016 figures)	3,861

Social economy Sector		
Paid employment in cooperatives (number of jobs in 2009-10)	236,000	646,397
Paid employment in the Social Economy compared to total paid employment in 2009-2010 (%)	5.64%	6.74%
Evolution of paid employment in the Social Economy from 2002-03 to 2009-10 (%)	-4.57%	42.53%
Different tax treatment for cooperatives	No	Yes
CIRIEC (International Centre of Research and Information on the Collective Economy) presence?	No	Yes

Source: Compiled by the author from several sources. See Chapters 1, 2 and 4 for references.

Appendix II. Timeline of agricultural cooperation - Spain

Spain - Timeline of Agricultural Cooperation

- **1842:** First record of workers' cooperatives
- **1860s:** Bakunin's anarchist ideas of voluntary cooperation reach Spain and many industrial and agricultural cooperatives are formed
- **1867:** Cooperatives already had a legal form and existed in statistical surveys
- **1869:** First legislative appearance of cooperatives in the “Law for free creation of joint-stock and credit companies”
- **1870:** First Spanish Workers Congress concludes cooperatives cannot help their struggle
- **1887:** Associations Act: this legislation did not classify many agricultural cooperatives as such
- **1887:** First official figures on cooperatives. These statistics are unreliable as only recorded 39 cooperatives (for all sectors), with none in Barcelona, despite several accounts of coops existing there before that date.
- **1890s:** First national organisation is formed: National Committee for Spanish Cooperatives.
- **1895:** First systematic compilation of statistics returns 138 cooperatives (for all sectors) but still unreliable and missing cooperatives from certain regions.
- **1906:** *Ley de Pósitos Agrícolas* is approved, legislating agricultural syndicates (equivalent of agricultural cooperatives). This ambiguous law starts a period characterized by cooperatives/syndicates with low specialization – plurifunctionality and no clear ideological base
- **1908:** 266 ACs are recorded in Catalonia.
- **1913:** The first national cooperative congress is held.
- **1920s:** *Confederación Nacional Católica Agraria* becomes main national organisation, co-existing with other more politicised groups: *Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra* (FNTT-UGT) (socialist ideology) and *Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores* (anarchist ideology)
- **1930:** Opening of the Institute of Cooperation and Social Welfare, the country’s first centre for cooperative studies
- **1931:** Cooperative Law (all sectors) is approved – first official recognition for agricultural cooperatives
- **1931-36:** Second Republic: important development of all cooperative sectors

- **1936-1939:** Spanish Civil War
- **1938:** Franco's government passes a law to remove the “socialist characteristics” of previous legislation, abolishes political cooperative organisations and integrates catholic-agrarian groups into the regime
- **1941-42:** Syndical Cooperative Administration introduces compulsory membership on *Hermanadas Locales de Labradores y Ganaderos* (local level – “horizontal syndicalism”), *Sindicatos Verticales de Rama* (crop sector – “vertical syndicalism”), *Uniones Territoriales de Cooperativas* (UTECA) (representing bodies at regional level) and *Union Nacional de Cooperativas* (national representing body).
- **1943:** Approval of “Cooperative Societies Law” by which coop societies can be formed with legal existence but cannot aim at profit making. Managing committees must include a member of the Falange (Franco’s regime) and an ecclesiastic representative.
- **1955:** Some 5,000 agricultural cooperatives exist in Spain with over 1 million members but only fewer than 500 tractors, a reflection of a huge but underdeveloped agricultural sector.
- **1956:** Mondragon Cooperative is founded
- **1959:** “*Operación Supermercado*” is set up as part of Franco’s Economic Stabilisation Plan with the objective of modernizing the Spanish retail sector
- **1962:** Only 44 stores in the country met the European criteria for supermarkets. It was not until the 80s that the retail sector started transforming distribution channels and shifting power in the food system.
- **1971:** New regulations are issued to bring Spanish coops in line with ECC countries.
- **1975:** Franco dies.
- **1975-76:** Three experimental farms initiated in Almeria, fully financed by a cooperative bank
- **1977:** Freedom of Association Act is approved and political parties, trade unions and employer organizations regain legal status
- **1978:** Spanish Constitution is enacted
- **1980s:** Democracy brings a period of transformation and opening for ACs and with political devolution, legal responsibility for ACs is transferred to the newly established regional autonomous governments
- **1985-86:** WTO comes into existence
- **1985:** By this year devolved laws on ACs by governments in the Basque Country, Catalonia, Andalusia and Valencia had been passed. By this time the co-operative movement in Spain becomes one of the largest in Europe, second only to Italy.
- **1986:** Spain joins EU. Three months later, the *Asociación Española de Cooperativas Agrarias* (AECA) (regional association) is created to improve the work done by FECA.

- **1989:** AECA and *Unión de Cooperativas Agrarias de España* (UCAE) merge and establish the Spanish Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives (CCAЕ).
- **2000s:** Period of development and consolidation of agricultural cooperatives.
- **2005:** Regions with strong cooperative sector are more business efficient and received less subsidies (e.g. Almeria received 1.8% compared to 18.2% Spanish average).
- **2009:** CCAE changes its name and passes on to being called Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias (Agri-food Cooperatives Spain) to project a modern, more business-like image.
- **2010-12:** Financial crisis and implosion of construction sector predicts new focus on agrifood business.
- **2012:** During UN International Year of Cooperatives, a new Agricultural Cooperative Integration Law to foment consolidation of the sector is proposed.
- **2013:** Agricultural Cooperative Integration Law is approved and mergers in the sector are encouraged.

Source: Both timelines were compiled by the author from several sources. For references see Chapters 1 and 2.

Appendix III. Timeline of agricultural cooperation - UK

UK - Timeline of Agricultural Cooperation

- **1799 and 1800:** Combination Acts starts the legal journey of the movement by introducing the right to associate, an activity considered conspiratorial until then.
- **1840:** Due to the spread of “High Farming” and the industrial revolution, by the mid 19th century farming only employs ¼ of the population and accounted for less than this share of the national income.
- **1846:** Friendly Societies Act: societies able to register but able to trade only with members and not allowed to hold common property.
- **1851-61:** First worker cooperative farm, Jumbo Farm is set up by Jumbo Cooperative Society and a group of weavers in Middleton, near Rochdale.
- **1852:** First Industrial and Provident Societies Act (Slaney's Act) advocated by Christian Socialists lawyers recognises cooperation as a distinctive form of organisation.
- **1869:** First Cooperative Congress.
- **1896:** CWS (now the Cooperative Group) begins farming at Roden Estate in Shropshire to grow fruit for the jam factory”. For years, the Cooperative Group is UK’s largest agriculture employer and landowner until summer 2014 when it sells its 7,000 hectares of land, 15 farms and around 130 residential and commercial properties to the Wellcome Trust for £249m in an attempt to cover its debts.
- **1891:** After a century of decline, farming’s contribution to the gross national income falls to under 8% (Hobsbawm, 1999).
- **1901:** Agricultural Organisation Society is set up.
- **1917:** The Cooperative Party is formed.
- **1924:** Fall of the Agricultural Wholesale Society.
- **1927:** (a) The Cooperative Party becomes a sister party of the Labour Party. Today, there are 32 Labour and Cooperative MPs. (b) The % of land owner-occupiers increased from 10% in the 1870s to 36% as aristocracy sold their land and diversified into other industries and colonies.
- **1930s:** Farming only employs about 5% of the occupied population and contributes less than 4% to the national income.
- **1945:** The Agricultural Co-operative Association for England is formed.

- **1949:** the Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Great Britain and Ireland (FAC) is formed, representing and training member organisations in both countries and also with lobbying functions
- **1951:** First supermarket in the country opens. By 1960, there were already 367.
- **1956:** Gaitskell Commission (first Cooperative Commission focussed on manufacturing and retail) and the Agricultural Co-operative Association for England merges with Farmers' Central Organisation to form the Agricultural Central Cooperative Association (ACCA).
- **1960:** After 9 years from the first supermarket, 367 more were operating by 1960 (Spain had only 44 stores in 1962). The Agricultural Central Trading (ACT) is set up jointly by the ACCA and the National Farmers Union (NFU).
- **1962:** Agricultural societies withdraw from ACT.
- **1965:** Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 is renamed to Cooperative and Community Benefit Societies and Credit Unions Act.
- **1967:** Central Council for Horticultural and Agricultural Cooperatives (CCHAC) was created to help farmers market their products in the newly formed European Common Market; with the 1967 Act, the UK Government starts to prepare for the entry into the European Community (EC).
- **1970:** ACCA becomes Federation of Agricultural Co-operatives (U.K) until 2001.
- **1973:** UK joined EEC. Before that, the country benefited from cheaper Commonwealth imports while the Agricultural Acts of 1949 and 1957 supported and protected national farmers
- **1983:** Food from Britain (FFB) is established under the frame of the agricultural Marketing Act of 1983 to promote food products of British origin inside and outside the country, and to continue the task started by the CCAHC through the Co-operative Development Board (CDB).
- **1990s:** Agricooperatives affected by the removal of the £ from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, the CAP of 1992 + the Uruguay round of GATT.
- **1991:** Government's report "Our Farming Future" is published and expresses concerns about low numbers of agricultural cooperatives and fragmented farming sector.
- **2000-01:** Monk's Cooperative Commission (initiated by Blair in 2000, published in 2001) mainly focussed on the performance of the Cooperative Group.
- **2001:** Curry Commission is set up to deal after the farming crises of BSE and Foot and Mouth disease and was to inform most of the agricultural policy of the last Labour administration.
- **2002:** Report from the Curry Commission, "The Future of Farming and Food" is published

- **2003:** Creation of the English Farming and Food Partnerships (EFFP) following the recommendations of the Curry report for strengthened collaboration within the food supply chain. Cooperatives and Community Benefit Societies Act introduced the concept of ‘asset lock’ (community benefit society).
- **2012:** Conservative/Lib Dem coalition announces intention to introduce a consolidating Act for industrial and provident societies by 2015.
- **2014:** Consolidated Cooperative Act for all cooperatives is approved, bringing together 17 different pieces of legislation that had not been updated since 1965.

Appendix IV. General data on ACs in EU

EU Member State	Total number of Cooperatives	Total number of Members ¹	Turnover (m€)
Belgium	301	:	3 257
Bulgaria	900	:	:
Czech Republic	548	524	1 327
Denmark	28	45 710	25 009
Germany	2 400	1 440 600	67 502
Estonia	21	2 036	512
Ireland	75	201 684	14 149
Greece	550	:	711
Spain	3 844	1 179 323	25 696
France	2400	858 000	84 350
Croatia	613	10 734	167
Italy	5 834	863 323	34 362
Cyprus	14	24 917	62
Latvia	49	:	1 111
Lithuania	402	12 900	714
Luxembourg	55	:	:
Hungary	1 116	31 544	1 058
Malta	18	1 815	204
Netherlands ¹	215	140 000	32 000
Austria	217	306 300	8 475
Poland	136	:	15 311
Portugal	735	:	2 437
Romania	68	:	204
Slovenia	368	16 539	705
Slovakia	597	:	1 151
Finland	35	170 776	13 225
Sweden	30	160 350	7 438
United Kingdom	200	138 021	6 207
Total	21 769	6 172 746	347 342

¹ multiple membership

Source: Cogeca, 2015.

Appendix V: Specific country data on ACs

Spain

Source: Cogeca, 2015.

Spain

9.1. GENERAL PROFILE

Year of EU entry: 1986

Capital city: Madrid

Total area: 504 782 km²

Population: 45.8 million

Currency: Member of the eurozone since 1999 (€)

Schengen area: Member of the Schengen area since 1991

V. COUNTRY REPORTS



Source: http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/member-countries/spain/index_en.htm

Spain	2000	2010	Change (%)
Number of holdings	1 287 420	989 800	-23.1
Total UAA (ha)	26 158 410	23 752 690	-9.2
Livestock (LSU)	14 994 220	14 830 940	-1.1
Number of persons working on farms (Regular labour Force)	2 439 040	2 227 020	-8.7
Average area per holding (ha)	20.3	24.0	18.1
UAA per inhabitant (ha/person)	0.66	0.52	-21.1

Source: Cogeca, 2015.

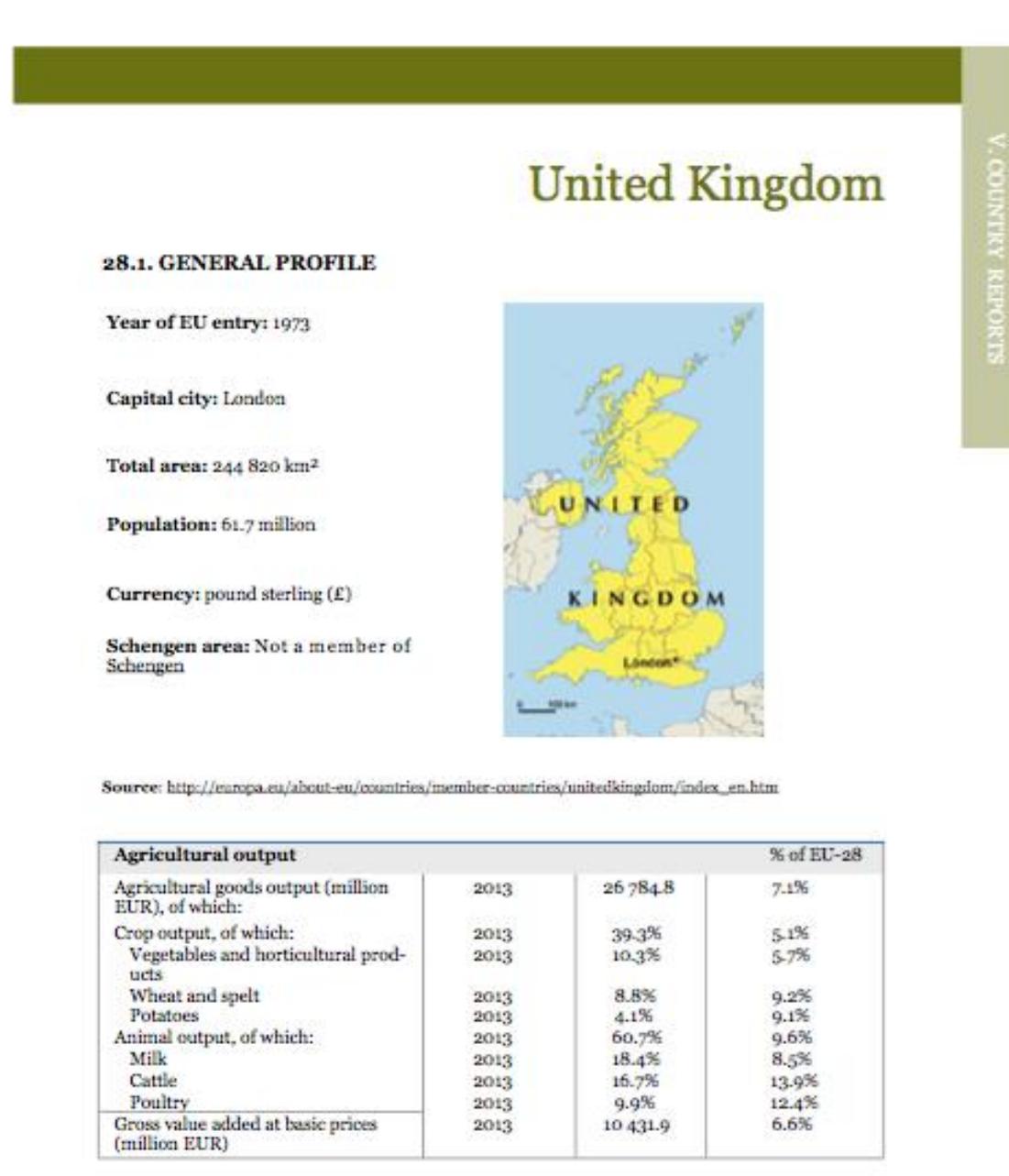
Spain

Ranking of cooperatives	Main sectors	Turnover (m€)	No of farmer members	No of employees	Degree	No of members	
1	COREN, S.C.G., S.COOP.GALEGA	Livestock, feed	980.0	6 000	3,550	2	10
2	Grupo AN	Livestock, arable crops, supply	665.2	21 000	1,172	2	134
3	DCOOP, S.C.A.	olive oil, table olives, livestock, supply	541.0	55 000	256	2	171
4	ANECOOP S.Coop.	Fruit and vegetables, wine	508.4	90 000	202	2	76
5	SCA GANADERA DEL VALLE DE LOS PEDROCHES COVAP	Livestock, dairy, supply	358.0	14 548	556	1	
6	S. COOP. COBADU	feed, livestock, supply	245.0	11 677	136	1	
7	ACOREX S.C.L.	Supply, arable crops, feed, rice, fruit and vegetables	244.5	6 500	131	2	42
8	S. COOP. GENERAL AGROPECUARIA (ACOR)	Sugar crops and sugar, supply	200.6	6 895	493	1	
9	Del Camp d'Ivars d'Urgell i Secció de Crèdit, SCCL	Livestock, feed, supply	189.8	2 930	87	1	
10	ARENTO, Grupo Cooperativo Agroalimentario de Aragón, S. Coop	Arable crops, supply, livestock	182.8	20 000	24	2	112
11	CASI, S.C.A.	Fruit & vegetables:	177.2	1 358	581	1	
12	S. COOP. COPISO SORIA	Feed, livestock, supply	164.0	1 271	95	1	
13	Actel, SCCL	Supply, fruit	159.5		213	2	127
14	SUCA, S.C.A.	Supply, shops	142.9	6 562	42	2	26
15	SAT CENTRAL LECHERA ASTURIANA	Dairy	129.5	7 336	18	1	0
16	Grupo Arco Iris	Livestock, feed, supply, services	129.3	1 020	301	2	5
17	Vicasol, S.C.A.	Vegetables, fruit, supply	121.2	480	1,088	1	
18	Mugiverde	Vegetables, supply	112.4	423	752	2	26

Source: Cogeca, 2015.

Appendix V: Specific country data on ACs

UK



Source: Cogeca, 2015.

United Kingdom

Scotland is home to the most cooperatives in the UK, more than Wales and Northern Ireland combined. However, turnover in Northern Ireland is higher per employee than in any other region in the UK.

List of top 5 largest farmers' cooperatives per sector

In the UK, the majority of the 5 largest farmers' cooperatives per sector appear in the top 50 list for cereals, fruit and vegetables, dairy, pig meat and sheep meat. Notably, three cooperatives appear in both the pig and sheep industry since they are specialist at their point in the livestock food chain, as opposed to being specialist in one type of meat. There is evidence that only one co-operative in the UK used to produce sugar beet (Fleggmart Ltd), but enquiries have so far failed to produce any organisation contact details or further information. The absence of cooperatives dealing in sugar is potentially due to British Sugar farms (a private sector company) having an apparent monopoly of beet production and processing for the UK's EU quotas (NFU, 2010). As such, although Fleggmart Ltd has been included in the table below, it is excluded from the analysis that follows.

Most important cooperatives per sector

Sector	Rank	Name of Cooperative
Cereals	1	Openfield Group Ltd
	2	Fane Valley Cooperative Society
	3	Atlasfram Group Limited
	4	United Oilseeds Marketing Limited
	5	Humber Grain Limited
Fruit and vegetables	1	Speciality Produce Limited
	2	Society of Growers of Topfruit Limited
	3	Bedfordshire Growers Limited
	4	(Premier Vegetables Limited?) East of Scotland Growers Limited
	5	Berry Garden Growers Limited
Dairy	1	Milk Link Ltd
	2	First Milk Ltd
	3	United Dairy Farmers Limited
	4	Fane Valley Cooperative Society
	5	Ballyrashane Cooperative Agricultural and Dairy Society (1990)

Source: Cogeca, 2015.

United Kingdom

Name of Cooperative	Origin Country	UK Members	Sectors	Comments
TELESCOOPERATIE FRESQ U.A. /FresQ	Netherlands	Yes	Fruit & Veg.	Its subsidiary FresQ Kent markets tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers for UK members.
Danish Crown AmbA	Denmark	No	Meat	The Danish Crown Group's processing activities in the UK is handled by Tulip Ltd (Turnover 1.3 b€). It carries out slaughterhouse and meat processing activities and operates in product groups: Bacon, luncheon meat, canned goods and poultry products.
Axérial	France	No	Cereal	Its subsidiary Boortmalt has 2 malt houses in England and 2 in Scotland
Champagne Céréales	France	No	Cereal	Operates in 25 countries; One of its companies, Ineos, owns an English biodiesel company.
Tereos	France	No	Sugar	Owens a sugar refinery in Selby, Yorkshire.
Limagrain	France	No	Seeds	Operates through its subsidiary Limagrain UK
Agrial	France	No	Fruit & Veg.	Operates 2 sites in UK through its subsidiary: Florette Group
Cecab	France	No	Fruit & Veg.	Cecab Group exports to more than 50 countries
Sodiaal Union	France	No	Dairy	Exports branded dairy products such as: Candia, Entremont, Le Rustique, Cœur de Lion, Riches-Monts, Régilait, Yoplait.
Carbery Milk Products	Ireland	No	Dairy	Now known as Carbery Group, Euro 200m food business; Part owned by 4 Irish dairy co-operatives.
Glanbia cooperative society ltd	Ireland	No	Dairy	Part owner of Glanbia plc, a major food business.
Kerry Cooperative society ltd	Ireland	No	Dairy	Part owner of Kerry Foods, a Global Euro5m. Food business.

Source: Cogeca, 2015.

United Kingdom

Most important cooperatives per sector

Sheep meat	1	ANM Group Limited
	2	Yorkshire Farmers Livestock Marketing Limited
	3	Dungannon and District Cooperative Enterprises Limited
	4	Pembrokeshire Quality Livestock Limited
	5	Caithness Livestock Breeders Limited
Pig meat	1	ANM Group Limited
	2	Scottish Pig Producers Limited
	3	Yorkshire Farmers Livestock Marketing Limited
	4	Anglia Quality Meat Association Limited
	5	Progressive Lean Pigs Limited
(Sugar)	1	Fleggmart Limited

28.4. TRANSNATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVES

Many cooperatives are active internationally. In most cases the foreign activities of co-operatives are limited to marketing, trade and sales. Usually they do not buy agricultural products from farmers, or supply inputs to them. However, there is a growing group of co-operatives that do business with farmers in other EU Member States. These cooperatives are called international cooperatives. They can be marketing cooperatives that buy from farmers in different countries, or they could be supply cooperatives that sell inputs to farmers in different countries.

The table below presents the international cooperatives that have their base in the UK. They have gone international by taking up business with non-member farmers in other countries. In the UK, this activity is evident in the fruit and vegetable sector, where a demand for year round supply has replaced a reliance on seasonal produce, and has resulted in sourcing from farmers internationally. However, none of the organisations listed below have membership from their foreign suppliers.

International cooperatives from the UK, trading with farmers in other countries

Name of the Co-operative	Host countries	Sector(s) involved in:	Comments:
Berry Gardens	Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Egypt	Fruit and Vegetables	Berry Gardens is a UK based cooperatives that markets berries grown by members in the UK and across Europe for year round supply. It also has partners who grow in USA and Australia.

Source: Cogeca, 2015.

United Kingdom

Name of the Cooperative	Host countries	Sector(s) involved in:	Comments:
Premier Vegetables Ltd	Spain, Holland	Fruit and Vegetables	Premier Vegetables Ltd do not have members in other EU but do sources produce from non-member growers in other countries to meet demands for year round supply.
Bedfordshire Growers Ltd	Spain, New Zealand, Chile	Fruit and Vegetables	Bedfordshire Growers Ltd do not have members in other EU countries but sources produce from other countries to meet demands for year round supply.

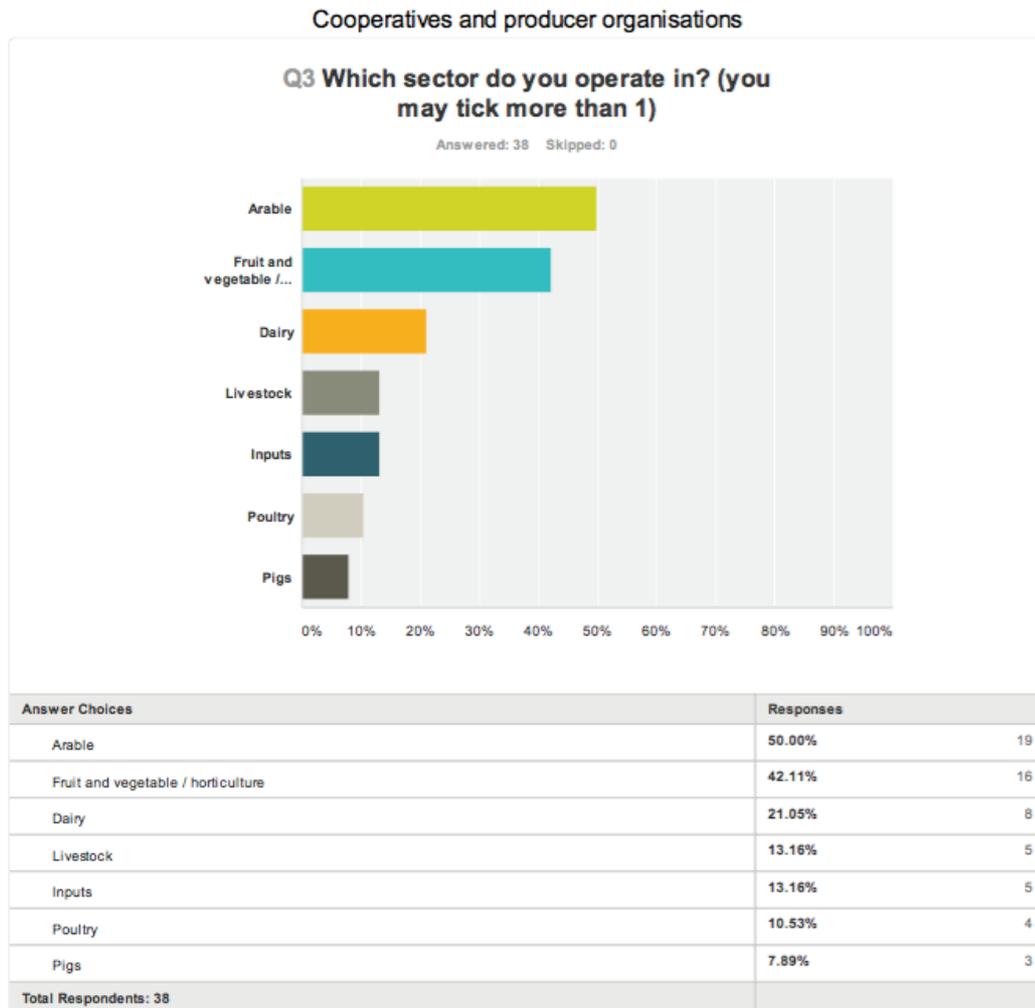
International & transnational cooperatives from overseas trading in the UK

Name of Cooperative	Origin Country	UK Members	Sectors	Comments
Arla Foods AmhA	Denmark	No, but Members of AFMP	Dairy	Major dairy business in UK. Operates through Arla Foods Milk Partnership (AFMP), with membership structure for producer groups and milk cooperatives. First entry into UK market through dairy products exports more than 100yrs ago, then via acquisitions from 1990s. Major growth in 2003, via merger with Express Dairies plc.
Town of Monaghan agricultural and dairy society ltd	Ireland	Yes	Dairy	Dairy products. Northern Ireland farmers are members supplying across the land border into the processing facility in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland
Lakelands dairies	Ireland	Yes	Dairy	Members and processing facilities in Northern Ireland.
Coöperatie Coforta U.A./ Coforta	Netherlands	Yes	Fruit & Vegetables	Suppliers of fruit and vegetables to supermarkets and wholesalers, through their subsidiary The Greenery UK. Membership is open to select international growers.

Source: Cogeca, 2015.

Appendix VI: DEFRA Survey on UK ACs – key results.

This appendix includes the answers to the most relevant questions in the 2013 DEFRA survey on ACs and POs commissioned to EFPF.

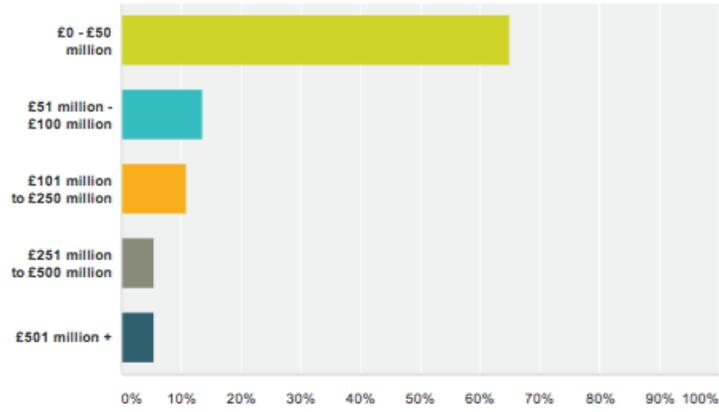


Source: EFPF, 2013.

Cooperatives and producer organisations

Q4 What is the turnover of your cooperative or producer organisation?

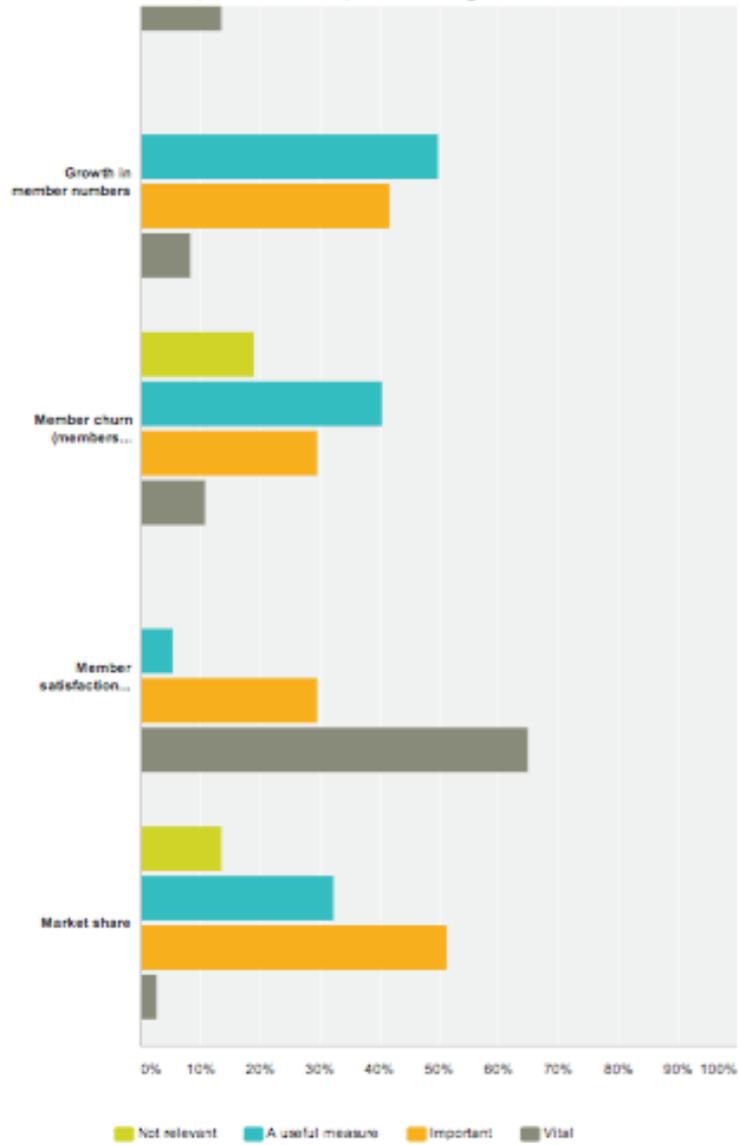
Answered: 37 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
£0 - £50 million	64.86%	24
£51 million - £100 million	13.51%	5
£101 million to £250 million	10.81%	4
£251 million to £500 million	5.41%	2
£501 million +	5.41%	2
Total		37

Source: EFPF, 2013.

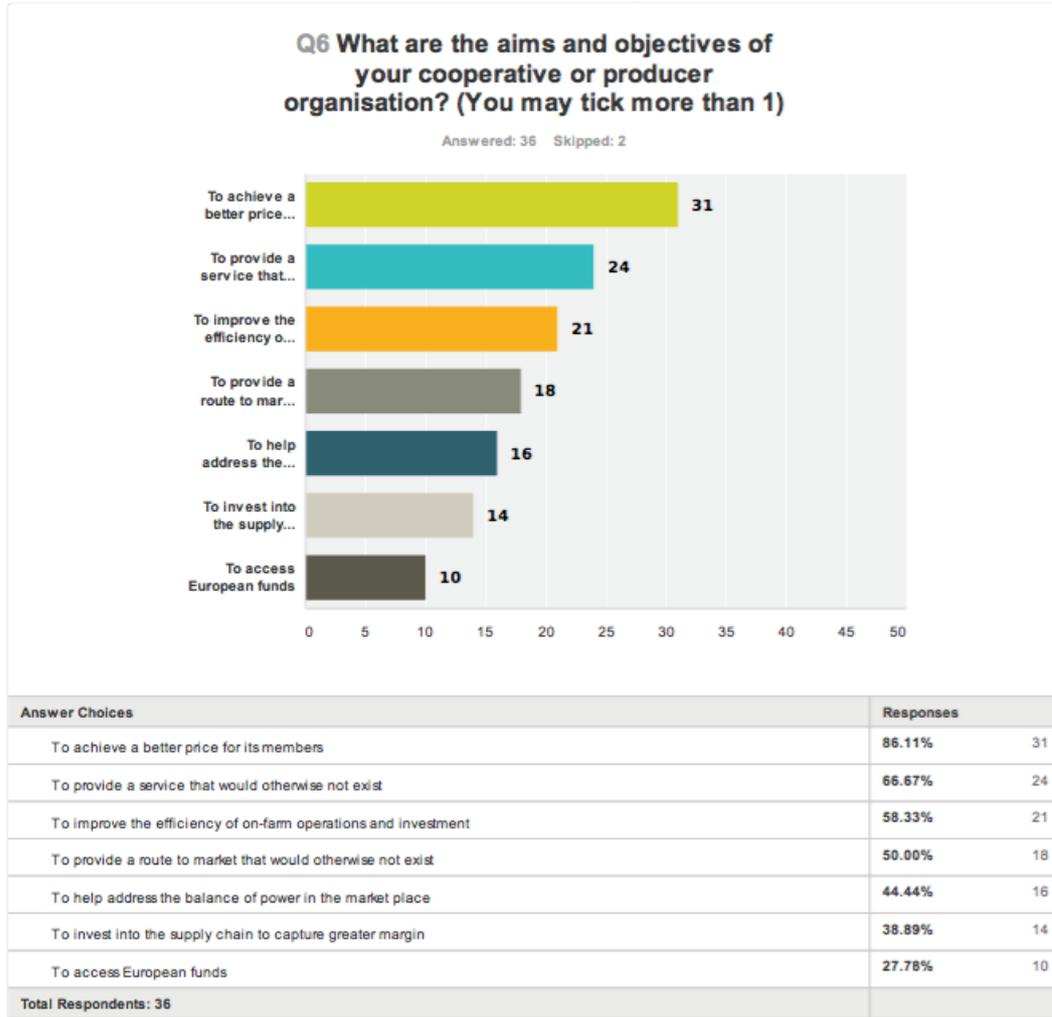
Cooperatives and producer organisations



	Not relevant	A useful measure	Important	Vital	Total	Average Rating
Price achieved for a member's product (e.g. price per tonne)	8.11% 3	5.41% 2	32.43% 12	54.05% 20	37	3.32
Profit generated by the cooperative or producer organisation	40.54% 15	21.62% 8	29.73% 11	8.11% 3	37	2.05
Return on investment	24.32% 9	43.24% 16	21.62% 8	10.81% 4	37	2.19

Source: EFPF, 2013.

Cooperatives and producer organisations

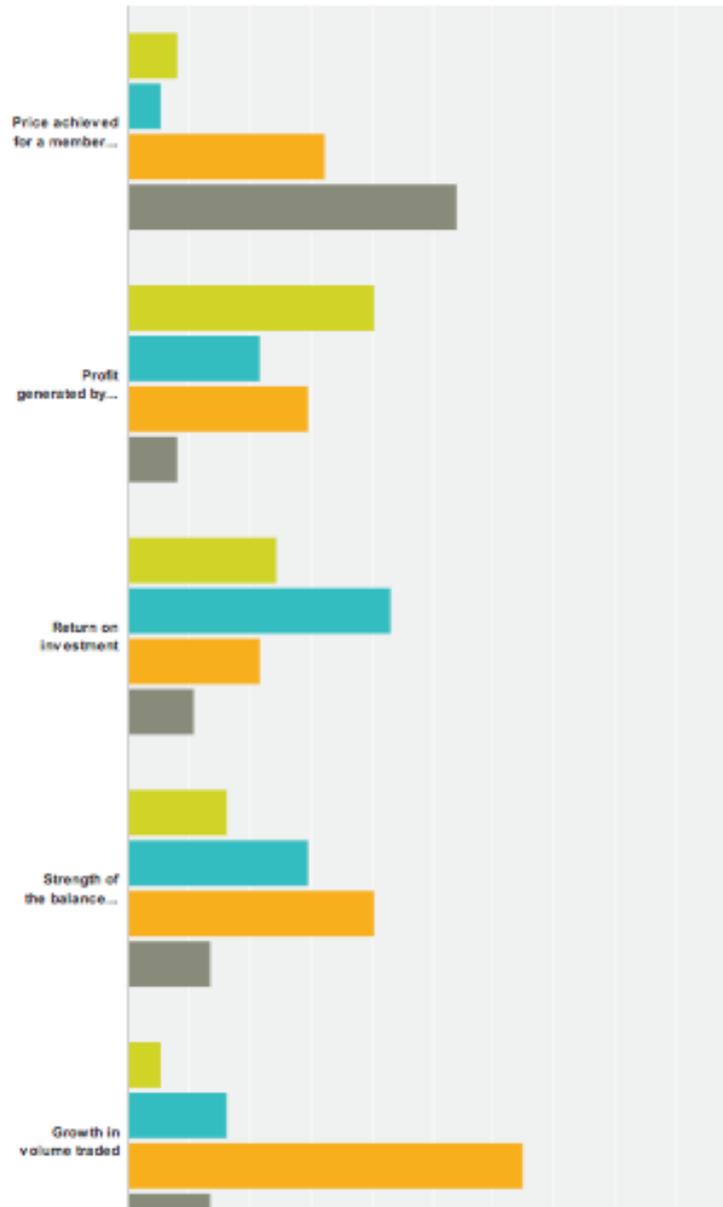


Source: EFPF, 2013.

Cooperatives and producer organisations

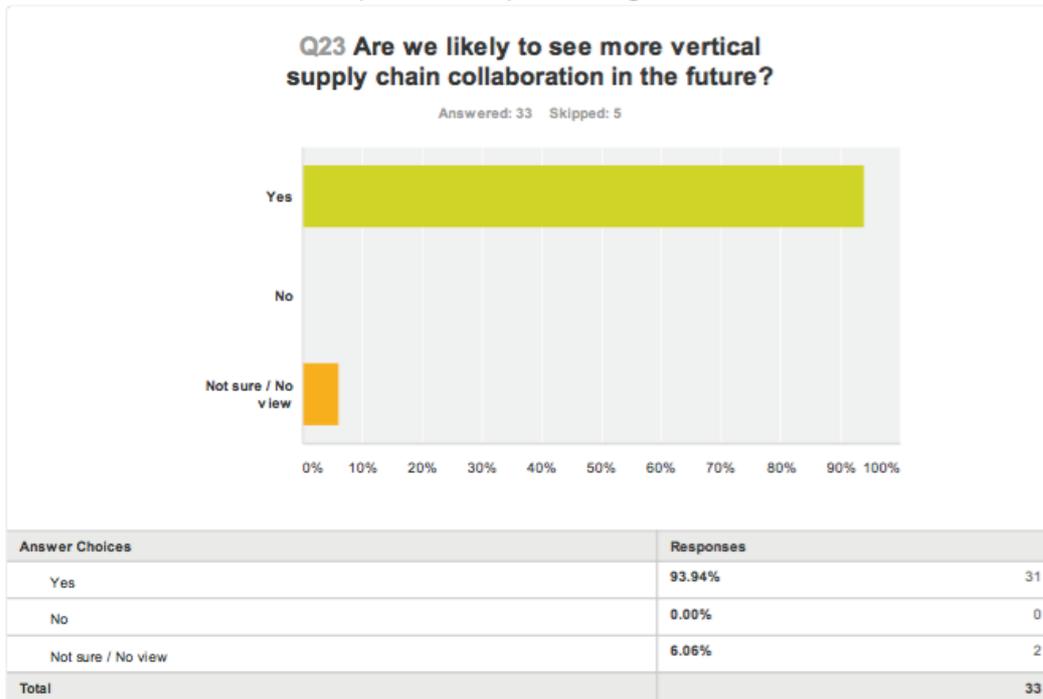
Q7 In terms of measuring success, how important are the following measures to your cooperative or producer organisation?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 1



Source: EFP, 2013.

Cooperatives and producer organisations



Source: EFPF, 2013.

Appendix VII. Interview scripts (semi-structured)

Type I Participants: Cooperative members

Interview Questions - Type I Participants: Cooperative members	
Background:	
1.	Tell me a bit about yourself and your role/place in your coop [How long have you been a member of this co-operative? Did you live in this town/city before becoming a member of the coop? How did you learn about/were introduced to the co-op? Why did you join the co-operative?]
2.	In your view, what are the main advantages and disadvantages of being a member of the coop?
Organisational	
3.	What would you say the main goals of your coop are? What do you think of these priorities? (give examples)
4.	Do you see yourself more as a client or a member of your cooperative?
5.	Does your cooperative have an environmental policy? Other policy such as fair trade/salary /training etc. [Do you think it is adequate?]
6.	What do you think your coop will look like in 5 years' time? What do you think it will offer to members? Is there a business plan for this period?
Governance	
7.	Can you tell me a bit more about the governance of your cooperative? [What do you think of the voting principle / admission requirements for new members / exit process for members wanting to leave the cooperative?]
8.	Who owns the land you work? [Would you consider co-buying land with other members?]
9.	Do you think the cooperative model is attractive to young farmers?
Legislation	
10.	Do you know what legal model your cooperative is based on? (PO, SAT, etc.) [If YES: Do you think it is a sustainable model? Why?]
11.	Are you aware of the current legislation changes in co-operative law? [Explain changes. Do you think legislation changes are going to affect your co-operative? How?]
Social dimension	
12.	Do you have any contact with fellow coop members outside the cooperative? (Follow up)
13.	What is the relationship between your coop and farmers' unions?
14.	We have talked before about your environmental policy. Does your coop have any environmental/community initiatives? [If yes, Please can you tell me a bit more about these initiatives? If no, Do you think it matters?]
15.	Do you sell directly to consumers? [Do you think it would be / is beneficial?] [If YES: How would you describe your consumer base?]
16.	Some cooperatives are integrating consumers and restaurateurs in their organisations, involving them in different degrees in the decision making process. Do you think this consumer or restaurateur integration in an AC can be beneficial or problematic? Why?
17.	Have you heard of the concept of Food Sovereignty and of Via Campesina? [If YES: Please tell me a bit more and how/if relates to your coop]
18.	There are arguments that co-ops are more egalitarian social movements than traditional business models what do you think?
19.	Does your coop work/trade with other coops? Why?

Type II Participants: Policy makers and civil society organisations

Interview Questions
Background
6. How does your work relate to agricultural cooperatives?
7. How do you think agricultural cooperatives' role is in UK/Spanish farming?
8. What do you think the main organisational objectives of most ACs are? [Do you think these objectives can secure a sustainable food system?]
Coops and the CAP
9. How do you think agricultural cooperatives have evolved since the UK/Spain joined the EU?
10. I have read about the EU's push for POs and SATs, which are organisations that encourage more flexible types of cooperation without having to adhere to the cooperative principles. Which model do you think is more appropriate to secure sustainable food production? POs, SAT or cooperative model? Why?
Long term approach
11. Are you aware of the new legislation changes for cooperatives? Do you think the new legislation changes are going to affect agricultural cooperatives? How?
12. Short-term policies that seek fast financial returns are often blamed for many environmental problems. Do you think cooperatives are more suited than other legal forms to enable a balance between the short and long term impacts of food production or is it maybe just a matter of willingness rather than legal forms?
13. Some cooperatives are integrating consumers and restaurateurs in their organisations, involving them in different degrees in the decision making process. Do you think this consumer or restaurateur integration in an AC can be beneficial or problematic? Why?
Cooperative principles
14. One of the main distinctions between the different cooperatives I have been studying is their adherence to the food sovereignty principles. Have you heard of the concept of Food Sovereignty? How do you understand it? How do you think it relates to ACs? What do you think of the way FS refers to "peasants" and "farmers"? Are they a homogenous population in your view?]
15. Do you think the size of ACs affects their adherence to the cooperative principles? Why?
16. Do you think the integration of consumers and or restaurateurs can affect the adherence to the cooperative principles? Why?
17. Do you think having a cooperative legal form can encourage organisations to adhere to ethical principles more than other legal forms or do you think the legal form is irrelevant?

Appendix VIII. Example of field notes and reflections on data collection process

Source: Extract written by Author on Thursday 11.9.2014.

I travelled from Avila to Jerte on a bus that was heading for Plasencia. I had to change buses at the first stop and move to a busier bus. Most people got off at Piedrahita; after that stop, there were only four of us on the bus. On the way there my contact phoned to say that the interviews had been swapped and whether I could stop a bit further South at a town called Navarencjo. Luckily, the bus had two stops in that town, so got off at the second one, right next to Las Tres Jotas, the bar where my contact and the interviewee were waiting in. We met the first participant there, who insisted in phoning another local producer. Both producers had known each other for over two decades, similar age (in their 50s) and aware of their different ideologies, one more conservative, one more anarchist and anti-system (self-labelled). The latter phoned the more conservative one because he wanted the interview to have two points of view that would reflect in a more balanced perspective of the situation for cherry producers in the Jerte Valley.

The Jerte Valley offers a microclimate in the very cold, dry and high region in the North of Extremadura. The valley of Jerte, as the valley of Tietar, separated by the Sierra de Gredos, still maintain their traditional “minifundios”, small plots of land of one hectare in average. Most producers own several plots, often not consecutive. The valley of Jerte grows around 80-90% of the national production of cherry in Spain. Cooperatives have a long history, and all interviews agreed that even if conflict arises, and it does, cooperatives are key and the only reason why they, small producers, still manage to exist.

Once both participants had arrived, it was decided that it was a better idea to do the interview in a *venta* (a rural bar) not as busy as the first bar and with lower noise levels. When we got there, the participants were welcomed by the bar owners jokingly as “*los ecologistas*” (“the greens”) as they are known for their organic production methods. In such small towns, growing methods become part of your personal identity.

The family character of agriculture and land ownership in the area means everybody knows each other and everybody feels they have a future to share, not just them themselves, but their descendants. This acknowledgement reminded me of Ostrom’s argument that a shared future was one of the conditions for successful management of the commons.

During the interview, it was fascinating to hear the different perspectives of each producer and how they had arrived to organic agriculture through different routes. One earlier based on his anarchist ideology and his wishes to be critical of the conventional system that is making growers more and more dependent on agribusinesses. The other one experienced a more gradual realisation while working with an agricultural engineering delivering training to growers. The engineer was knowledgeable on organic agriculture and the participant soon realised “it was the right thing to do”, so moral arguments than then also became health arguments as post conversion, the grower believed former health conditions had been caused by the products he used during his pre-organic growing methods. The argument that it was also healthier for consumers was put forward too.

Following this combined interview, I was drove to the top of the valley to visit a goat shepherd. He is also a member of Actyva, the integral cooperative that is one of the case studies. His traditional cheeses still do not have a hygiene certificate so the cooperative is only allowed to legally sell them to members, so non-member consumers do not have access to this product. The goats live and die in the valley. Traditional methods are used to make the cheese. It is not certified organic or vegetarian.

Wild board meat hanging dried

Baby lamb stomachs (“well breast-fed”) hanging to dry to use for the cheese rind?

Baby lambs reared in the dark for a “whiter flesh”: “cordero lechal”

Last goat shepherd in the valley. The dad is still a “trashumante” with a herd of over 300 goats, member of several coops as each season he is in a different region.

After this visit, I crossed a range of mountains to the neighbouring valley of the river Tietar in Arenas de San Pedro. I stayed at my contact’s friends as he had been called at very short notice to attend a meeting at his cooperative as management was announcing the price the cherries they had harvested in July had achieved. Pretty much everybody I met in the town was member of a local AC. The news was not good and when the grower arrived to the other grower’s house, his disappointment and anger were obvious. A conversation followed about the struggle that small producers are suffering and how many are disappearing as it costs them more money to harvest their produce than to let it rot. Their knowledge of their trees, that they refer to as “people, children that need to be looked after”, makes them be aware of the fact that only a couple of years of neglect means that trees and plots that have been created and managed over decades and generations, can be lost. That is one of the reasons why they continue to harvest, year after year. Another reason is their passion, reflected on their generosity with their time, happy to share their experiences and worries.

They are defensive and suspicious of the administration and of academics and the interests behind them. One grower told me about food sovereignty: *“a concept made up by a petit bourgeois academic is not going to change the reality of a small grower”*.

Fire is a common enemy in the area. A big fire destroyed a large forested area of the valley and surrounding farms. Local people, mainly growers, form “cuadrillas forestales” that are only paid the minimum wage. The work involves high-risk activities controlling and extinguishing fires as well as clearing burnt and damaged trees. One of the participants had been badly hurt by a pine tree that fell on top of him and since that episode he has been receiving a small disability payment. Other growers had other alternative sources of income (a fishmongers, a job in a plant nursery, training, working as middle men, etc.) as they had to complement their income as growers.

Fire destroys trees, scenery, wind protection, land water retention, as well as further eroding their faith in the administration. Some think the big fire in the valley was voluntarily initiated (as proved true of many others in the country), to either get insurance payments or in this case, to access cheap quality wood and misappropriate recovery funds. But fire not only destroys but also creates; it creates strong friendships and trust in others you risk your life with and transcends the fire-fighting environment into the food-producing context, where favours and free labour exchanges take place. These close communities are forced to live together, but from these regular interactions, the long-term character of people is shown and strong relationships are given the space to develop over ideological differences.

The following day I visited a cooperative that was right in the middle of its fig harvest. A strong argument took place as a family of angry producers was very vocally complaining about the requirement of placing figs of the same diameter in trays that sell at higher price than those in boxes. Other producers got involved saying that if they had to redo the boxes to ensure all the figs were the right size, so had they.

I spoke to the manager whose closest family members were part of the cooperative too. The interview was interrupted by several phone calls as the following Monday was a bank holiday and the manager had not realised this was the case and was trying to re-organise the delivery of the harvest.

That same evening I interviewed the president of an olive oil cooperative that mainly processes olive oil for self-consumption. Only 15-10% of the harvest gets sold. Allowed levels of self-consumption for a family are calculated based on the number of dependents. Picaresque enters the game here as some members sometimes claim the number of dependents in their families is higher (the ongoing financial crisis also justifies this claim) and use some of the olive oil to sell directly to consumers, i.e. in their own food shops (fruit shop or butchers) in the same package as it came out of the cooperative but slightly cheaper than if it would have gone through the coop. Members are disciplined if they are caught selling part of their allocated self-consumption oil.

That same night, I had dinner with three producers and we debated many food and farming issues until 2am. An interesting discussion took place regarding organic production. There is a certain distrust towards organic growers as some conventional growers believe organic farms only manage to produce a decent harvest because they are surrounded by conventional farms that carry out pest, weed and fungal control, implying that they are free-riding on their neighbours' phytosanitary measures. At the same time, they were complaining about new pests and higher resistance of existing pests in their fields. They explained how new varieties were introduced mainly because of fashion and fruit diameter – the market logic for putting a price to fruit seems to be: “the bigger the better”, often sacrificing taste and the resilience of local varieties. The producers I had dinner with were telling me how they were sure those new varieties they had introduced were going to be a failure in only a few years' time, probably as soon as four. They had conserved some of the old varieties because they liked the taste of the fruit they produced “even though it is small”.

Two days later, on Monday, I travelled to Oviedo, Asturias. From there I got a train to Pola de Siero, where a friend picked me up to take me to Castanera (in the Sariego district as I found out later, they were several hamlets under the same name). That night I stayed in a beautiful old house next to a ruined orreo. Two friends are renting the house and have started to cultivate a rented plot near the house (owned by a separate landlord). Land in Asturias is cheap as often people who are no longer involved in agriculture (perhaps their parents were) inherit plots and they prefer to rent it cheap than to having to look after them. Unfortunately, my friends were away, but my other friend was looking after their plot and taking their produce to the weekly local market the next day on their behalf. The produce is harvested the night before for freshness. Amongst other vegetables, favas (green beans) were harvested in abundance but only a couple of kilos were sold, we had them for dinner that night while talking about how disheartening it is to see how much of that big bag of beans that had taken so long to grow and so much effort had to either be given away or end up back in the land as compost.

I was sad to miss the market in Pola de Siero, but I had arranged a visit to Catasol Cooperativa Integral that same day. I opened the window in the morning anticipating a beautiful view as the house is on a hill edging a valley; however, the fog was low, very low, and visibility was only a few meters. The ruined orreo stood there, wrapped in dense, white fog that made it look like out of a dream or a nightmare. As I was leaving the house, I received a phone call from the Catasol member who was giving me a lift to the farm. He was able to pick me up as that day he had to pass the MOT of his car. One of his back wheels was not breaking properly, so he did not pass the MOT and had to travel to his dad's to borrow his car. That delay gave me enough time to book my next coach to Bilbao.

I walked through a narrow lane with plants covered in dew drops down to the road that crossed the hamlet. On the way I spotted some gigantic slugs. I also spotted kiwi and chestnut trees, the same trees that had surprised me in Valley de Tietar.

Once I reached the road, I walked to the bus stop where I was going to be picked up by a Catasol member. When we reached the farm, one of the members was leaving to do some deliveries. The land had been bought with producer and consumer members' investments. Other plots of

land with building permission surround the land. Two building companies bought the land (including Catasol's section) with the intention to build semidetached houses before the property market collapsed in 2007/08. The companies are holding to the land next to roads as it has building permission, but were happy to sell the middle plot to Catasol. The area had been grassland for a long time. This was a blessing and a curse. A blessing since the fact that they were not surrounded by other conventional growers meant that conversion to certified organic production only took a year (it normally takes between 1.5 to 2 years). On the other hand, a white worm common in grassland, ate all the tender lettuces they had planted.

Producer members are in their 40s, all knew each other through Equo, the new name of the Spanish Green Party. One of the members pointed out that work is hard, especially in the greenhouses. Even though they only formed in mid-2013, they already have built a packing unit where they prepare orders, have lunch, and sell their products to whoever wants to visit them. They are also operating 3 greenhouses where they grow a variety of tomatoes, peppers and aubergines. A successful way of growing that they aim to expand.

They have installed some solar panels to provide enough electricity for the water pump, the fridge and the alarm system. They have built a pond where carps have been introduced to reduce the number of mosquitos in the farm. A snake that lives next to the pond eats the carps in turn! Organic fertilizers are applied as sparsely as possible. There were plans to introduce chickens for egg production, but the conventional method of keeping laying hens for only two years and replacing them before they were allowed to complete their natural cycle was not a method they agreed with.

A member of Catasol gave me a lift to Aviles where we carried out the last two interviews with workers and one of the members. I spent the night in Aviles and I travelled to Bilbao on Wednesday.

On Thursday morning I visited Esnetik, a new cooperative of producers and consumers that started by selling sheep milk products. From small producers who had got "stuck" due to their small volume of milk that no processing firm wanted to collect. At the moment there are 5 shepherds members. Esnetik buys 100% of their production at a fixed, fair price. Esnetik then sells as much as it can to its consumer members (individuals and groups) and the rest gets sold to a milk parlour; Esnetik covers the price difference between the price agreed with the producers and the price the milk parlour is willing to pay. All producers have the same local variety of sheep, one that is not the most productive in commercial terms but that is adapted to the local geography and climate and is fairly resistant and does well with their method of production.

The initiative is very closely linked to the ENHE union. Other participants told me about the importance that training and education of members has in this union (not just technical but political).

The cooperative has 4 workers, 3 f/t and 1 p/t (the delivery person). At the moment they are not able to offer open access to other producers, as they do not have enough the demand with the fair price they offer. Consumer members are very committed and demonstrate so by their capital contributions to the cooperative – the fee to join is €1.000, a contribution that can be made individually and entitles that member to one vote or it can be made by a group of consumers and entitles the group to one vote – many members also contribute their time to the cooperative, selling in markets and fairs and helping prepare deliveries.

This topic of free labour and volunteers was discussed with other participants. Some believed that volunteer labour is needed in order to be able to make these initiatives happen because they are up against such a calculated and faceless system based on labour rules that otherwise alternatives would never get started.

Ideology as the starting point seems to be the common denominator of new cooperatives. In the case of Esnetik, because they base their practice on food sovereignty, they are “politicised” but some members believe that should not mean being “partidist”, as the fact that one party is a member means negative attitudes from competing parties.

Aspirations of autonomy is the main discourse in Esnetik (E).

E conceives organic production as a synonym of autonomy. Organic production methods that are based on reliance on organic inputs etc., are a trap.

Esnetik is very aware of how the conventional food systems “appropriates” originally radical initiatives such as organic and fair trade. For this reason, they are trying to incorporate elements that the conventional system would be unable to replicate: i.e. double labelling. This type of label shows a breakdown of the price including the percentage that gets allocated for each step of the process, from production to processing and retailing. The label complies with two functions: informing consumers and securing transparency – both an outward and inward approach. It publicises the efforts the cooperative is doing to secure a fair price to producers. However, for consumers who are not familiar with the average percentage paid to farmers, it might result pointless or at worse, confusing.

The label only appears on the coop’s dairy products. Dairy products were the only products that were on offer at the beginning, however, as other emerging coops, there has been a gradual realization of the need to diversify products in order to be able to cover a wider range of consumer members’ dietary needs. It is acknowledged that it is too much to expect from individual consumers to be buying several products from several cooperatives. It is also a barrier for producers as economies of scale are key in logistics. E, in a response to this reality, has started to sell five more products to consumers: cider, wine and (conserved) peppers. These products come from selected producers that follow E’s principles. Even though they have had talks about the double labelling, it has not happened yet for these products. In this sense, the cooperative is both selling products of its own producers but also acting as a middleman for other producers on behalf of their consumer members.

From Bilbao I travelled to Ispaster near Lekeitio. I was invited for dinner at the house of my next participant. It was only a few metres away down a lane from where I was staying the night. Dinner was delicious – home grown tomatoes, courgette soup, *pisto* (a vegetable dish) and some local fish. Conversation was just as delicious and hilarious to find out how small the world is.

I stayed in a beautiful rural hotel where I enjoyed the best views from the top of the hill looking down to the sea and the best breakfast I’ve ever had in paid accommodation: an egg from the hens that were roaming freely in front of me in a looked after orchard area with a tasty tomato, drinks and a home-made cake, very different from the breakfast I was offered the day before in my accommodation in Bilbao. After breakfast I was sad to leave but made my way to my participant’s place. We continued the conversation from the night before but in a more formal manner and with a focus on cooperatives.

That same evening I made my way back to Madrid. The next interview is scheduled for Thu with the training manager of Cooperativas AgroAlimentarias.

Appendix IX. Examples of translated quotes

Example 1

Original: *“Para mí lo mejor es poder participar, y si q he encontrado muchas veces como la dificultad en iniciativas vinculadas al mundo agrario manteniendo mi identidad como consumidor”*

Translation: *“For me the best thing is that I can participate, and it is true that I have found many times the difficulty to do so in initiatives linked to the agrarian world while still mainting my identity as a consumer”*

Example 2

Original: *“Yo lo q veo es q esa multiplicación de experiencias q hoy por hoy veo q no estén muy interconectadas y q redes como la de REAS todavía tiene un trabajo que hacer no solo con iniciativas de soberanía alimentaria, sino de la economía social en general que tiene todavía un trabajo q hacer y creo que ahí, dependiendo de lo que ocurra ahí, es donde estará la clave de si se queda en algo super micro o es capaz de trascender algo mas. Porque ahí yo que sé, a lo mejor logramos superar economías de escala que hoy por hoy nos resultan...pero si conseguimos repartir con otras iniciativas incluso si no tienen que ver con el mundo de la alimentación pero sí compartimos valores, pues a lo mejor eso nos ayuda a pegar un salto que hoy no somos capaces de ver”*

Translation: *“What I see is that the multiplication of those experiences, as of today, I cannot see them interconnected enough, and that networks like REAS still have a job to do, not only around food sovereignty initiatives, but social economy in general [...] and I think that depending on what happens there, is where the key is to see whether it remains at a micro level or it is able to transcend to something more. Because there, I don't know, perhaps we manage to overcome economies of escale that as of today we find them...but if we manage to distribute with other initiatives even if they don't have to do with the world of food but we do share values, maybe that would help us make the jump we are not able to see today.”*

Example 3

Original: *“Muy complicado llegar a la política, porque España está estratificada políticamente en 3 escalones q es ministerios, comunidades autónomas y municipios. Yo llevo a intentar engañar a la comunidad autónoma para q coordine sus políticas y haya 17 políticas uniformes. Yo a estos no llevo. Gente q haga menos de un millón de euros al año, es q ni me interesa, no puedo llegar a ellos. Nosotros vamos a otro rollo. Es muy complicado. Desde aquí a los del ministerio nos ven...y bueno, a los de Bruselas...estamos a otro nivel, no se relacionan con nosotras. Para empezar mi norma solo va para las supraautonomicas, por un tema de competencia”.*

Translation: *“It's very difficult to get to that level of policy, because Spain is stratified politically in three layers: the ministries, the autonomous communities and the municipalities. I get to trick the autonomous communities so that they coordinate their policies and we get 17 uniform policies. I don't reach these ones. People that make less than a million euros a year, they don't interest me, I can't reach them. We are in another game. This is very complicated. From here, we in the Ministry are seen as, well, and the ones in Brussels, we are at another level, they don't liaise with us. To start with, my policies are only for supra-autonomic cooperatives, because of the devolved powers”*

Appendix X. Participants' Information Sheets (English and Spanish versions)



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: Agricultural cooperatives and sustainable food systems: the case of Spain and the UK

Principal Investigators: Ms Raquel Ajates, Prof. Martin Caraher and Prof. Tim Lang

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study titled "*Agricultural cooperatives and sustainable food systems: the case of Spain and the UK*" carried out by Raquel Ajates as part of her PhD Research at City University's Centre for Food Policy. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

This research aims to compare the development of agricultural cooperation in UK/Spain and to analyse what policy lessons can be learnt from their differences and similarities. Furthermore, this project will map the existing diversity in the agricultural cooperative sector and will explore cooperatives' conception of "sustainable food systems" in order to evaluate their readiness to deal with the financial, social and environmental challenges facing the food system in the XXI century.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to take part in this research due to your links with the agricultural cooperative sector in the UK and/or related public policy. The selecting criteria were never based on any personal socio-demographic attributes. Approximately other 20 people will be interviewed as part of this project. There is no exclusion or discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality, religion or age, with the exception of those under the age of 18 who will not be eligible to be interviewed.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the project is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate in part or all of the project. You can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

- The participant will take part in one single interview expected to last between 1-2 hours.
- The participant might be asked to take part in a second interview also expected to last between 1-2 hours and with the objective of clarifying or expanding on topics covered during the first interview.



- The interview will have a semi-structured character with a pre-planned list of questions but will have the flexibility for the participant to expand on certain related topics as the participant sees appropriate.
- The interview will take place in an agreed place and time by the participant and the researcher; the more likely places will be either the participant's place of work or a meeting room at City University London; some participants will be interviewed online if face-to-face meetings are difficult to arrange.

What do I have to do?

The participant will be asked to answer questions regarding agricultural cooperatives and their understanding of sustainable food systems and related policies.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no expected disadvantages of taking part in this research. This study does not constitute any health and safety risks higher than those that participants are exposed to in their day-to-day working lives.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Taking part in this research might encourage participants and agricultural cooperatives to reflect more on/ be more active in the food sustainability debate. This research is intended to provide an insight into the agricultural cooperative sector in Spain and UK and its understanding of food sustainability, which could inform future policy-making in this area.

What will happen when the research study stops?

Data are intended to be kept for a period of seven years in secure and locked filing cabinets at City University London. After that period, data gathered during interviews and from participants will be destroyed by permanently deleting electronic files (including audio and written notes) and all hard copies will be shredded.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

- Only three people will have access to the data: The doctoral student and two academic supervisors
- Each participant will be able to choose a pseudonym to protect his/her identity and safeguard confidentiality. Those who do not choose a pseudonym will be assigned one.
- Audio recordings will be transcribed. The transcripts will have all identifiable information removed and participants will be identified by pseudonym.
- The recordings and the transcripts will be kept separately in locked filing cabinets. Electronic copies will be password protected and will not be emailed.
- Restrictions on confidentiality apply – e.g. reporting of violence, abuse, self-inflicted harm, harm to others or criminal activity. In the case of the participant sharing information that falls under any of the aforementioned categories, the researcher will confidentially referred the case to a relevant professional team.
- After the research is completed, only the data sets should be retained and the identifiers should be destroyed. Data sets will be kept for 7 years before being permanently destroyed.

What will happen to results of the research study?

Having used the information and insights gained from interviewees and, together with the data analysis and literature reviews, the findings will be presented in a PhD thesis as well as conference presentations and papers that will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals for publication. All publications will maintain the same level of anonymity regarding the data collated during the interviews. Use of direct quotes will be done with specific permission only.

Participants are welcome to request a copy of the summary of the results by emailing

Raquel.Ajates@city.ac.uk

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

The participant is free to withdraw from the study without an explanation or penalty at any time.

What if there is a problem?

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, City University London has established a complaints procedure via the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is:

"Agricultural cooperatives and sustainable food systems: the case of Spain and the UK". You could also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg
Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee
Research Office, E214
City University London
Northampton Square London, EC1V 0HB
Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City University London School of Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Further information and contact details of academic supervisor of this doctoral research

Prof Martin Caraher, Professor of Food and Health Policy

Address for correspondence: Northampton Square London, EC1V 0HB M.caraher@city.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet



HOJA INFORMATIVA PARA EL PARTICIPANTE

Nombre del proyecto: *Cooperativas agrícolas y sistemas alimentarios sostenibles: el caso de España y el Reino Unido*

Nombre de los investigadores: Raquel Ajates Gonzalez, Tim Lang y Martin Caraher

Nos gustaría invitarte a tomar parte en un proyecto de investigación llamado *Cooperativas agrícolas y sistemas alimentarios sostenibles: el caso de España y el Reino Unido* llevado a cabo por Raquel Ajates González como parte de sus estudios doctorales en el Centre for Food Policy de City University London. Antes de decidir si desea tomar parte es importante que comprenda porqué la investigación se está realizando y lo que conllevaría su participación. Por favor lea la siguiente información y consúltela con otras personas si lo desea. No dude en preguntar si hubiera algo que no esté claro o si desea más información.

¿Cuál es la finalidad del estudio?

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo comparar el desarrollo del cooperativismo agrícola en España y Reino Unido y analizar que tipo de formulación de políticas se desprende de las diferencias y similitudes encontradas. Además, este proyecto mapeará la diversidad del sector cooperativo agrícola y explorará la concepción de "sistemas alimentarios sostenibles" en diferentes tipos de cooperativa con el propósito de evaluar su capacidad de afrontar los retos económicos, sociales y medio ambientales a los que se enfrenta el sistema alimentario en el siglo XXI.

¿Por qué he sido invitada/o?

La invitación a tomar parte en esta investigación se basa en su relación profesional con el sector cooperativa agrícola en España y/o políticas públicas relacionadas. Los criterios de selección no están basados en ningún tipo de dato personal socio-demográfico. Aproximadamente otras 30 personas serán entrevistadas para este proyecto. Esta investigación no excluye o discrimina por razones de género, etnicidad, raza, discapacidad, orientación sexual, religión o edad, con excepción de personas menores de edad que no serán entrevistadas.

¿Es mi participación obligatoria?

La participación en el proyecto es voluntaria y usted puede elegir participar o no en parte o la totalidad del proyecto. Uste puede abandonar el proyecto en cualquier momento sin ser penalizado ni que le afecte en ninguna manera. Es su decisión si quiere participar o no. Si decide participar, se le pedirá que firme un formulario de consentimiento informado. Si decide participar usted es totalmente libre de abandonar el proyecto en cualquier momento sin tener que alegar ninguna justificación.

¿Qué tengo que hacer si participo?

- La/el participante tomará parte en una entrevista que durará aproximadamente entre una y dos horas.



- Cabe la posibilidad de que se requiera su participación en una segunda entrevista que tendría la misma duración aproximada de la primera con el objetivo de profundizar o clarificar temas tratados en la primera entrevista.
- La entrevista será semi-estructurada con una lista de preguntas como guión y con la flexibilidad para que usted pueda incluir puntos que crea relevantes
- La entrevista se realizará en un lugar y fecha convenientes para participante e investigadora. Si algún participante tiene dificultad en asistir a una cita presencial, podría ser entrevistado por teléfono o internet.

¿Qué tengo que hacer?

Los participantes serán entrevistados sobre el tema de cooperativas agrícolas, su entendimiento de sistemas de alimentación sostenibles y políticas relacionadas.

¿Hay alguna desventaja o riesgo por tomar parte en este proyecto?

No se anticipa ningún tipo de desventaja por tomar parte en esta investigación. El proyecto no presenta ningún tipo de riesgo para la salud o la seguridad de los participantes mayor que los que encontrarían cada día en su vida laboral cotidiana.

¿Hay alguna ventaja por participar?

Participar en esta investigación puede presentar una oportunidad para que los participantes reflexionen sobre o sean más activos en el debate sobre sostenibilidad en los sistemas alimentarios. Esta investigación tiene el objetivo de ofrecer un análisis del sector cooperativo agrícola en España y Reino Unido y como el sector entiende sostenibilidad alimentaria, con vistas a sustentar futuras políticas en este área.

¿Qué pasará cuando el proyecto finalice?

Los datos serán almacenados por un periodo de 7 años en un escritorio bajo llave y las grabaciones en un ordenador protegido con contraseña, ambos situados en City University London. Después de ese periodo, los datos recogidos durante las entrevistas serán destruidos, los archivos electrónicos serán eliminados (incluidos los archivos de grabación y las notas escritas) y todas las copias impresas serán destruidas en una trituradora de papel.

¿Será mi participación tratada con confidencialidad?

- Sólo tres personas tendrán acceso a los datos: la estudiante de doctorado y los dos supervisores.
- Cada participante podrá elegir un pseudónimo para proteger su identidad y salvaguardar confidencialidad. Aquellas personas que no elijan un pseudónimo serán asignados uno.
- Se realizará una transcripción de las grabaciones. Cualquier dato identificativo se eliminará de las transcripciones y cualquier alusión a los participantes se hará usando pseudónimos.
- Las grabaciones y las transcripciones se guardarán bajo llave en cajones diferentes. Las copias electrónicas estarán protegidas con una contraseña y no serán enviadas por correo electrónico.
- Habrá restricciones en lo que se refiere a la confidencialidad en casos de denuncias de violencia, abuso, autolesiones, daño a otros o actividad criminal. En caso de que el participante proporcione

algún tipo de información que pertenezca a cualquiera de las categorías que se acaban de mencionar, la investigadora referirá el caso al equipo profesional pertinente.

- Una vez que el proyecto haya finalizado, sólomente la información anonimizada será almacenada mientras que los identificadores serán destruidos. La información anonimizada será destruida después de 7 años.

¿Qué se hace con los resultados de la investigación?

El análisis de los datos proporcionados por los participantes y de la literature disponible sobre el tema y las consecuentes conclusiones se incluirán en la tesis doctoral, presentaciones en conferencias y artículos en publicaciones científicas y arbitradas. En todas las publicaciones se mantendrá el mismo nivel de anonimidad sobre los datos recogidos durante las entrevistas. Los participantes pueden solicitar una copia del resumen de los resultados por correo electrónico escribiendo a esta dirección:

Raquel.Ajates@city.ac.uk

¿Qué pasa si no quiero continuar en el proyecto?

En cualquier momento puede retirarse del proyecto sin ningún tipo de explicación o consecuencia.

¿Qué puedo hacer si surge algún problema?

Si por cualquier motivo quisiera poner una queja referente a cualquier aspecto del proyecto, City University London tiene establecido un procedimiento de queja a través de la Secretaria del Comité de Ética Investigativa. Para poner un queja puede llamar al 0044 207040 3040 y preguntar por la Secretaria del Comité de Ética Investigativa con el nombre del proyecto que es:

"Agricultural cooperatives and sustainable food systems: the case of Spain and the UK"

Alternativamente puede ponerse en contacto por correo a través de esta dirección:

Anna Ramberg
Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee
Research Office, E214
City University London, Northampton Square, London, EC1V 0HB
Correo electrónico: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

¿Quién ha aprobado este proyecto?

Este proyecto ha sido aprobado por el Comité de Ética Investigativa de la Facultad de Las Artes y Ciencias Sociales de City University London.

Datos del supervisor académico de esta investigación doctoral:

Martin Caraher, Professor of Food and Health Policy

Dirección postal: Northampton Square London, EC1V 0HB

Correo electrónico: M.caraher@city.ac.uk

Gracias por leer esta información

Appendix XI. Participants' Consent Forms (English and Spanish versions)



Consent Form

Title of Study: Agricultural cooperatives and sustainable food systems: the case of Spain and the UK

Principal Investigators: Ms Raquel Ajates, ~~Prof.~~ Martin Caraher and ~~Prof.~~ Tim Lang

Please initial box

1.	<p>I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records.</p> <p>I understand this will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be interviewed by the researcher • allow the interview to be audiotaped • make myself available for a further interview should that be required 	
2.	<p>This information will be held and processed for the following purpose(s):</p> <p>I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.</p> <p>I understand that all information collated during the interview (including recordings) will be kept in a secure place and measures will be in place to protect my identity from being made public. All data collated while undertaking this research will be destroyed after a period of seven years.</p> <p>I understand that I have given approval for the name of my workplace to be used in the final report of the project and future related publications.</p>	
3.	<p>I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.</p>	
4.	<p>I understand that if for whatever reason I would like to complain about any aspect of the study, City University London has established a complaints procedure via the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee. To complain about the study, I can phone</p>	



	<p>020 7040 3040, ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is:</p> <p><i>"Agricultural cooperatives and sustainable food systems: the case of Spain and the UK"</i></p> <p>Alternative, I could also write to the Secretary at: Anna Ramberg Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee Research Office, E214 City University London Northampton Square London EC1V 0HB Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk</p>	
5.	<p>I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.</p>	
6.	<p>I agree to take part in the above study.</p>	

Name of Participant Signature Date

Name of Interviewer Signature Date

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher's file.



CITY UNIVERSITY
LONDON

Formulario de Consentimiento Informado

Nombre del proyecto: *Cooperativas agrícolas y sistemas alimentarios sostenibles: el caso de España y el Reino Unido*

Nombre de los investigadores: Raquel Ajates Gonzalez, Tim Lang y Martin Caraher

Por favor escribe tus iniciales para cada punto

1.	<p>Acepto tomar parte en este proyecto de investigación de City University London. Me han explicado el proyecto, he leído la hoja informativa para participantes y se me ha ofrecido una copia.</p> <p>Entiendo que mi participación requiere:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ser entrevistado por el investigador• Permitir que la entrevista se grabe en audio (no video)• Tomar parte en una segunda entrevista si fuera requerido	
2.	<p>La información será guardada y procesada con el siguiente propósito:</p> <p>Toda la información que ofrezca será tratada de manera confidencial y ningún dato que pueda identificar a cualquiera de los participantes será publicado ni cedido a terceras personas ni organizaciones. Ningún tipo de datos personales será publicado.</p> <p>Comprendo que toda la información que se recoja durante la entrevista (incluidas las grabaciones) será guardada en un sitio seguro y se tomarán las medidas necesarias para proteger mi identidad. Todos los datos recogidos para este proyecto de investigación serán destruidos después de un periodo de 7 años.</p> <p>Autorizo la mención del nombre de mi lugar de trabajo u organización en la tesis y futuras publicaciones relacionadas con este proyecto.</p>	
3.	<p>Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria, que puedo elegir no participar en cualquier parte o la totalidad del proyecto y que puedo abandonar la investigación en cualquier momento sin ser penalizado ni que me afecte en ninguna manera</p>	
4.	<p>Entiendo que si por cualquier motivo quisiera poner una queja referente a cualquier aspecto del proyecto, City University London tiene establecido un procedimiento de queja a través de la Secretaria del</p>	



	<p>Comité de Ética Investigativa. Para poner un queja puedo llamar al 0044 207040 3040 y preguntar por la Secretaria del Comité de Ética Investigativa con el nombre del proyecto que es:</p> <p><i>"Cooperativas agrícolas y sistemas alimentarios sostenibles: el caso de España y el Reino Unido"</i></p> <p>Alternativamente, también puedo ponerme en contacto por escrito con la Secretaria en esta dirección:</p> <p>Anna Ramberg Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee Research Office, E214 City University London, Northampton Square London EC1V 0HB Correo electrónico: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk</p>	
5.	<p>Autorizo a City University London a guardar y procesar esta información. Comprendo que esta información únicamente será usada con la finalidad expuesta en esta declaración y que mi autorización está condicionada al cumplimiento por parte de la Universidad de los deberes y obligaciones expuestos en el Acta de Protección de Datos de 1998.</p>	
6.	<p>Autorizo mi participación en este proyecto.</p>	

Nombre del Participante Firma Fecha

Nombre del Investigador Firma Fecha

Una vez completado y firmado, una copia es entregada al participante y la otra al investigador

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